Knowing and understanding the impact your behavior has on others and the impact their behavior has on you can make a major contribution to a more productive relationship.

Style and Versatility: The Unique Factors

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Administrators today have many pressures from staff, students, and community to reform education, select the best staff, keep up with all the new programs, and provide leadership for the future. Balancing the needs of the various audiences while performing the regular tasks of the job can seem insurmountable. As site-based management becomes more a part of the educational system, the administrator must become even more adept at working with people in appropriate ways in order to reach decisions.

With the number of instructional improvement models currently being touted as the way to help students learn, which is best? All of them. Madeline Hunter, TESA, cooperative learning, cognitive coaching, etc., all have their good points and are effective to varying degrees with teachers as they are put into practice with students. What are *the unique factors* which can make a difference in how a teacher accepts, learns, and implements one model more effectively than another?

To paraphrase from Michael LeBoeuf's book *How To Win Customers and Keep Them for Life*, the better you know your customers (students, staff, and community), the more effectively you can treat them in the manner they want to be dealt with, and the longer they will remain your customers. Specifically, the "customer" will perform better in the classroom and support the schools. To apply LeBoeuf's ideas further, all the instructional models listed have excellent points to improve student learning, but a specific model may not have been introduced, explained, or supported in an effective manner so that teachers can use it in the classroom. Therefore, selecting the appropriate approach to orienting, explaining, and supporting the instructional model is critical for its acceptance by each staff member.

An example of a process which requires versatility is that of selecting a new principal using a participative decision-making process. How is it that two seemingly equally qualified candidates can get such different reactions from committees that interview them? Perhaps the teachers see the first candidate as result-oriented, straight talking, and someone who will accomplish things in the school. They like her and are convinced she should be the next principal. However, the parents see the candidate as

cool, distant, and someone who will have a difficult time getting to know the students and parents. They are not impressed with the candidate and do not want that person as principal. Last, the administrator committee sees her as unimaginative, too quick with decisions, and someone who does not use participative management. Thus, the administrators do not favor her. With the second candidate, the administrators see a motivating person who will stimulate new ideas and bring excitement back to the school; therefore they favor the candidate. The parent committee views the second candidate as warm, but overwhelming and with ideas too expensive for them; they are really not sure. The teachers view the person as much too emotional, and a principal who will not check things out well enough before they are to start a program which will cause false starts; thus, they do not want the second candidate for the principalship. How can three groups see one individual so differently? What are the *unique factors* which cause this difference in perception? How can a "good" decision be made in a situation like this?

To reach a decision that is acceptable and can be supported by these committees, the facilitator must have a great deal of versatility to draw the various points of view together. Charles Garfield, in his book *Peak Performers*, describes versatility or flexibility as the mental agility to be objective and look at the situation from many different angles. It means setting aside preconceived thoughts and examining the issues on their merits. With the three selection committees, each committee was seeing the candidates from their particular points of view; behaviors shown by the candidates either reinforced their viewpoint or conflicted with it, causing acceptance or rejection. So, understanding what is expected in a principal candidate before the interviews begin and helping the committees to objectively focus on these desired behaviors will facilitate win/win decisions for all groups.

A principal's style or approach to an interview or presenting the instructional model definitely affects the way their audiences perceive their intentions and responses. Their style of behavior may be very compatible to the teachers which is likely to bring a positive reaction, or the style may be conflicting which may cause a negative response. Either of the reactions is the result of the other person's perception of the presenter's style. Knowing how a person's behavior is perceived by others is critical to overall administrative success in presenting ideas, conferring with staff, students, community, and evaluating staff.

A study completed by Roger Reid (Tracom Corporation) indicated that we are only about 30 percent accurate in estimating our style of behavior as compared to how others rate it. If there is a possibility of misjudging the effect of our behavior four out of five times, it becomes imperative to receive feedback from others about their perceptions of our behavior.

As Tom Peters describes in *Thriving on Chaos*, "perception is reality; there is no reality other than perception." Knowing and understanding how people perceive behavior is critical to helping staff make the best decisions, whether choosing instructional models or selecting staff.

Unique Factor Number One: *Style*

Over twenty years ago, Tracom, a Denver-based company, introduced a model to describe interpersonal interaction. The model is based on an instrument which assesses how others view a person's behavior when interacting with them. With the knowledge of another's perception, a person can choose to make the necessary adjustments to be more effective in the interpersonal interaction. The style of inter-

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action and not necessarily our intentions will either build productive relationships or cause unwanted and harmful tensions in them.

The Social Styles Model is composed of a four-quadrant grid (see Figure 1) constructed by combining two dimensions of *behavior–assertiveness* and responsiveness. Assertiveness is defined as the extent to which there is a behavioral attempt by someone to direct others through words or actions. A person with less assertive behavior is often viewed by others as tentative, reserved, and asking more questions. A person seen as more assertive is described as being more active, challenging, and making more statements of fact. Either type of behavior can be effective, depending on the situation.

The second dimension, *responsiveness*, is defined as the extent to which a person displays emotions and feelings. A more responsive person is viewed as being open in communications, and more dramatic and emotional in decision-making. The less responsive individual is seen as cautious in communications, and more formal with restrained emotions. Again, either type of behavior can be just as effective, depending upon the situation.

In the Social Style Model, the assertive dimension is placed horizontally with the less assertive (asking) behavior on the left side and the more assertive (telling) behavior on the right. The responsive dimension is located vertically with the less responsive (controlled) behavior at the upper end and the more responsive (emotive) behavior at the bottom of the scale. As the two dimensions intersect each other, they form the four quadrants of the Social Style Model.

FIGURE 1
SOCIAL STYLE MODEL[1]

CONTROL

ASK · TELL

EMOTE
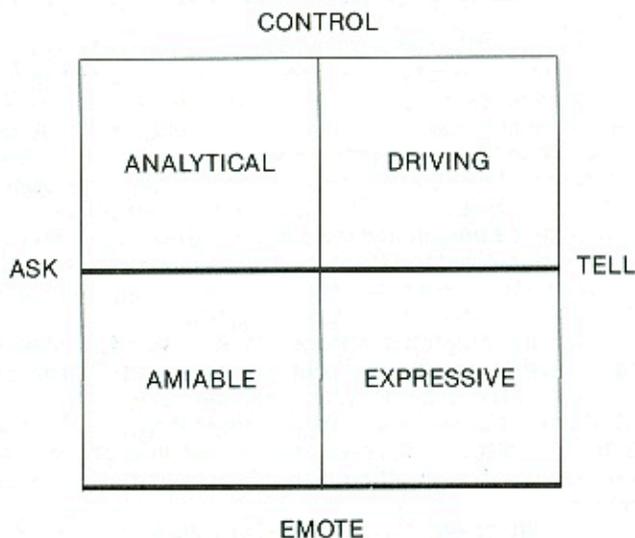
See Merril & Reid, 1981[1]

The upper left quadrant is more asking and more controlled and is described as an analytical style of behavior. Analytical behavior is seen in people who are more studious of situations, keep opinions to themselves, and state opinions very factually. Gathering information and basing actions on objective data are important because being right is critical. However, an analytical style may be seen as cool and indecisive since the individual tends to rely on all relevant data before a decision can be made.

The driving quadrant, or upper right side, is characterized by more controlled and more telling behavior. The driv-

ing behavior is seen as fast-moving, determined, unemotional and personally forceful. Gaining results is important to the driving style and the individual may appear to be task-oriented in interactions with others. A driving style can come across as impatient and too concerned about personal objectives.

Amiability is the behavioral description listed for the lower left-hand quadrant. This style is seen as more questioning and emotive. The amiable style is often described as warm, friendly, and concerned. These people build relationships carefully and usually for the long term. Building on the strengths of others and being a team player is important to the amiable style. Yet, amiables may seem overly sensitive and slow to initiate action.

The lower right quadrant is characterized by more telling and more emoting behaviors and called expressive by style. The expressive style is perceived as outgoing, motivating, and creative. These people have a tendency to look at the big picture, think about the future, and move quickly to make decisions. However, expressives may appear undisciplined and lacking a clear focus to their efforts.

After careful study of each of the four styles there appears to be no one best style. Each style has its strengths and its weaknesses.

Unique Factor Number Two: *Versatility*

Many of the misunderstandings concerning the selection of staff, choosing an instructional model, and so forth come as a result of social style-based conflicts. An expressive staff member getting too much data and information on a program before he or she even has a chance to see it in action may be "turned off" and not want to hear any more. The driving-style central office administrator hearing an amiable candidate for the principalship talk about the importance of building staff relationships may see it as "soft" leadership and will withhold recommendation.

Versatile behavior enables the administrator to build an objective understanding of the other person and the "bridge" the style differences to a more effective working relationship. Versatility is defined as the extent others see us as adaptable, resourceful and competent in an interpersonal relationship. In other words, people endorse our behavior and our actions which display a concern for their tensions in the relationship. (See Figure 2).

Versatility is looking beyond personal style preference and trying to understand the needs of the other person. The central office administrator who is concerned about the amiable principal candidate being a soft leader can ask follow-up questions to see if the candidate will hold staff accountable and take a tough stand even though it may hurt a relationship. Finding the applicant who is versatile is much more important since no one style is any more effective than another. The key to overall effectiveness is being versatile and using the appropriate behavior for the particular situation.

The most productive administrator will use the Platinum Rule "Do unto others as they would have done unto themselves." It's all a matter of setting the priority on meeting the other person's style needs first, then meeting your own. Both of you will meet your needs and the situation will be a double win.

Versatility allows the productive administrator to move beyond home-base style and help others feel comfortable while communicating and working together. James Kouzes and Barry Posner, in their book *The Leadership Challenge*, describe versatility as the capacity to expand your repertoire of responses to function effectively in many different situations. The versatile administrator has a variety of be-

haviors and uses whatever is appropriate to resolve the situation in the best possible manner for all sides.

Versatility: High to Low

As versatility is better understood, it is becoming evident that the more versatile an administrator is, the better the chance for success with students, staff and parents. Even though there are drawbacks to high versatility, the administrator with low versatility will not be as productive in a system which promotes a democratic or site-based approach to education.

FIGURE 2
VERSATILITY

My Tension	Focus of concern		Other's Tension
W	X	Y	Z
	25 percentile	50 percentile	75 percentile

Regardless of the style, the characteristics of the less versatile person are to be less aware of or sensitive to the tensions produced in others during an interaction. Teachers will have different reactions depending on the administrator's style, but they will generally see the low versatile–amiable as "soft" and not willing to get things done. The analytical with low versatility will be seen as slow to make decisions and needing a lot of information. Low expressive versatility is shown by failure to stay focused or not getting enough data before making a decision. The driving-style low versatility person is perceived as not caring and only focused on the task or decision. However, low versatility does not measure the degree of caring nor the capacity to build adaptable behavior necessary for effective interpersonal interaction.

The mid-range versatility represents a moderate ability to monitor the tensions created during interpersonal relationships. Teachers see administrators in this area as average in the way they interact with people. This person can be effective and use appropriate behavior with certain groups of people but may not consistently be able to productively manage relationships with a wide variety of groups. The administrators rated high in versatility are seen as excelling in their ability to manage the tensions during interpersonal relationships with staffs. These individuals seem to know the people and the situation so as to apply the pressure or "back off" at the right time.

Yet they may appear independent and changeable which can cause tension in some people, especially if the other person is lower in versatility.

Improving Versatility

There is often confusion in thinking that high versatility means giving up your goals. It doesn't. It means working toward the same goals in a manner more comfortable to a person with a different style. The focus or goal remains the same, only the "how" of its achievement is altered. By being more open in the process of reaching the goal, an even better solution may be discovered.

To build your versatility, you must *first* know and understand your style. This enables you to know the impact of your style behaviors on others and what particular behavior patterns may cause tension. Since we are often not accurate in how we think others view our behavior, it is important to receive feedback on how our audiences see us.

Tracom developed the Social Style Model as a feedback instrument designed to measure how others view a person's behavior. The instrument has been used for over twenty years on nearly a million people. To obtain the feedback, five colleagues are asked to complete surveys which are then computer scored to develop the Social Style Profile. This profile indicates a behavioral style, a rating of versatility, and a description of the strengths and growth areas.

The *second* step to improve versatility is to know and control particular style tendencies. There will be certain areas where behavior may be over- or underused. For example, if a person is less assertive, listening may be overused and opinion statements underused. If a person can be sensitive to the situation and use the appropriate behavior, the other party will feel more comfortable in the relationship.

Step *three* in improving versatility is knowing other people's behavioral style preferences. A careful study of their behaviors in a variety of situations is needed to increase accuracy of prediction. When you think you know the other person's style, behavior can be anticipated which may cause tension and diminish the relationship.

Applying the Platinum Rule is the *fourth* step for improving versatility. Do unto others as they would have done unto them. For example, if a conference is being held with an analytical parent to report test results on a special education student, a person needs to be prepared with all the details. Not only will the test scores be important, but the stanines, percentiles, and grade discrepancies may need to be explained in detail. Once the other person's style needs for information and detail are met, you can then meet your need for proper program placement with less resistance.

Being versatile is not always easy. It takes effort and willingness to assume some of the tension created during interpersonal relationships. It does require you to control behavior to keep tensions at a level that motivates people to produce the best possible solution. But isn't that the description of an effective educator?

For the most part, it is important to be versatile in our relationships, but being versatile all the time is not realistic or practical. We may have high versatility in one setting such as at work, but lower in another like home where we do not try as hard. The effort it takes to be highly versatile cannot be maintained all the time. If we were to keep it high, the uniqueness of individual style would be masked from others. Ironically, the overuse of versatility can cause others to mistrust you or see you as being unpredictable. However, used correctly versatility is honest and fair, and shows a sincere effort to build a comfortable and productive relationship.

Styles Training in Education

Even though the Social Styles Model has been used in business for many years, only in the last few years has it been adapted for use in education. Now the model is being used to train boards of education, classified personnel (e.g., bus drivers, secretaries, custodians), teachers, and administrators how to work more effectively with others. By providing needed information, the Social Style Model assists in the acceptance, implementation, and evaluation of instructional models, performance evaluation systems, site-based management, strategic planning, and team building.

Training in the model takes place over a two-day period. This includes presentations, discussions, small group activities, individual planning and video tape viewing which provide the participant with an understanding of the model. Also during this period participants receive the Social Style Profile developed from colleague feedback.

Although this program is relatively new, it is now being used throughout the United States and Canada. School districts from Hawaii to New York and Texas to Minnesota are using it as part of their staff development programs. Extensive use of the program has been made in such small districts as Colville, Washington and Bemidji, Minnesota where they have joined in partnership with the community in offering training. Larger districts like Columbus, Colorado Springs, and Charleston, West Virginia are using it in their development programs.

In Worthington, Ohio, a district of 9500 students, most of the certified staff, administrators and the board of education have participated in training sessions and use the concepts almost daily in their work. The knowledge of style differences is often discussed in meetings when there is tension or ineffective decision-making. Teachers use the information as they plan for parent conferences, and it is helpful to secretaries as they try to meet teacher requests. Administrators have found the knowledge of styles important when they give feedback after classroom observations.

All these districts have one or more certified trainers who can conduct the seminars and follow up with reinforcement of the concepts. This is an important aspect of the program which gives it local ownership and reduces the costs.

Conclusion

The Social Style Model is not a panacea for developing interpersonal relationships, but it does offer positive alternatives for improving them. Knowing and understanding the impact of behavior on you can make a major contribution to a more productive relationship. As new programs are introduced, staff are selected, and committees are convened, it is important to continue the improvement of all participants' ability to interact effectively with others. Many participants have reported that the styles training has been the best that they have received to help them understand themselves and improve their interaction with others.

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