

## Identify ‘Behavior’ Styles to Improve Communication

By Francie M. Dalton

Eight classic styles of behavior exist in the office: commander, drifter, attacker, pleaser, performer, avoider, analytical and achiever. These styles are general and stereotypical, and few employees will fit a profile exactly while others may reflect a combination of several styles. But it can be very effective to fashion management strategies for each behavioral style to maximize your communication with your employees.

### **Commanders:**

Demanding, domineering, stereotypical control freaks. They’re extremely bossy and abrupt, bordering on rude. They are uncomfortable with and aggravated by phrases such as “I feel” or “Let’s share.”

**Strengths:** Their ability to implement, regardless of what barriers may exist. They can be relied upon to do whatever it takes to get the job done.

**Management strategy:** Because commander behavior is motivated by the need for control, it is not unusual for managers to feel threatened by commander employees. If you chastise them for not “knowing their place,” they will go around, over or through you—or they will go out the door. Delegate to your commander. Assign projects by being specific about the desired result and letting them figure out the details. Provide critical feedback in terms of desired results, outcomes or objectives and avoid talking about feelings. Value and validate their ability to overcome obstacles and get the job done.

### **Drifters:**

Free spirited and easy going, disorganized and impulsive, virtually antithetical to commanders. Their extremely short attention span means they don’t pay attention to details, they fail to follow up and frequently miss deadlines. They have difficulty with structure of any kind, and their behavior, although wrapped in personal warmth and friendliness, causes extreme exasperation among their colleagues, making the drifter one of the most difficult subordinates to manage effectively.

**Strengths:** Innovative, creative, extremely flexible and able to improvise on a moment’s notice.

**Management strategy:** Inject as much fun and variety into the work day as possible. Integrate short but more frequent team meetings where updates or interesting tidbits are announced. Try to “lighten up”—at least in front of your drifter. Include your drifter in the entertaining of clients or other social activities. Keep assignments short, and try to build variety into tasks. If possible, provide for a “roving” capacity in the drifter’s job. When it’s time to give critical feedback, remember that if you are tense, angry or stressed, the drifter will simply “zone out” until you are approachable again. Instead, try delivering the feedback outside the office. Use personal appeals, and value and validate their “out-of-the-box” thinking. Make sure to close discussions on a non-business related topic such as an upcoming party, sports event or other social activity.

**Attackers:**

Angry and hostile, cynical and grouchy; sometimes the most demoralizing influence in the workplace. They are highly critical of others in a demeaning and condescending tone, and their attacks may be personal in nature, tantamount to verbal abuse. When something goes wrong in the workplace, attackers have a real need to know who is to blame.

*Strengths:* They can withstand professional loneliness longer than most because they're utterly convinced that they don't care whether others like them.

*Management strategy:* Managers are often unaware of the abusive behavior of attackers. Your job is to make sure other staff members know how to cope with attacker behavior—to respond in android-like fashion, no matter what behaviors the attacker manifests. The direct approach is ineffective. Instead, ask the attacker “self-convicting” questions, such as, “What do you believe to be the most important characteristics of teamsmanship?” or “How do you plan to evidence these over the next review period?” Value and validate their apparent resilience and their willingness to do the ugly, unpopular jobs that no one else wants to do.

**Pleasers:**

Thoughtful, pleasant, helpful, easy to get along with on a personal basis. They want the approval of others, so they give in easily, feigning agreement to maintain harmony. Pleasers remember special occasions and express interest in the outside activities of others, but they also use up time needed to complete their work assignments and find it difficult to say “no” to the requests of others. They fail to ask the tough questions necessary to get the job done, and they won't complain if they are badly treated by others

*Strengths:* They humanize the workplace by nourishing a congenial atmosphere and a fundamental caring for others.

*Management strategy:* Managers need to avoid being held hostage by the very nature of pleasers and thus failing to give them the critical feedback they need to grow and develop. Give feedback most effectively through the “sandwich technique” by inserting a criticism between two compliments. Knowing the names and activities of their family members, remembering special occasions and being personally thoughtful helps establish a “savings account” of good things against which you can make withdrawals or critical comments. Value and validate the assistance they provide in helping to balance professional and personal lives.

**Performers:**

Flamboyant and loud, jovial and entertaining. They make us laugh, but they can be self-promoting hustlers who use others as stepping stones on their path to the limelight. They create a false impression of their own status and importance by always seeming to be in a hurry and talking about their high-profile projects.

*Strengths:* Ability to establish, not to maintain, relationships.

*Management strategy:* Motivate their behavior by appealing to their need for recognition but monitor their performance to ensure they deliver what they promise. If they don't reach their goals, performers will deny any responsibility, blame others or rationalize

away their failure to produce. In giving critical feedback, try telling a story in which the undesirable behavior is assigned to someone you worked with in another company. Because performers are notoriously poor with administrative details, managers will either need to shore up this weakness with strong support personnel or build incentives into the review system to ensure compliance with administrative expectations. Value and validate their ability to establish new relationships.

**Avoiders:**

Quiet and reserved, prefer to work alone. If forced to work on a team or committee, they speak only in superficial terms, in cliches or to validate what someone else has already said. Fear also prevents them from taking initiative; they shun recognition and increased responsibility because both impose undesirable levels of visibility and accountability.

***Strengths:*** Their commitment to doing the job right the first time, every time. They can be relied upon to do exactly what they're told—no more, it's true—but no less either.

***Management strategy:*** Avoid threatening them when giving feedback. Be careful to first assure the avoider that his job is not at risk and to reassure him of this at the conclusion of your remarks. Always provide detailed instructions in writing. Don't push positions of increased responsibility or assign him to high-profile projects. Value and validate your avoiders for their meticulous attention to your instructions, and express confidence in their ability to continue doing their jobs effectively.

**Analyticals:**

Cautious, precise and diligent, but also procrastinators who check everything thrice and overanalyze. No matter what new idea anyone has, analyticals have a reason why it shouldn't be done. Although aware that others perceive them as socially awkward nay-sayers, not much pain is associated with this because analyticals prefer data to people.

***Strengths:*** Their ability to see several steps ahead and to anticipate the various potential risks.

***Management strategy:*** Provide examples of the behavior you're criticizing or your input will be perceived as invalid. To build a good working relationship, show respect for details. When he submits a project, go through and highlight sections and ask meaningful questions, and then express appreciation that you can rely on him for any other explanations needed. Help your analytical meet deadlines by having him break down projects into interim steps and assign his own deadlines to each of the interim steps. Value and validate the analytical's commitment to provide accurate information.

**Achievers:**

Content, peaceful and pleasant to be around, self-confident without being arrogant. They hold themselves accountable for their results and actively seek feedback, listening carefully for the value provided in criticism.

***Strengths:*** They find humor in their shortcomings and make appropriate adjustments, and they positively influence others.

**Management strategy:** Achiever subordinates are low-maintenance individuals. They adhere to their own performance standards, which are likely to be considerably higher than those set by managers. Managers can rely on their achievers to focus consistently on what's best for the organization. Value and validate the achiever's objectivity and their ability to interact effectively with all behavioral styles.

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