

Life Would Be Easy... If it Weren't for Communication Differences

Connie Podesta

A little background on communication styles can help us understand the issues and learn how to alter our approach to eventually make life a little easier for both parties.

The Basics

Every time we speak, we choose and use one of four basic communication styles: assertive, aggressive, passive and passive-aggressive.

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION:

The most effective and healthiest form of communication is the assertive style. It's how we naturally express ourselves when our self-esteem is intact, giving us the confidence to communicate without games and manipulation.

When we are being assertive, we work hard to create mutually satisfying solutions. We communicate our needs clearly and forthrightly. We care about the relationship and strive for a win/win situation. We know our limits and refuse to be pushed beyond them just because someone else wants or needs something from us. Surprisingly, assertive is the style most people use least.

AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION:

Aggressive communication always involves manipulation. We may attempt to make people do what we want by inducing guilt (hurt) or by using intimidation and control tactics (anger). Covert or overt, we simply want our needs met - and right now! Although there are a few arenas where aggressive behavior is called for (i.e., sports or war), it will never work in a relationship. Ironically, the more aggressive sports rely heavily on team members and rational coaching strategies.

PASSIVE COMMUNICATION:

Passive communication is based on compliance and hopes to avoid confrontation at all costs. In this mode we don't talk much, question even less, and actually do very little. We just don't want to rock the boat. Passives have

learned that it is safer not to react and better to disappear than to stand up and be noticed.

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION:

A combination of styles, passive-aggressive avoids direct confrontation (passive), but attempts to get even through manipulation (aggressive). If you've ever thought about making that certain someone who needs to be "taught a thing or two" suffer (even just a teeny bit), you've stepped pretty close to (if not on into) the devious and sneaky world of the passive-aggressive.

So now what?

Clearly, for many reasons, the only healthy communication style is assertive communication. Surely you can identify many people in your own life that favor each of the four styles. Most of us use a combination of these four styles, depending on the person or situation. The styles we choose generally depend on what our past experiences have taught us will work best to get our needs met in each specific situation. If you take a really good look at yourself, you've probably used each throughout your lifetime.

Understanding the four basic types of communication will help you learn how to react most effectively when confronted with a difficult person. It will also help you recognize when you are using manipulative behavior to get your own needs met. Remember, you always have a choice as to which communication style you use. If you're serious about taking control of your life, practice being more assertive. It will help you diffuse anger, reduce guilt and build relationships - both personally and professionally.

Take Action!

Begin to pay attention to which communication styles you use throughout the day. How often do you use a communication style other than assertive?

Watch and identify the communication styles some of the difficult people in your life use. Can you begin to notice how others use manipulative techniques to get their way.