

Understanding What Makes People “Tick”

People in positions of responsibility need to have tremendous communication skills, and municipal employees are no different. It is essential for them to communicate in a way that will motivate their staff, reassure and inform council members, and promote the programs of the municipality to the community.

What if you always knew what to say and how to say it, in such a way that your message would be received clearly and receptively by others? Maybe you are one of the lucky ones who exhibit this talent innately, or perhaps you have developed it over time. Most of us, however, need a little help in this area. You say “tomato,” yet the listener hears “potato.” You say “my staff needs updated equipment,” yet the councillor hears “We are going to have to raise taxes, and that will make my constituents unhappy.”

Effective communication – through which the listener receives the exact message you intended to send – can be tricky. To consistently have your message heard clearly by your community or council members, you must commit to breaking down the barriers that can distort your message. Knowing when to cut to the chase; when your audience needs time to discuss the issues; or when to send an email rather than meet face to face are examples of skills that differentiate the highly successful municipal leader from the less than effective one.

Barriers to great communication are usually unseen and unrealized because most people naturally look at life from their own perspectives. Whenever they see behaviour they don’t understand – the manager who can’t stop talking, the employee who criticizes everything, the councillor who always needs to be in control – the natural instinct is to think, “What is wrong with them? Why can’t they be normal, just like me?”

This lack of understanding of how the natural communication skills of others are different from your own can lead to tension, disappointment, frustration, and unmet expectations. Even so, many of these barriers are within your control (as the sender), including the words you choose, your tone of voice, the level of detail you provide, and the ability to anticipate the listener’s receptiveness.

Toppling the Barriers

Let’s begin to topple these barriers by understanding how everyone’s personal communication style is affected by their behavioural style and their temperament, or what is more commonly referred to as personality style.

Think about your employees; you can likely already identify these four basic personality styles within your team:

- ▶ some individuals enjoy being in charge and making things happen;
- ▶ others are part of your team because they really enjoy being around peo-

ple, talking, telling stories, and having fun;

- ▶ still others are satisfied simply being part of the team, and are willing to help out by taking on a supportive role; and
- ▶ other individuals are more systematic and predictable in their approach, and expect city hall to be run in the same manner.

With all these personality styles operating within every environment, whether in the office or the council chamber, it is no surprise that communication is an ongoing challenge. The good news is that patterns of behaviour tend to be predictable – that is, very distinctive and consistent ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. This is good news, because once you become aware of these particular patterns of behaviour in others, your ability to communicate effectively increases significantly.

Behavioural Drivers

Recognizing temperament or personality styles is not a new concept. Over 2000 years ago, Hippocrates (a Greek physician), began to recognize differences in human behaviour that seemed to follow a pattern. Over the centuries, this pattern was explored by many scientists until it was defined by Dr. William Marston in 1928 when he wrote a book called *The Emotions Of Normal People*. Marston theorized that people are motivated by four instinctive drives and these drives determine behaviours in a pattern that he called D.I.S.C.

- ▶ D – Dominance
- ▶ I – Influence
- ▶ S – Steadiness

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► C – Cautiousness

Let's take a quick look at each of these four dimensions.

D or dominance individuals are outgoing and task-oriented. Their primary motivating factor is to get results and to get them quickly. (Think of the individual who likes to tell others what to do and is always pushing for fast decisions.) The key to communicating with this type of person is to give respect and get to the bottom line as quickly as possible.

I or influence individuals are outgoing and people-oriented. Their primary motivating factor in life is to have fun with people. (Think of the councillor who consistently needs to tell you his or her latest story or new joke before getting to the facts.) The key to communicating with this personality style is to take time to genuinely interact and be friendly before beginning to deliver your message.

S or steadiness people are reserved and people-oriented. Their primary motivating factors are peace and harmony. (Think of the person who prefers to stay quietly in the background as a supportive team member and avoids conflict at all costs.) The key to communicating with these people is to use warm voice tones

and show real appreciation for their quiet, consistent support of the team.

C or cautiousness individuals are reserved and task-oriented. Their primary motivating factors are perfection and correct information. (Think about the councillor who always has to be right and can't move forward on a decision until every detail has been checked and rechecked.) The keys to communicating with this personality style are honesty and integrity. Be sure your facts are accurate.

It is important to realize that very few people are just one style. Most individuals are a blend of two, three or even all four styles of D.I.S.C. However, studies have shown that people will demonstrate predominance in one of the four areas. When you can speak directly to their predominant style (whether D, I, S, or C), there will be significantly fewer hurdles to overcome for improved communication.

Applying the Principles

Your challenge as a leader is to do something with this knowledge. This takes time and a commitment from you. The first step is to think about your own natural personality style, then observe

and identify the styles of those with whom you work, and, most importantly, work towards adapting your style to each individual. It may sound difficult, but – like any skill – it becomes easier with practice.

You may have gone through an exercise like this with less than stellar results. You embrace a new concept and implement it enthusiastically; for the first week it is refreshing because it's novel; soon, however, it becomes tedious. You may convince yourself it's too time consuming to follow through. To make matters worse, you might stop because you don't see the immediate payoff, so why continue?

There is a payoff, though, whether it is immediately tangible or not. It comes in the form of increased productivity, reduced conflict at council meetings, improved staff morale at city hall, and better relationships all around. The key is to make the process continual, and don't stop trying.

Communication is all about understanding other people. Without people, there is no municipality, because people make a municipality tick. Knowing what makes the people tick is what D.I.S.C. is all about. MW



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It is Necessary not to Change*
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