

tailoring your own communication skills, part 1: observing

J. CHARLES COLLIE

This article is about understanding yourself, understanding others, and then understanding how to relate to others if they aren't like you. We look at some formal descriptions of the four basic personality types (as applied to this field), what each type wants, how they act, and what they do. Finally, we list clues to help you recognize the four basic types.

None of us need convincing that people are different. But it's easy to get lazy in actually adapting how we communicate in order to account for that fact. Unless we are intentional in this regard, our energies are more likely to be focused on adapting to what we are comfortable with, not how others want to experience us.

Dynamic and Versatile

The most profound insight I have developed through research and application of the principles of personality profiling is that personality is both static and dynamic. We all have

personality preferences that are part of our genetic code, but as we experience life and different roles within life, we can change, or more correctly stated, adapt our personality to fit or connect with what we see our role to be. In other words, we can learn to be versatile in our personality. Versatility is the point of this article, and it extends to managing people, landing new business, dealing with suppliers, working well with our equity partners, and presenting our work.

My recommendation is that you set up a specific session to profile your existing clients,

and then use that as a good launching point to profile your prospects even before they become clients.

The Right Way?

First, let me make an assumption. Most of you reading this article have worked for years developing your way of presenting. You may or may not have a specific method for selling your services but you have continuously honed your presentation method. And it still doesn't work every time. Often you're frustrated, knowing your work is better than the competition, but still losing out in the end. In developing your brand, you have created an organization with a definite personality and that personality dominates your presentations. And you may or may not have noticed that many of your clients, maybe all, have similar corporate personalities, or at least the person you have direct contact with at the client has a similar personality. It's not a bad thing to have a brand personality, but treating all prospects the same is a bad thing. (More on that below.)

The Likability Factor

The things you say, the way you look, the materials you present—all are part of tailoring your selling approach. The key to winning is personality identification. And once identified, being versatile enough to move yourself and your company to project that personality. Prospects hire firms like yours

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

We adapt, in good ways, instinctively. It's a personality dance that we enjoy, particularly if we are coloring within the lines.

But we need to be more intentional about it in our Persuading. This article sets the stage for that, and the next article

will give you very specific examples of how to apply these principles.

Figuring out how people want to receive communication applies to managing people, landing new business, dealing with



suppliers, forming an equity partnership, and presenting your work.

I think this two-part series has the potential to really change your business

measurably. ●

understand the prospect. Third, you must connect with the prospect.

Sounds simple. And it is, really. Personality profiling at its foundation contains only two questions: First, "Are you more Task-oriented or People-oriented?" Second, "Are you more assertive or less assertive?" Once these two questions are answered you will know where you or your prospect's personality preference is (see Figure 1). Each question describes a continuum upon which each person has a place.

Selling and Dating

Each person has all four types in their personality, to one degree or another, but one type is always more pronounced than the others. It's our preferred

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tailoring, part 1...

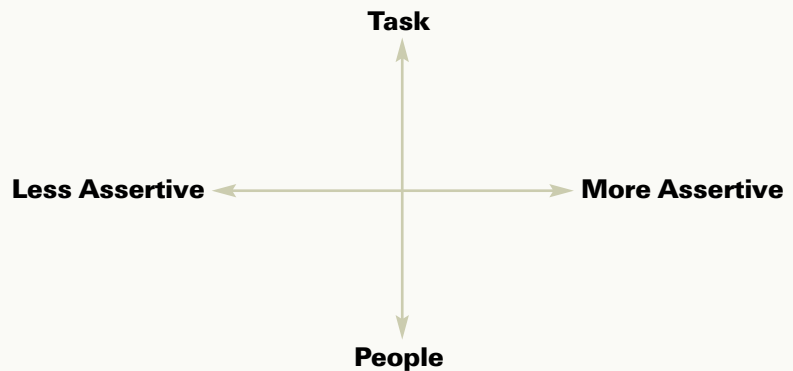
by choosing the one that is most likely to meet their expectations. In other words, they choose the one that they "like" best. So the key to winning new business is to get prospects to "like you better." This isn't something they talk about, of course. But the public reasons they give you for that hiring decision are often justifications for what they want to do anyway, at a personal level.

The Likability Strategy

Is the work important? If you build a better mousetrap, will the world really beat a path to your door? Actually, no. Doing good work is important,

but the hiring decision is usually based on who they "like" best. How do you get them to like you better? Getting them to like you better from a personality perspective is a three step process. First, you must understand yourself. Second, you must

FIGURE 1: THE TWO PERSONALITY CONTINUUMS



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Persuading® is edited by David C. Baker. Please direct corrections, comments, or submissions to editor@persuading.com.

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ISSN: 1524-959X.

personality type. In the selling process, we tend to put the strongest part of our personality (our preference) forward. One of my favorite ways of looking at this is to compare selling with dating. We want the other person to like us so we put what we think is our most charming and attractive face forward. But once we start building a relationship, we start to see the rest of the story—habits that we’d rather not talk about here.

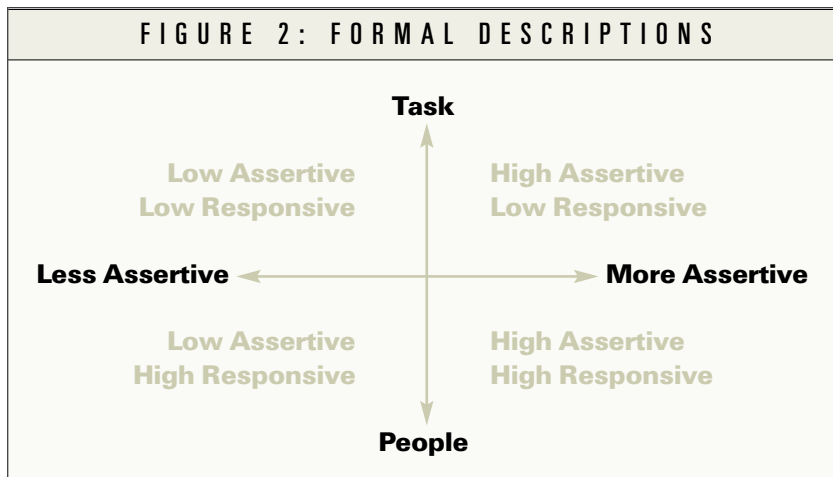
This only covers step one of the process: understanding yourself. To be successful at selling (or dating) you must take the time to also understand your prospect (step two). The reason for this should be clear—your preferred personality type may not be theirs.

Who Are They?

Now that we have an understanding of the overall “getting them to like you” strategy, let’s get deeper into how to go about executing this strategy. To deepen an understanding of each of the four basic personality types let’s look at some formal descriptions, what each wants, their style, and what each does.

Formal Descriptions

As you can see in Figure 2, each of the four basic personality types can be described formally based on the point at which the two continuums intersect. For example, in the upper right quadrant, you find someone who is task oriented and more assertive. That person could be described as High Assertive (action-based) and Low Responsive (less emotive or



not emotion-based). Across the axis in the lower left quadrant you will find someone who is people oriented and less assertive. That person could be described as Low Assertive (passive-based) and High Responsive (more emotive or emotion-based). These formal terms are helpful in getting an academic understanding of each of the basic personality types but don’t give us the application principles we need to use the information in selling.

What They Want

At their essence, each of the four basic personality types wants one thing over everything else. It describes who they are much better than the formal descriptions we just covered. The **Task, More Assertive** quadrant wants “Results.” They are most concerned with the bottom-line. If you can give me the results I want, when I want them, how you get them is not much of a concern.

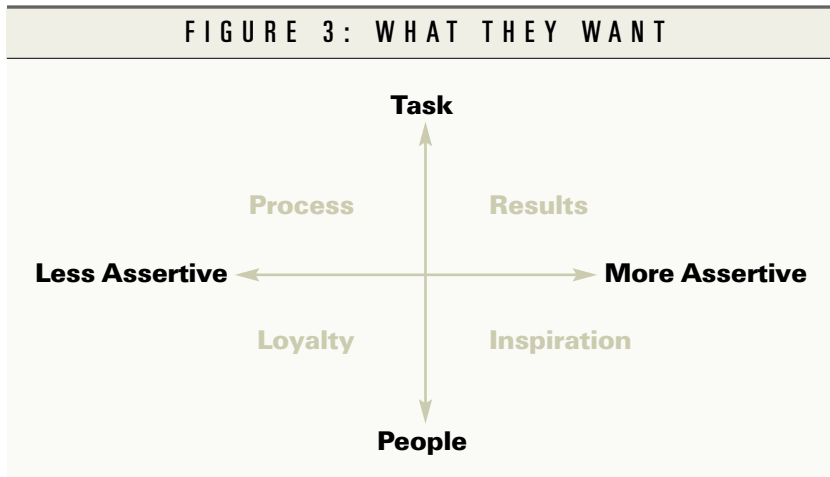
But the **Task, Less Assertive** quadrant wants “Process.” The only way they’ll believe you can get results is by

the process, and how you get the results is much more important than just getting the results.

Then there is the **People, Less Assertive** quadrant which wants “Loyalty.” The important thing to them is not the result or the process but rather the people. More importantly, it’s about the relationship between people. Deep, lasting relationships with a few select people is their focus.

And last but not least, the **People, More Assertive** quadrant wants “Inspiration.” They want to inspire and to be inspired. Whereas the “Loyalty” quadrant wants deep relationship, the “Inspiration” quadrant wants attention. It’s about ego gratification. In a way they are also about relationship. But unlike the “Loyalty” quadrant, the “Inspiration” quadrant is not about quality relationships, but rather the quantity of relationships. They are shameless networkers. From this point forward we will use the terms “Results,” “Process,” “Loyalty,” and “Inspiration” to identify the four basic personality types (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: WHAT THEY WANT



Style

In their style, Results personalities are “decisive”—they need to be in control. Process personalities are “analytical”—they need precision. Loyalty personalities are “accommodating”—they want everyone to get along. And Inspiration personalities are “spontaneous”—they want excitement, status and recognition.

Activity

Results personalities strategize. They can best be described as Fire, Ready, Aim. They make big picture decisions (often quickly) and implementation is delegated.

Process personalities analyze. They can be described as Ready, Ready, Ready, Ready. They want all the facts before making any decisions. This sometimes leads to what is known as analysis paralysis.

Loyalty personalities organize. They are ready, aim...and what do you think, should we fire now? How about you, what do you think? Okay, the majority agrees we’re Ready, we’ve got the right Aim, so let’s go ahead and Fire.

Inspiration personalities personalize. Fire, Fire, Fire. Did you see me firing? That was great! Let’s go celebrate!

Identifying A Personality Quickly

Now that we know what they want, their style, and how they act, how do we quickly identify someone’s personality preference? There are clues in everything they do. From their body language, verbal style, dress, office decor, and decision-making style, you can gather information to help answer the two identification questions (Task or People, More Assertive or Less Assertive).

Clues: Body Language

Results personalities tend to be action-oriented. They lean forward when talking. They sustain contact with such intensity that they make you feel like they are looking right through you. Their facial expressions can be described as “stone faced.” They avoid physical contact that they do not initiate. Their handshake is beyond firm. The sum total of their body lan-

guage is best described as “business-like.”

Process personalities are much more cautious than the Results personality. They have a quiet demeanor, though like the Results personality they will avoid physical contact. They need their space. Body movements of the Process personality are “rigid,” even to the point of appearing uptight. Eye contact is intermittent. “Reserved” sums up the Process personality.

Loyalty personalities, like the Process ones, are cautious and have a quiet demeanor. But they are much more open to physical contact once they get to know you. They are more compliant and open to suggestions once the relationship is established. Comfortable and relaxed, the Loyalty personality is more personal than business-like.

Inspiration personalities are full of gestures, smiling and spontaneous. The Inspiration personality gives more non-verbal feedback than all the others combined. Unlike the Process and Loyalty personalities, the

Doing good work is important, but the hiring decision is usually based on who they “like” best.

Inspiration personality is not cautious. They’re responsive and open. They’re often “the life of the party.”

Clues: Verbal Style

Results personalities are business-like. When speaking

with them in person or over the telephone, you will recognize them because their voice is mostly monotone and fast paced. They will make pointed statements (often in a challenging way), responding to questions quickly and with a loud confident sounding voice. Once they think they understand what you want they will direct you to the person handling that area.

Process personalities, like the Results personality, are more monotone. Unlike the Results personality, they are quieter and slower paced. They take their time to think before responding to questions. Also, they tend to ask pointed, challenging questions, while avoiding making pointed statements. Generally, they keep their true opinions to themselves.

Loyalty personalities, being the most personal of the four basic personality types, always talk to the person first. They are interested in where you are from, how many children you have, what pets you have, what sports you are interested in, your hobbies, etc., before they get around to business. They are more likely to express their positive emotions once they get to know you. But at the same time they will keep their opinions to themselves. As personal loyalty is important to them, they will hold in negative emotions as long as they can. When they do reach their limit they will explode emotionally and become more like the results personality in their verbal style.

Inspiration personalities tend to talk about themselves. Loud, fast paced, and animated,

they will express feelings, contribute, interrupt, drop names, and generally dominate the conversation.

Clues: Dress

Results personalities always dress appropriately but generally non-descript. Standing out is not what is important to them—it is about getting things done. So they dress according to the environment and focus on getting down to business.

Process personalities tend toward the traditional in their dress. As details are important to the Process personality, they are always perfectly coordinated, shoes are shined, and clothes are neat and creased. An interesting fact about Process personalities is that they have a love of beauty. This love of beauty can be seen in their appreciation of fine art in all areas of life, including their dress.

Loyalty personalities express themselves in the same relaxed and comfortable attitude prevalent in their body language. They are more casual in their attire with a tendency to always be underdressed for the occasion. Because they are more concerned with other people

than themselves, how they dress is not a focus for the Loyalty personality.

Inspiration personalities are electric in their dress. With bright colors and big jewelry they dress to impress. These are the people who are setting trends or are at least the first to follow. They are always looking for the latest, newest thing.

Clues: Office Decor

Results personalities love power positioning. Control is one of their strongest traits. They will always have their desk positioned with their back to the window that the sun streams in through. And they will always have you seated directly across from them with that same streaming sun in your eyes. Their desk will be orderly and business-like (where have we seen that word before). Their work materials will be close at hand. Efficiency and effectiveness are seen in every part of the decor. An In and Out Box are mandatory. There will be few or no family photos or mementos.

Process personalities will have their office systematically organized. They will have piles

I want to thank several people who have influenced my thinking on this subject. As president of the Sanders Consulting Group from 1996-1999, I had the privilege of working with a true rainmaker, Stuart Sanders. Stuart's natural ability to understand people mixed with his study of the personality profiling systems developed by Francis Litauer, Wilson Learning Systems' Social Styles, Personalysis, The DISC System, and Insights Discovery enabled him to teach others to sell their services in a way that is unique to the advertising industry. That is, to understand the client as a person and sell to that person or group of people. From this initial influence I have delved further into the writings of C.G. Jung, Andrew Lothian, Francis Litauer, Robert A. Rohm, Myers & Briggs, Edward De Bono, David Keirse, Tony Buzan, and a myriad of others.

beforecast

“Gestures and facial expressions do indeed communicate, as anyone can prove by turning off the sound on a television set and asking watchers to characterize the speakers from the picture alone.”

—Peter Farb, *Word Play*, 1973

“Few men are of one plain, decided color; most are mixed, shaded, and blended; and vary as much, from different situations, as changeable silks do from different lights.”

—Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son*, 1752

“One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears—by listening to them.”

—Dean Rusk

“Communication is depositing a part of yourself in another.”

—Anonymous

of support material nearby, but the piles will be neat and organized like the rest of the office. Often they will use their desk as a conference table. Books on bookshelves will be systematically ordered. One interesting feature of the Process personality’s office that was pointed out to me by Stuart Sanders is that they always have a take home bag, or as Stuart calls it, a “fake” home bag. That is, a briefcase full of work that they take home every night to work on. It’s really a fake home bag because most of the time they never open the bag and bring the work back the next day untouched. Like the Results personality there will be few family photos or personal items, but there will be charts and graphs posted.

Loyalty personalities are warm and friendly. More like a

den than an office, their offices are comfortable with a lived-in look. Lots of personal photos (usually family) can be found along with items relating to hobbies or personal interests. Plants are found in every Loyalty personality’s office without exception.

Inspiration personalities may never let you see their office. Messy is the hallmark of their decor. They will hold meetings in a conference room to prevent you from seeing their office. However, if for some reason they do let you enter their forbidden city, this is what you’ll see. As I stated before, it will be messy. It will be evident they have a lot of things going on at once, unless, of course, they’ve hidden the mess. If you have reason to believe the person is an Inspiration personality and the

office is somewhat neat, wait for an opportunity to snoop. Quite often the Inspiration personality will have stuffed all the mess that was on their desk, credenza, floor, window sill, and chairs, into the space under their desk, in a corner behind a large plant, or some other convenient hiding place. As they are Inspiration personalities, you will likely see some sort of inspirational slogan or slogans displayed along with a wall of fame. A wall of fame is a wall with pictures of the Inspiration personality with famous people they have met.

To use the above information to identify your prospect’s personality preference, remember that we all have some of all four personality types within us. Therefore, when profiling a prospect, look for corroboration in a number of areas before coming to any conclusions. Mistakes will still occur, but not often.

In part 2, we’ll look at applying this knowledge in very specific situations. ●

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For the past ten years, Charles has helped realign organizations to overcome obstacles to their growth and take advantage of changes in their markets.

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