

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION STYLES

What are communication styles and why are they important?

Have you ever heard the expression “It is not what you say, it is how you say it?” Communication is much more than the words you choose—it is a SET of various behaviors and methods of relaying information that impacts all facets of life. When you communicate, your goal should always to be understood.

Communication Styles

Assertive Communication

The goal of assertive communication is to communicate with respect and to understand one another. It allows you to protect your own rights of expression while not violating the rights of others. Hallmarks of assertive communication include eye contact, mutual validation, confidence, flexibility, clearly presented wishes, and objectivity. These traits promote strong long-term relationships.

Example Phrases in Assertive Communication

“So what you’re saying is...is that right?”

“I think...I feel...I believe that...”

“I would appreciate it if you...”

Passive Communication

In passive communication, one’s own rights are being violated by failing to express honest feelings and opinions. Passive communication is geared at avoiding conflict at all costs. Hallmarks of passive conversation include little eye contact, deference to others’ opinions, a quiet tone, and possible explosions after being passive for a long period.

Example Phrases in Passive Conversation

“I don’t know.”

“Whatever you think.”

“I’ll go with whatever the group decides.”

Aggressive Communication

Aggressive communication is aimed at protecting one’s own rights at the expense of other’s rights with no exceptions. The goal of this style is to win and be right no matter the consequences. Hallmarks of aggressive communication are an angry and intimidating tone, intense eye contact, loud, belittling, no deference to others, and manipulation.

Example Phrases in Aggressive Conversation

“It’s going to be my way or not at all.”

“You’re stupid if you think that will work.”

Tip for Success

While Assertive communication is a style to strive for, scenarios exist where aggressive (emergencies) or passive (minor issues) styles are key. Work within your own skill set, personal style and the situation.



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Basics of Effective Communication

No one communicates using one style 100% of the time. Most of our conversations include a blend of each of the three styles. Learning all communication styles is important in order to avoid communication in less effective ways *and* in order to recognize those styles in others so as to be able to appropriately respond. While all styles have their proper place and use, assertive communication is the healthiest and should be used the most. Assertive communication is ideal, not only because it respects the boundaries of all parties, but also because it is easier to problem-solve, emotional outbursts are minimized, and everyone wins on some level. Even when using aggressive, passive or a combination of styles, being understood should always be the goal.

Demonstrating Communication Styles

In this sample conversation, decide who is using which communication style: passive, aggressive, or assertive.

Nate: "Brianne, I finished the group project."

Brianne: "Why didn't you do this the way I told you to? You're stupid if you think this example will work!"

Nate: "Sorry, I was late to the meeting and don't remember you talking about it. I just did what Danielle said since she had more experience than me."

Brianne: "Great now I'm going to fail because you can't listen to instructions!"

Danielle: "Whoa guys, let's talk about this. Brianne, I understand you care about the project and want to do well, but I feel that Nate's example might work with a few tweaks. I can see this is important to you, but it is just as important to Nate and I as well."

Aggressive: _____

Passive: _____

Assertive: _____

Reflect on a time when you've been in a situation similar to this. What style did you use? How was the

RESOURCES

University Counseling Service	Academic Support & Retention
3223 Westlawn South	310 Calvin Hall
319-335-7294	319-353-2747
ucs@uiowa.edu	tutoriowa@uiowa.edu
http://counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu/	http://tutor.iowa.edu

Works Cited:

www.docstoc.com/docs/619320/passive-aggressive-an-assertive-communication

www.au.ag.mil/au/awc/awcgate/sba/comm_style.htm