

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE

Good communication skills require a high level of self-awareness. Understanding your personal style of communicating will go a long way toward helping you to create good and lasting impressions on others. By becoming more aware of how others perceive you, you can adapt more readily to their styles of communicating. This does not mean you must be a chameleon, changing with every personality you meet. Instead, you can make another person more comfortable with you by selecting and emphasizing certain behaviors that fit within your personality and resonate with another.

There are four basic communication styles:

## AGGRESSIVE

## PASSIVE

## PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE

## ASSERTIVE

### ELEMENTS OF THE AGGRESSIVE STYLE:

#### 1. Mottos and Beliefs

- "Everyone should be like me."
- "I am never wrong."
- "I've got rights, but you don't."

#### 2. Attitudes

- Close minded
- Poor listener
- Has difficulty seeing the other person's point of view
- Interrupts others
- Monopolizes conversation

#### 3. Characteristics

- Achieves goals, often at others' expense
- Domineering and bullying
- Patronizing
- Condescending and sarcastic

#### **4. Behavior**

- Puts others down
- Doesn't ever think they are wrong
- Bossy
- Moves into people's space, overpowers
- Jumps on others, pushes people around
- Know-it-all attitude
- Doesn't show appreciation for help from others

#### **5. Nonverbal Cues**

- Points, shakes finger
- Frowns
- Squints eyes critically
- Glares
- Stares
- Rigid posture
- Critical, loud, yelling tone of voice
- Fast, clipped speech

#### **6. Verbal Cues**

- "You must (should/ought to/better)..."
- "Don't ask why. Just do it."
- Verbal abuse

#### **7. Confrontation and Problem Solving**

- Must win arguments
- Uses threats or personal attacks
- Operates from win/lose position

#### **8. Feelings Felt**

- Anger
- Hostility
- Frustration
- Impatience

#### **9. Effects**

- Provokes counter-aggression, alienation from others, ill health
- Wastes time and energy over-supervising others
- Pays high price in human relationships
- Fosters resistance, defiance, sabotaging, striking back, forming alliances, lying, covering up
- Forces compliance with resentment

# ELEMENTS OF THE PASSIVE STYLE:

## 1. Mottos and Beliefs

- "Don't express your true feelings."
- "Don't make waves."
- "Don't disagree."
- "Others have more rights than I do."

## 2. Communication Style

- Indirect
- Always seems to agree
- Doesn't speak up
- Hesitant to voice own opinion

## 3. Characteristics

- Apologetic, self-conscious
- Trusts others, but not self
- Doesn't express own wants and feelings
- Allows others to make decisions
- Doesn't get what he or she wants

## 4. Behaviors

- Sighs a lot
- Tries to sit on both sides of the fence to avoid conflict
- Clams up when feeling treated unfairly
- Asks permission unnecessarily
- Complains instead of taking action
- Lets others make choices
- Has difficulty implementing plans
- Self-effacing

## 5. Nonverbal Cues

- Fidgets
- Nods head often; comes across as pleading
- Lack of facial animation
- Smiles and nods in agreement
- Downcast eyes
- Slumped posture
- Low volume, meek
- Fast, when anxious; slow, hesitant, when doubtful

## 6. Verbal Cues

- "You should do it."
- "You have more experience than I do."
- "I can't..."
- "This is probably wrong, but..."
- "I'll try..."
- Monotone, low energy

## **7. Confrontation and Problem Solving**

- Avoids, ignores, leaves, or postpones the conversation
- Withdraws, is sullen and silent
- Agrees externally, while disagreeing internally
- Expend energy to avoid conflicts that are anxiety provoking
- Spends too much time asking for advice, supervision
- Agrees too often

## **8. Feelings Felt**

- Powerlessness
- Wonders why doesn't receive credit for good work
- Chalks lack of recognition to others' inabilities

## **9. Effects**

- Gives up being him or herself
- Builds dependency relationships
- Doesn't know where he or she stands
- Slowly loses self esteem
- Promotes others' causes
- Is not well-liked

## **ELEMENTS OF THE PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE STYLE:**

Passive Aggressive is a style in which individuals appear passive on the surface but are really acting out anger in a subtle, indirect, or behind-the-scenes way. People who develop a pattern of passive-aggressive communication usually feel powerless, stuck, and resentful – in other words, they feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of their resentments. Instead, they express their anger by subtly undermining the object (real or imagined) of their resentments. Passive-Aggressive communicators will often:

- Mutter to themselves rather than confront the person or issue
- Experience difficulty acknowledging their anger
- Use facial expressions that don't match how they feel - i.e., smiling when angry
- Use sarcasm
- Deny there is a problem, even when asked directly
- Appear cooperative while purposely doing things to annoy and disrupt
- Use subtle forms of sabotage to “get even”

# ELEMENTS OF THE ASSERTIVE STYLE

## 1. **Mottoes and Beliefs**

- Believes that both self and others are valuable
- Knowing that assertiveness doesn't mean you always win, but that you handled the situation as effectively as possible
- "I have rights, and so do others."

## 2. **Communication Style**

- Effective, active listener
- States limits and expectations
- States observations, not labels or judgments
- Expresses self directly, honestly, and as soon as possible about feelings and wants
- Checks on others feelings

## 3. **Characteristics**

- Non-judgmental
- Observes behavior rather than labeling it
- Trusts self and others
- Confident
- Self-aware
- Open, flexible, versatile
- Maintains a sense of humor
- Decisive
- Proactive, initiating

## 4. **Behavior**

- Operates from choice
- Knows what it is needed and develops a plan to get it
- Action-oriented
- Firm
- Realistic in their expectations
- Fair, just
- Consistent
- Takes appropriate action toward getting what they want without denying rights of others

## 5. **Nonverbal Cues**

- Open and natural gestures
- Attentive, interested facial expression
- Direct eye contact
- Confident or relaxed posture
- Vocal volume appropriate, expressive
- Varied rate of speech

## 6. **Verbal Cues**

- "I choose to..."
- "What are my options?"
- "What alternatives do we have?"

## **7. Confrontation and Problem Solving**

- Negotiates, bargains, trades off, compromises
- Confronts problems at the time they happen
- Doesn't let negative feelings build up

## **8. Feelings Felt**

- Enthusiasm
- Contentment

## **9. Even tempered**

Effects

- Increased self-esteem and self-confidence
- Increased self-esteem of others
- Feels motivated and understood
- Others know where they stand

Clearly, the assertive style is the one to strive for. Keep in mind that very few people are all one or another style. In fact, the aggressive style is essential at certain times such as:

- When a decision must be made quickly;
- During emergencies;
- When you know you're right and that fact is crucial;
- Stimulating creativity by designing competitions destined for use in training or to increase productivity.

Passiveness also has its critical applications:

- When an issue is minor;
- When the problems caused by the conflict are greater than the conflict itself;
- When emotions are running high and it makes sense to take a break in order to calm down and regain perspective;
- When your power is much less than the other party's;
- When the other's position is impossible to change for all practical purposes (i.e., government policies, etc.)

The passive aggressive style generally has no critical applications and should be avoided.