



# The People Styles Study Guide

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## Introduction

Human nature and behavior is a mystery to most of us. This mystery plays out every day at work; people think differently than you do, they make decisions differently, they use their time differently, they communicate differently, they handle stress differently, and they manage conflict differently. These differences can be an asset, but if they aren't understood or managed, they can also make for long days and unproductive relationships.

This Guide will introduce you to a model—People Styles—that unlocks the mystery of why people act the way they do. You'll not only develop a better understanding of human behavior, you'll be able to predict it. Armed with that knowledge, you'll be able to improve both the *way* you work with other people and the *results* that, together, you achieve.

## Part 1: People Styles as a Way of Understanding Human Behavior

People Styles is based on the premise that there are three truths about people:

- In some way, every person is like all other people. As human beings, eat, we sleep, we feel emotions, we communicate with others, etc.
- In some way, we're each unique. Our DNA is ours alone, and so is each person's life experience.
- In some way we're more like some people than others. People that share the same culture, speak the same language, or work for the same company have more in common with each other than they do with other people. While that may be self-evident, there's more: researchers have discovered people who are otherwise very different share certain "behavioral patterns." And when you know how to interpret these patterns, behavioral "styles," begin to emerge.

The first two truths are both important to honor: we all have attributes in common while at the same time we're each individuals in the truest sense of the word. Yet it is this third truth that is the focus of this model.

It's important to remember three things when learning about People Styles. First, People Styles is a *theory*. A theory is defined as "a general principle formulated to account for certain observable phenomena" and "a guess." When it comes to applying theories to people, it is both easy and dangerous to believe that our guesses and judgements are "true" in some absolute sense. We're often guilty of such pop psychology, assuming we know why a person behaved in a particular way. We believe the inferences we make, assuming we know what person's intentions are. Yet while we may think we understand another person's values, beliefs, feelings, and what might be

motivating them, in reality we know none of these things—all we know is how the person acted. Which brings us to the second point.

The focus of People Styles is *behavior*—the actions we can see and hear, just as a video camera would record them. As you'll see, you'll be able to make some generalizations and predictions about a person based on the behaviors you observe. But it would be wrong to treat these generalizations as "true." Instead, use the People Styles model as a scientist would—to create hypotheses that need to be tested and occasionally retested. Don't fall in love with your diagnosis of someone's behavior; it's the behavior itself that counts.

The final thing to remember is that there isn't a better or worse style to be, just as there isn't any better or worse eye color to have. We'll use terms for "more assertive" and "less assertive" to describe behavior, but more doesn't mean better, and less doesn't mean worse. As you'll see later, success comes from each style. And when people of different styles work together, their different perspectives can make teams far more effective. So as you proceed, don't think of better or worse. Work to understand (versus judge) each style and think about how you can better relate to them.

## TWO DIMENSIONS OF BEHAVIOR

There are literally thousands of different human behaviors. But in developing this theory, researchers realized that most of these behaviors fall broadly into one of two categories—"assertiveness" and "responsiveness." These behavioral dimensions form the heart of the People Styles model.

**Assertiveness** is "the degree to which a person's behaviors are seen by others as being forceful or directive." There are three important components to this definition:

1. The "degree" to which... In observing behavior, it is important to think of it along a continuum of assertiveness. It isn't that people are or aren't assertive. Everyone is assertive. The question is *how assertive are they?*

NOTE: For the purposes of this Guide, we won't use the terms "aggressive" or "submissive." These are value judgements that often carry negative connotations. We'll refer to people as "more assertive" and "less assertive."

2. ...are seen by others... This is critical to the People Styles approach to understanding behavior. You may be the expert on what you think, feel, and believe, but who's the expert on how you behave? Other people are. While we may *think* we know how we're behaving, it's impossible to look at behavior in the same way others do. For instance, you might not realize that you've got a scowl on your face—you're just listening intently to a colleague's idea. But what they observe is your expression, not your intention. That's why it's impossible to accurately observe yourself from your own skin.

3. ...forceful or directive. In general, more assertive people tend to:

- exude more energy
- move faster
- gesture more vigorously
- make frequent and strong eye contact
- lean forward, especially when making a point
- speak more rapidly
- speak more loudly
- speak more often
- address problems and make decisions more quickly
- express opinions and give directions more emphatically

Less assertive people tend to:

- demonstrate less energy
- move more deliberately
- gesture less emphatically
- make less direct eye contact
- lean backward, even if making a point
- speak less rapidly
- speak less loudly
- speak less often
- address problems and make decisions more thoughtfully
- express opinions more carefully (often in the form of a question)

**Responsiveness** is defined as “the degree to which one is seen by others as showing their emotions, or demonstrating awareness of the feelings of others.” Two components of this definition bear emphasis:

1. ...showing their emotions... Obviously we all have emotions; we just express them differently. Some seem almost unemotional by all outward appearances. In contrast, others wear their emotions on their sleeves. These people would be “more responsive” than half the population, while people who are more emotionally reserved would be considered “less responsive.”
2. ...demonstrating awareness of the feelings of others. More responsive people visibly tune into the feelings of others. You can read a more responsive person’s empathy (or disdain) on

their face, and hear it in their tone of voice. Less responsive people don't feel less empathy, nor are they unaware of the feelings of others. It just isn't obvious in terms of behavioral clues.

The behaviors associated with more responsive people are:

- expressing feelings more openly
- appearing more friendly
- demonstrating a variety of facial expressions
- gesturing more freely
- speaking with greater inflection in their voice

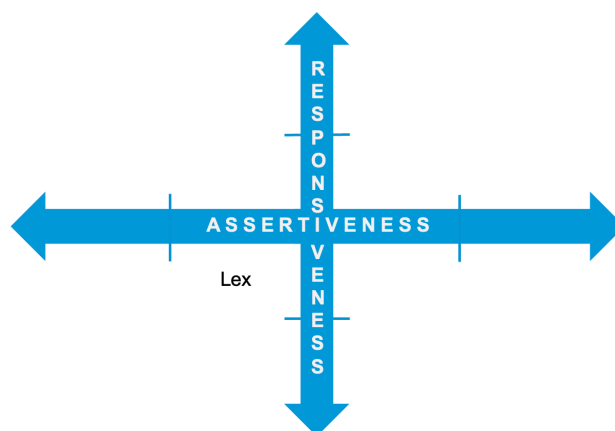
Less responsive people tend to:

- disclose their feelings less frequently
- appear more reserved
- demonstrate fewer facial expressions
- gesture less often
- speak with less inflection

In the event you're thinking about where you might fall along each continuum, remember, there is no bad place to be.

## THE PEOPLE STYLES MODEL

When you juxtapose these dimensions, you get a diagram, a "style map" that looks like this:

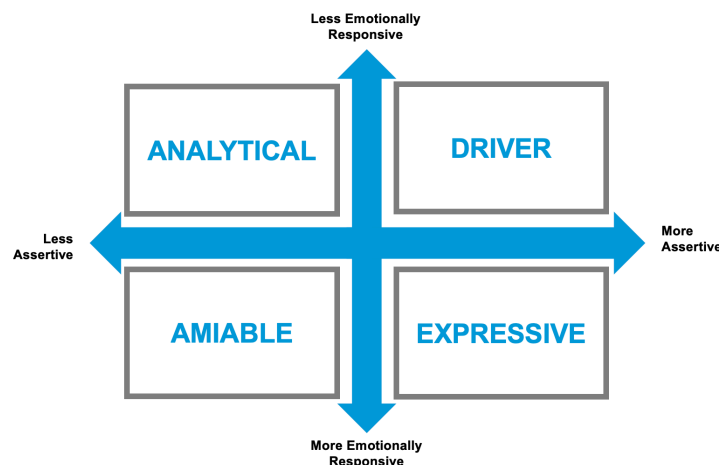


As you can see, based on a person's assertiveness, and responsiveness, you can "plot" where they would fall along the appropriate continuums. In the example above, Lex would be someone who would be considered "less assertive" (the responsiveness axis of the map being the dividing line) and "more responsive" (the assertiveness axis being the dividing line). These lines represent continuums and there are gradations along the way. In Lex's case, they would be less assertive than about 50% of the population, and also more responsive than about 50% of the population.

So what does this tell you about Lex? Actually, quite a lot. Researchers discovered that each of the quadrants created by juxtaposing the continuums represent a style—a predictable set of behaviors and preferences that can help you understand how that person works. What's more, once you understand the person's style, you can temporarily adjust your own behavior to work more effectively with that person.

## THE FOUR STYLES

To communicate easily about each style, each has its own name. The problem is that once you're introduced to the style's name, it's easy to remember the label and forget about behaviors. So as you're introduced to the name, remember that the style itself is much more than the name; it's the behavioral clusters and associated preferences that count.



Here, in no particular order, are the styles:

- If you're less assertive than half the population and less responsive (emotionally disclosing), the name of your style is "**Analytical.**"
- If you're more assertive than half the population and less responsive, the name of your style is "**Driver.**"
- If you're more assertive than half the population and more responsive, the name of your style is "**Expressive.**"
- If you're less assertive than half the population and more responsive (emotionally disclosing), the name of your style is "**Amiable.**"

Here is a summary of each style:

### **The Analytical Style [less assertive and less responsive]**

- Analyticals are famous for their high standards. They tend to be the most precise of the four styles—they want things done right the first time so they don't have to do it over.
- Analyticals will gather more data and take more time making decisions. They like options, and they like the costs and benefits of each clearly stated. Even so, they may want more information about one or more options before they're ready to act.
- Not surprisingly, Analyticals are known for being systematic in their approach to problem-solving. They appreciate logic and reason and rarely go with their gut reactions.
- Analyticals prefer to work alone or with a small group of people (vs. large teams); the interaction dynamics suit them better. They think carefully about what others say and take time to craft a response. That's more challenging in larger groups when the topic changes quickly.
- When expressing an opinion, an Analytical tends to use more tentative language. Rather than making a direct statement, they will say: "Perhaps we should..." or "Do you think it would be wise to...?" That doesn't mean their convictions are tentative, it's just the way Analyticals tend to speak.

### **The Amiable Style [less assertive and more responsive]**

Amiables and Analyticals share the same level of assertiveness. You'll thus see some behaviors and preferences in common between people of these styles. You'll also notice some differences:

- Given their higher responsiveness, Amiables are true team players. They enjoy working with other people, and (given their lower assertiveness) are happy to let others be in the spotlight. They listen carefully to others' ideas and want to make sure that everyone's ideas get a fair hearing. They also want to make sure that relationships remain as harmonious as possible, occasionally thrusting them into the role of peacemaker.
- Amiables are generous with their time. More than other styles, if a colleague needs something, they're likely to set aside what they are doing to help.
- Amiables operate best in structured environments since they're less likely to create structure for themselves. They appreciate stability in their work environment, including clarity regarding their role.
- Amiables are great "maintainers:" they are less interested in creating goals and plans, but once they're in place, you can count on Amiables to keep things moving smoothly.
- When contributing ideas, Amiables will often wait to hear what others think before offering their own. When they do, their contributions will often be indirect, even attributing their own opinions to others: "A lot of people are saying that 'X' is the way to go..."

### **The Expressive Style [more assertive and more responsive]**

- Given their higher assertiveness, Expressives demonstrate more energy than the less assertive styles. This is particularly true when with other people—Expressives feed off the energy of others.
- Other styles often think of Expressives as “outgoing;” they seem naturally friendly and frequently seek out opportunities to interact with others. They like to have fun, and make work fun. These high-contact people like working with others and interacting socially with others; they are more likely than people of other styles to mingle the two.
- Expressives are often thought to be ruled by their feelings. Because of their high assertiveness, their emotions are also easily apparent to others—either they’ll tell you how they’re feeling or it will be evident in their body language. They use more and bigger gestures than do people of other styles.
- Expressives like to talk—a lot. There isn’t a lot of airtime when an Expressive is in the conversation, a circumstance that is sometimes troubling to less assertive styles.
- In terms of stating their opinions, an Expressive’s motto is, “tell it like it is (at least what I think it is).” They are nothing if not candid; there is nothing tentative about them.

### **The Driver Style [more assertive and less responsive]**

- Given their higher assertiveness, and less responsive nature, Drivers tend to be goal focused and results oriented. They are also very independent: they prefer to set their own goals (instead of having those goals dictated to them).
- The Driver is the most action-oriented of the styles. While the Analytical’s preference is to “do it right, do it once,” the Driver’s orientation is “just do it.” Drivers would rather take action and make corrections along the way. If their course of action doesn’t turn out to be the right one, they will readily admit it with a “win some, lose some” philosophy. That said, they believe, on balance, they’ll win more than they’ll lose by seizing the moment.
- Because of their high assertiveness and lower responsiveness, Drivers’ words and actions seem highly purposeful. They move fast and speak fast. They are also the most concise of the styles. They don’t convey as much expression as Expressives do, and their gestures are smaller, but equally forceful (rather than throwing their hands up in the air as an Expressive might, they’ll lean in and point a finger). They don’t speak as much as Expressives do; they want their meetings to be task-focused and efficient. For these reasons, Drivers are sometimes perceived (particularly by the more responsive Expressives and Amiables) as being insensitive. But that’s not true. They just don’t talk about feelings as much as the other styles do, and they channel their concern not into talking about an issue, but into doing something about it.



## BEATING THE STEREOTYPE TRAP

“Stereotype” is defined as “a conventional, formulaic, usually highly simplified opinion, conception, or belief.” In putting together this portrait of styles, it is easy to stereotype person as a “Driver” or explain someone’s behavior by saying, “it’s because they’re an Analytical.” That’s a misuse of the model. No one is one-dimensional in that way. A person’s style represents their behavioral “home base” but it’s equally true that we’re all four-style people:

- Analyticals focus on correctness and quality, but so does everyone.
- Expressives like to have fun, but who doesn’t?
- Drivers value accomplishment, as do people of other styles.
- Amiables seek to create harmonious relationships, a goal of all people regardless of style.

The goal of the People Styles model is not to pigeon-hole others but to understand them so you can “flex” your own style to work more effectively with them. Building bridges, not boxes, is what People Styles is all about.

Before moving onto the next section, Flexing, a few thoughts and reminders to conclude this section:

- You can’t change your style. Because style is defined by behavior *patterns*, your style isn’t situational. An Expressive may be subdued in a given meeting, but they’re still an Expressive in terms of their general behavior. It is simply unnatural, for instance, for an Analytical to live as a more emotive or responsive person (thus change style to an Amiable). They would need to retrain all their unconscious reactions and expressions to make such a conversion. However, an Analytical might change (or “flex”) their behavior when a situation called for it to be more effective with someone of a different style. More on that in the next section.
- You are more than your style. Style is literally a two-dimensional way of understanding a person’s behavior. Your values, beliefs, interests, skills, abilities, and life experience are just a few of the qualities that add to those dimensions and further define who you are.
- You are different from others of your style. Oprah Winfrey, Bill Clinton, Muhammad Ali, Robin Williams, and Noble laureate Richard Feynman are (or were) all Expressives. They are also very different people who have achieved success in different ways. And yet they are all more assertive than half the population, and more emotive than half the population.

And the reminders...

- People Styles is a theory.
- The focus of People Styles is *behavior*—actions can be seen or heard, just as a video camera would record them.
- There isn’t a better or worse style to be.

## Part 2: How to Flex

People Styles offers a way of better understanding and predicting human behavior. But understanding is different from action. The real power of the process comes when you use it to improve your interactions with the people you work with.

“Flexing” is the process by which you tailor your behavior so that the way you work fits better with a person of another style. It’s akin to the way you adjust your driving style based on road and traffic conditions: you change your driving behavior when the situation warrants it, then you return to your typical style.

We chose the word “flexing,” because it best describes the spirit of the process—you temporarily increase or decrease your assertiveness and/or responsiveness based on the person and the situation. You then return to your comfortable behavior patterns. The goal is to move toward the other person’s comfort zone so that, together, you’re able to be more productive.

It may seem that making such small behavioral changes are insignificant in terms of being effective with other people. Yet in the work I do with executives, their unwillingness to flex is among the top reasons why their careers have derailed. Most prescribe to the “my way or the highway” approach to management. Such inflexibility leads to performance problems and compromises their ability to lead. Knowing when and how to flex is essential in fast-moving, highly collaborative organizations.

### THE FLEXING PROCESS

Flexing is a relatively simple process. There are five basic steps to flexing to another person’s style:

1. Know your own style.
2. Determine the other person’s style.
3. Assess the style gap.
4. Select a few behaviors to move closer to that person’s behavioral frame of reference.
5. Gauge your success.

#### 1. KNOW YOUR OWN STYLE

In order to flex *to* a person of another style, you’ve got to know where you’re flexing *from*. The trick in determining your own style is that your style is based upon how other people observe you, not how you observe yourself. Still, you’ve got to have a starting point, so doing a self-assessment is better than nothing (keep in mind that in our workshops, more than 50% of participants are wrong in assessing their styles). If you’ve got a videotape of yourself at a

birthday party or with another group of people, that might offer you some behavioral clues to consider as you develop your hypothesis.

To the best of your ability, assess your behavior as you think others might see you. For each pair of behaviors, circle the one that is most like you most of the time.

**ASSERTIVENESS**

<b>Less Assertive</b>	<b>More Assertive</b>
Lean backward	Lean forward
Makes intermittent eye contact	Makes sustained eye contact
Fewer or less forceful gestures	More forceful gestures
Speaks slowly (compared to all people)	Speaks quickly (compared to all people)
Speaks softly (compared to all people)	Speaks loudly (compared to all people)
Pauses frequently	Pauses rarely
States opinions carefully	States opinions strongly
Exerts less pressure for action	Exerts more pressure for action
Asks when delegating ("Would you...")	Tells when delegating ("Get me...")

**RESPONSIVENESS**

<b>Less Responsive</b>	<b>More Responsive</b>
Shows little facial expression	Shows more facial expression
Uses few gestures	"Talks with hands"
Sits and stands straight	Relaxes posture and body
Speaks with less inflection	Speaks with more inflection
Speaks with consistent volume	Varies volume when speaking
Refers less to feelings	Refers more to feelings
Uses facts and logic as rationale	Uses people/opinions as rationale
Speaks precisely re: time and data	Speaks casually re: time and data
Limits small talk and stories	Makes small talk, tells stories

If you selected more behaviors in the less assertive and less responsive columns, your style is Analytical.

If you selected more behaviors in the less assertive and more responsive columns, your style is Amiable.

If you selected more behaviors in the more assertive and less responsive columns, your style is Driver.

If you selected more behaviors in the more assertive and more responsive, your style is Expressive.

Once you've determined what you think your style is, try it on for a few days. Notice how you behave (not how you feel) in other people's company. See how it fits. Remember, your style isn't about your inner feelings or beliefs—it's about how you act with others.

## **2. DETERMINE THE OTHER PERSON'S STYLE**

The second step is to assess the other person's style. To do so, first select a person you work with regularly. Choose someone who's approach to time, decision-making, etc., is different from you. For the time being, don't choose a relationship that could stand some improvement someone but not someone with whom you have a bad relationship.

Once you've selected the person, observe and assess their behavior using the same criteria above. Follow the same process to make an educated guess regarding their style.

## **3. ASSESS THE STYLE GAP**

Compared to you, where does the other person fall on the style map? Are they more assertive? Less responsive? Both? Once you know your location on the map and the other person's, you're ready to flex.

## **4. SELECT A FEW BEHAVIORS TO MOVE CLOSER TO THAT PERSON'S BEHAVIORAL FRAME OF REFERENCE.**

First, think of a situation—an upcoming meeting, etc.—when you can use this flexing plan.

Once you do, select a few—two or three—behaviors from the lists above that you can temporarily adopt to set the other person more at ease. The easiest way to flex is along the assertiveness continuum—you can speed up or slow down your rate of speech more comfortably than you can manufacture or stifle facial expressions. If you're at the same level of assertiveness, review the list of responsive behaviors and select those that would be most comfortable for you.

Example 1: If I'm an Expressive, and I work with an Analytical, I am both more assertive and more responsive than my colleague. To flex, I need to select a few less assertive and/or less responsive behaviors to move closer to that person's comfort zone. Since it is easier for me to flex my assertiveness behaviors, I'll select two from that list: I'll speak more slowly and lean backward. I'll also choose an item from the responsiveness list: I'll refer to more facts and data in supporting my point.

Example 2: If I'm an Analytical working with an Amiable, my flexing choices are different. Since we are both comfortable with less assertive behaviors, I'll pick a couple of behaviors that will allow me to increase my responsiveness. For instance, I might choose to refer more to my feelings, and engage in some brief small talk by asking what the Amiable's plans for the weekend are and sharing my own.

In making these flexing choices, it's important not to feel like you're acting. If these behaviors make you feel inauthentic, as if you're roleplaying someone else, choose behaviors that you can adapt and still be yourself.

## 5. GAUGE YOUR SUCCESS.

After the conversation, ask yourself the following questions?

- a) Did the other person seem more comfortable?
- b) Were we more effective?
- c) Did I feel comfortable with the behaviors I selected?

If you answered "yes" to all, congratulations! Keep up your flexing when it counts, returning to your home style for everyday interactions with this person.

If you answered "no" to question "c" that's not surprising. Flexing will move you temporarily out of your comfort zone. Remember that the goal isn't to make you more comfortable—it's to make you more effective. So if the other person was more comfortable and together you were effective, you've still made a successful flex.

If your flex wasn't as successful as you had hoped, review your assumption about the other person's style and the behaviors you "flexed." You might try selecting other behaviors the next time. In addition, think about other information you have about how this person prefers to be worked with that might not be style-related. If that still doesn't work, you might simply ask the person if there are ways you can work more effectively with them. That, after all, is the goal.

## "FLASH FLEXING:" DO ONE THING DIFFERENT

This flexing process outlined above is effective when you have the time to think about when and how to flex. However, you'll find yourself in countless situations where flexing could really help you in the moment. You don't have the time or mental bandwidth to go through the flex planning process. What do you do then?

As long as you're relatively certain of your own position on the style map, you can choose to "flash flex"—do one thing differently that will help improve the interaction, regardless of the other person's style.

**If you're an Expressive, "restrain."** Tone down your volume, use fewer gestures, and give others more airtime. Don't talk about your feelings; focus on the needs of others.

**If you're a Driver, "listen."** Your focus on task and action can lead others to question to if you're open to their input. So listen more—making sure that others know you're listening. Paraphrase the other person's point of view before stating your own.

**If you're an Amiable, "reach."** Your focus on other people's needs can sometimes mask what you yourself think or feel. So your word is "reach"—state your own feelings and opinions more forcefully and frequently than you're normally comfortable doing. Let people know where you stand.

**If you're an Analytical, "decide."** While you are naturally hesitant to move forward until you're certain that a course of action is prudent, you may occasionally need to be more forceful in stating your opinion, pro or con (sometimes 80% certainty is enough). This higher level of directiveness will be particularly effective with the more assertive styles, Drivers and Expressives.

## **Conclusion**

People Styles offers one way of improving the way you work with other people. Keep in mind, however, that people are much more than just their style.

In our People Styles workshops, we ask people how they want to be treated. Three words dominate the responses: everyone wants to be treated with honesty, fairness, and respect. So when working with people, keep in mind this "ultimate flex": to treat the *person* in front of you how they want or need to be treated—*now*. And while you develop that skill, People Styles will keep you tuned into some of the behaviors that can help along the way.