

Flexibility – A Key to Successful Work Relationships

By Cynthia Stotlar, M.Ed., SPHR

Want to get along better with your co-workers, your immediate manager or with your customers? Don't we all!

Life would be so much easier if we could all get along and "play well with others." But often, we approach situations from such different work styles than our partners, it almost seems like we are speaking different languages.

Flexibility is the key. Regardless of whether you attended one of the recent training sessions on *Maximizing Work Relationships*, there are some simple techniques you can use to flex your style or borrow behaviors that will help you work even more effectively together and develop a synergistic relationship.

Flexibility means you will need to take your lead from the other person, your partner. Borrow behaviors from the other styles to develop more solid relationships.

Pace

If you prefer a "slow and steady" approach working with someone who is fast paced can be challenging. Borrow some "Dominant" or "Influencing" fast paced behavior and work to match their pace. Use words that demote speed like "let's see how *fast* we can get this done." But don't let yourself get "steamrollered." If you don't understand a point, ask. Don't hope that you'll figure it out later. It saves time to clarify right then.

If you are the speedy one, borrow some "Steady" behavior and take a more relaxed approach. Focus on the process and make sure your partner understands key issues before moving forward. Work from an agenda so you cover the issues instead of bouncing from topic to topic.

Dominant behaviors include:

- Fast paced
- Decisive
- Confident
- Assertive
- Forceful

Influencing behaviors include:

- Fast paced
- Optimistic
- Friendly
- Helpful
- Social

Steady behaviors include:

- Relaxed pace
- Good listener
- Friendly
- Methodical
- Organized

Conscientious behaviors include:

- Relaxed pace
- Thorough
- Precise
- Analytical
- Critical thinkers

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Focus

For some of us, the relationship is more crucial than the details while the rest of us live for details, charts and graphs. If you are a detail-oriented person who often forgoes small talk, borrow a little “Influencing” and ask a quick: “How was your weekend?” or “What ‘s new in your life?” to start the conversation on a friendly basis and then move to the details.

If you are meeting with someone who typically dives right into the details, borrow some “C” behavior and don’t ask or volunteer personal information. Get to the point and move on. This isn’t being rude, it’s flexing your style to better meet your partner’s needs. If you are presenting data, consider using charts and graphs to better illustrate it.

The key to good relationships is flexing our style to better meet our partner’s needs whether it’s a co-worker, your immediate manager or a customer. Learning to borrow behaviors and flex your style sets you up for success!

Quick Refresher on the four quadrants:

| | Task oriented More pessimistic | People oriented More optimistic |
|--|--|--|
| Fast paced Feel able to take control | Dominant personalities take a fast paced approach to life and are typically viewed as very decisive. They have little need for small talk or chit-chat and prefer to get right down to business. They tend to be quite focused, see what needs to be done and just do it. | Influencing personalities also are fast paced but enjoy camaraderie. They tend to build lasting business relationships and building teams. They enjoy helping out in both the business and personal arenas. |
| Relaxed pace Feel are not able to control | Conscientious personalities work at a more relaxed pace. They are detail oriented and precise. They give all decisions very careful consideration and only finalize decisions when they feel there has been enough review. | Steady personalities also work at a relaxed pace. They are excellent workers and great listeners. They like to have a plan and work that plan. They tend to be viewed as calm, cool and collected. |

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