

# MANAGING DIFFERENT PERSONALITY STYLES

By Frances M. Dalton



This article examines the difficult to manage facets of seven personality styles (*Figure 1*). The content is condensed from phase one of an eight-phase professional development program and includes:

- Fast, accurate ways to identify each personality style.
- The core motivator for each.
- How each style makes decisions.
- How each style reacts to feedback.
- How to diffuse conflict and optimize interaction with each style.

It's important to remember that all of us are at least 50 percent Achiever. Our objective in studying other styles is not to learn how to change them, but to learn how to become more of an Achiever ourselves.

No one is purely one style. It's common for most of us to be dominated by two or even three of the personality styles described.

Also, successful application of the techniques described here require your willingness to tailor your managerial style to that of individual subordinates. The secret to successfully managing a variety of personalities is to package what you want from each in a way that makes the individual want to give it to you. Let's look at what packaging is needed for each of the eight styles, remembering that the frame of reference adopted for this article assumes each personality is subordinate to the reader.

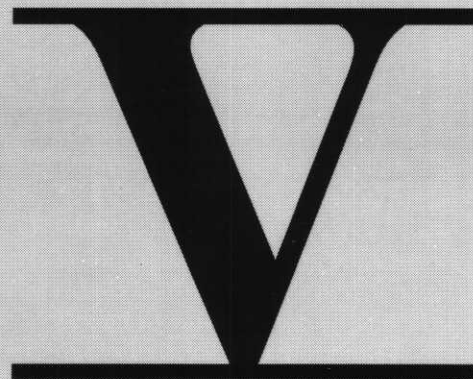
## COMMANDERS

Conservative in dress, results-oriented and confident. Commanders are implementers. They have a sense of urgency about almost everything they do; they walk at a fast pace, are economical with words (to the point of being abrupt), and are naturally aloof to the ideas and emotions of others.

Commanders are totally structured and, since they demand perfection of both themselves and others, they are poor delegators. Their erect

posture, combined with bossy, domineering natures and uncomfortably solid eye contact will inspire confidence in some and thoroughly intimidate others.

The core motivator for a Commander is to be in control. If this need is met and they are, essentially, masters of their own destiny, they can be reasonably content and can even learn to delegate. If this need is frustrated, however, they will seek control by controlling others to an unreasonable degree whenever and wherever possible. *(Continued on Page 13)*



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# Personality Styles —

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More comfortable with concepts than with emotions. Commanders are not introspective and tend to retaliate when given critical feedback. Their retaliation, however, is borne of the need to regain control in a situation where they perceive themselves to be the underdog.

Commanders are comfortable in decision-making roles, and they need to demonstrate their competence. They look for opportunities to take initiative and will reach out for more and more responsibility, testing the limits of their authority. Therein lies the greatest potential for conflict



Figure 1. with Commander subordinates: If agency management is insecure, the Commander's initiative can seem threatening.

To effectively manage Commanders, you must first recognize that they are competent to handle additional responsibility and would welcome it. So, delegate to them! Whenever possible, offer a variety of alternatives from which the Commander subordinate can choose; this helps him/her maintain some degree of control.

The three most beautiful words to the ears of a Commander are order, control and results, so the way to access the enthusiastic support of Commander subordinates is to show how whatever it is you want them to do will create order, increase control and

deliver results. Be direct, be brief and stay focused.

## ATTACKERS

Attackers are never in a good mood. They're hostile and cynical to the degree that work colleagues actively avoid them. Everything about the Attacker — their voice, eye contact and body posture — is intimidating and deliberately used to demoralize everyone with whom they come in contact. They are keenly aware of others' shortcomings, showcasing the mat the most embarrassing moments.

The core motivator for attackers may surprise you. Their greatest need is for respect. Sadly, adult Attackers become so because they received no respect as children, even for their dignity as a human being. As they mature, their need for respect becomes so great that they will blast others to get it if necessary.

Attackers interpret any critical feedback as abuse. They take it very personally and retaliate, in a personally abusive manner. They will condescend and become sarcastic and insulting, justifying their behavior by citing the incompetence and inadequacy of others.

The secret to successfully managing Attackers lies in responding rather than reacting to their behavior. Also, while you yourself may need help in managing the Attacker subordinate, the more urgent need is to equip your staff with coping skills, since they are more likely to suffer at the hands of th Attacker than you are.

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Next, rather than directly reprimanding Attacker behavior, try a more sophisticated way of giving critical feedback. Ask your Attacker subordinate questions that indirectly reveal the impact of their behavior. For example: What do you think are the five most important characteristics for good leadership? What are your ideas on effectively motivating others? How can you help me put the heart back into this organization? What kinds of organizational atti-

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tudes and behaviors cripple one's drive to succeed? What's the best way a person can go about getting others to want to help them?

Ask your Attacker subordinates questions like these frequently and in casual atmosphere (perhaps over lunch). This technique will help focus your Attackers on the difference between their current behavior pattern and what their answers to your questions define as effective behavior patterns.

## PERFORMERS

Flashy, loud, jovial and self-centered, the Performer is the one who over-promises and under-delivers. Always the first to volunteer and extremely adroit at paying verbal homage to your goals and objectives, the Performer doesn't follow up, misses details and deadlines, and then rationalizes the failure to perform with excuses or by blaming others. Despite all this, they are superb salespeople and charismatic individuals. Their greatest strength lies in establishing, not maintaining, relationships.

Performers are highly sensitive to indications of status: the Rolex watch, the tailored suit, the luxury car and a window office all matter greatly to the Performer. Unfortunately, more important to your performer subordinate than all of these is positive attention from you, and that's the point around which your greatest potential for conflict exists. The core motivator for Performers is the need for recognition.

Performers base their decisions on whatever will cast them in the most favorable light. Their decisions are not driven by what is best for the company, what is best for the client or what is best for the team. Instead, they reconfigure almost every situation into a "deal," so that there is always something in it for them.

No one is more convincing or more glib than the Performer receiving critical feedback. They have elevated to an art form giving excuses and rationalizing poor performance. Supremely talented at hustling others (particularly their bosses), Performers can actually convince you that your expectations of them were unrealistic in the first place.

Managing Performers is a piece of cake as long as you can demonstrate that whatever it is you want them to do will make them a star. They won't be very good at details or at following up, but if they have excellent administrative support and are getting lots of recognition, they will be motivated to blow the socks off any quota you assign them.

When offering Performers critical feedback, use the technique of story telling. Tell your Performer stories that communicate your point in an impersonal, non-critical way. You may have to tell the story a second time for the message to sink in, but for the Performer, this way of receiving feedback is highly effective.

As for their need for your attention, provide as many opportunities

for visibility as possible and be sure that the recognition you give them is delivered publicly.

## PLEASERS

Thin-skinned and tender-hearted, Pleasers are placating and deferential. Their greatest strength is their congenial disposition. Nice, kind and agreeable, they're very easy to get along with and they need everyone around them to be in harmony.

Pleasers can't tolerate conflict or confrontation. They won't ask potential clients the tough questions; they won't defend themselves when under attack from colleagues or superiors, they won't discipline subordinates when appropriate; and they won't complain if they are badly treated by others.

The greatest need of Pleasers is to be loved and accepted. It follows, then, that Pleasers will base their decisions on what is most likely to retain others' regard for them. Therein lies your greatest area of potential conflict with Pleasers — they will subordinate the good of the company to whatever will maintain harmonious working

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relationships.

The most typical response displayed by Pleasers receiving critical feedback is to act hurt and cry. You actually end up apologizing the first few times, and then stop giving them feedback altogether in order to avoid the emotional reaction. Because your approval is so important to them, they will feign agreement with your criticisms rather than engage in a substantive discussion of the issues.

Successfully managing Pleasers requires a familial approach. Know the names and significant activities of each of their family members, acknowledging significant dates and events. When giving constructive feedback to Pleasers, use the sandwich technique: tell a Pleaser something he or she does wonderfully well, then state what needs to be improved and end the discussion by reiterating what he or she does well.

## AVOIDERS

Reserved and meticulous, quiet and very private, Avoiders usually have poor eye contact and won't express their opinions unless and until they know what opinion it's safe to have. They prefer to function in a vacuum, more comfortable with data than with people, shunning both recognition and increased responsibility, since both impose undesirable levels of visibility and accountability.

Losing patience with the ostrich-like Avoider is your greatest potential for conflict, so keep in mind what's wonderful about these folks. You can send them to committee meetings as your delegate and they'll commit you to absolutely nothing. They are inscrutably reliable, doing precisely as they are told. Always on time, and never one to leave early. Avoiders are likely to have perfect attendance records.

The Avoider's greatest need is for security. They will sacrifice money,

position, growth and new opportunities for safety. As you might expect, Avoiders are uncomfortable making decisions. They will delay as long as possible, and then form a committee through which their responsibility for the decision can be diminished.

The secret to successfully managing the Avoider is to show how what you want them to do will insulate and protect them from unwanted risk, attention and responsibility. It's important to ensure that their job assignment fits their personality, since they're less flexible than any other style and can't adapt easily to change.

Place your Avoiders where the work environment is relatively stable. Calm the Avoider when change is imminent by emphasizing how much the new way is like the old. Remember, assuming anything other than a relaxed posture and a friendly tone of voice will significantly increase stress for the Avoider personality. Attempts to bully them into being less risk-averse will be endlessly frustrating for both of you, so have patience — they are terrific worker bees!

## DRIFTERS

Friendly and warm, free-spirited

and easygoing, Drifters are the most creative and imaginative of all personality styles. They can produce a cohesive whole from mere fragments, can effortlessly improvise bridges where others see only chasms and devise brilliantly simple solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems. On the other hand, rules, facts and structure are like straightjackets to the Drifter.

Likely to wear socks of different color, always a bit mussed. Drifters are impulsive, chaotic and unfocused. Because they have no strong values, they are very flexible and easily adaptable. The good news about that is that they don't judge others against a highly principled self; the bad news is that this lack of strong values makes their position on any issue confusing and ambiguous.

Their mental "flitting about" results in poor follow-up and incomplete work. Fickleness poses the greatest source of conflict with Drifters. To help you cope with this, I suggest you remember that both Einstein and Edison were expelled from grade school for their Drifter behaviors! The core motivator for Drifters is the need for freedom.

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When Drifters receive critical feedback, their eyes sort of glaze over and they become distant. You lose them to a mental frolic. To the Drifters' way of thinking, life should be a veritable picnic, so when unpleasantness occurs, they simply take an imaginary sojourn until the complaining peters out. If forced to focus, they'll inject enough levity into the situation to successfully change the subject.

Of all personality styles, the Drifter is the most difficult to manage because of an inability to adapt to structured workplace environments. Life really does have to be fun for the Drifter, and making the life of an agent fun on a consistent basis may be an unrealistic goal.

Even if you are successful in such efforts, the Drifter agent may leave you on impulse, if for no other reason than a desire for new surroundings. They will respond well to contests, social events and the opportunity to entertain clients or engage in any other highly social activities.

## ANALYTICALS

Although exceptionally good at identifying options and forecasting the ripple effects of each, Analyticals remain guilty of overanalyzing everything. Unreceptive to change and unwilling to consider others' points of view, Analyticals are falsely accused of being dull.

Analyticals' strongest need is for certainty. In everything they do, they must be absolutely positive that the course they've chosen or the recommendation they've given is correct. Since it isn't possible to be correct every time, Analyticals are notorious for procrastinating. As you might expect, Analyticals have great difficulty making decisions; they prefer reanalyzing the situation. This is the trait most likely to generate significant conflicts.

Analyticals will challenge critical feedback, asking first for examples that demonstrate your point, and

then for lots of details so they can be sure that you are sure of your facts.

As long as they are held accountable, Analyticals will be immobilized with the feeling that if they just wait a little bit longer, more information will be forthcoming that could dramatically change the result. Allow them to surrender accountability with dignity by taking over the responsibility yourself.

In giving instructions or setting goals with an Analytical, conduct the entire process in writing as the discussion progresses. Use a building-block approach, showing specifically how each fact builds on the next and be prepared to answer questions.

In managing Analyticals it's important to honor their efforts. Your failure to do so is extremely demotivating to them. If your Analytical subordinate overwhelms you with research and documentation, at least skim the work, highlighting sections about which you can ask substantive questions.

Alternatively, explain to the Analytical that the work needs to be done so it can be retained on file, and that you appreciate the luxury of being able to rely completely and totally on his/her analysis to the point where it isn't even necessary to review the work.

## ACHIEVERS

Perhaps you're lucky enough to know at least one Achiever. Happy, peaceful and pleasant to be around, they are self-directed and self-confident. They deceive themselves less than other personality styles and can see the humor in their own shortcomings. This same quality permits them to be genuinely interested in others' opinions.

Achievers see the truth better than other personality styles because they distort it less. As a result, they are effective managers who convey no hint of ulterior motives. They have a high sense of self-esteem. Unlike other personality styles who achieve their self-esteem vicariously through the confirmation of others, the Achiever has his/her own internal set of standards based on reality and experience, and it is this set of standards to which they hold themselves accountable.

Achievers equate self-discipline to being a disciple to one's own value system. It is primarily this frame of reference that allows them to be consistently proud of their behavior. Instead of associating self-discipline with punitive measures, they reformat the concept into a personalized constitution that governs their behavior.

Achievers' greatest need is for competency, and they hold themselves accountable for developing whatever competencies become necessary.

Here at last is the personality style that makes decisions based on what will be most effective, rather than what will deliver the greatest personal gain, or the least visibility, or the greatest level of control. Achievers base their decision on reasonable research and are committed to effectiveness.

When receiving critical feedback, the first utterance of the Achiever is, "Thank you. Tell me more. I love feedback." Achievers take ownership for their behavior and are able to laugh at themselves. They listen carefully for the value provided in critical feedback and make appropriate adjustments.

As for successfully managing Achievers, it isn't necessary to alter your managerial style for their benefit, since they have the flexibility to adapt to whatever style you choose. The most effective use of Achievers is in positions where they can influence others.

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