

# Coaching T.E.A.M. Talk: Communicating with Style



*caregivers*

PREVENT  
*abuse/neglect*



PROTECT  
*clients*



PROMOTE  
*dignity*

## FACILITATOR GUIDE

Developed by:  
**UW Oshkosh**

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# Learning Points

Let's review the main learning points.

- Identify your personal communication style and the style of others
- Improve communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal
- Communicate successfully with those you supervise
- Adapt communication skills for a more successful team

# Team Members

As a supervisor, you work as part of a team. And that team is made up of four general groups of people:

- Clients/residents
- Co-workers
- Caregivers
- Family members of clients and residents

# Encouraging Cooperation and Teamwork by Understanding Style

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We know the primary reason managers fail is their inability to build relationships with their staff members. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of our style helps us become more successful supervisors or managers.

Understanding communication styles can also help us to resolve conflict. When we understand our own style and the style of others, we are able to be more flexible and skilled at handling conflicts.

- Understanding style is essential to working well with your staff, co-workers, friends and clients.
- Acknowledging style differences allows us to move past conflict and focus on the work rather than personalities. Let's begin by identifying our own style.

# Identifying Communication Styles



Recognizing your own communication style and the styles of others on your team can lead to more success as a supervisor, reduce conflict and frustration, help prevent abuse and neglect of those in your care and increase job satisfaction.

Communicating well with others is critical to the goal of your team: ***Providing safe, quality care to clients and residents***

## Verbal and Nonverbal Communication



When we think of the word “communication” most of us think of verbal communication. However, unspoken communication also affects how others perceive us. Truly, a picture can be worth a thousand words!

It's important to consider both verbal and nonverbal communication to better understand how both words AND actions send messages to others. We've all heard of “first impressions.” Most of us draw impressions of others without even thinking about it. Often, these judgments are made within the first few seconds of meeting a person.

Our first impressions are most often based on unspoken communication, the signals that others send either consciously or unconsciously. These first impressions can be completely off-base and even unfair, but they are often hard to change.

What are some of the ways that a person may communicate without saying a word?

*[Invite responses from the audience. Note them on a flip chart or white board. Suggested responses: body language, posture, facial expressions, mannerisms, clothing, make-up, hairstyle, personal hygiene.]*

It's important to be aware of nonverbal messages, so we can avoid sending unintentional messages.

## T.E.A.M. Talk: Communicating with Style



Communication styles have been studied for thousands of years. In more modern times, many serious students of the subject agree that there are primarily four basic communication styles. Of course, we are all a combination of the four styles and the style we use at any one time may vary depending on the situation.

Conflict among team members often occurs because of a difference in style, not a difference in content. In other words:

It's not ***what*** we say, but ***how*** we say it!

In this training, each of the four communication styles is represented by the letters in T.E.A.M.

**T**=Thinker    **E**=Engager    **A**=Adventurer    **M**=Mover

Which T.E.A.M style best expresses the way you communicate? Let's find out!

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## Activity: T.E.A.M. Talk Cards

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*[Distribute the Team cards.]*

**T.E.A.M. Talk  
Cards  
Handouts**

Each person has four cards, each one representing a different communication style. Look at each of the cards and sort them in the order in which they seem most like you (on top) to least like you (on the bottom). Don't spend too much time; let your first impressions be your guide.

*[Give the group 2 or 3 minutes to sort the cards. Ask people to identify their predominant style. If you have a smaller group, it's likely that each style may not be represented.]*

Let's learn a bit more about each of the four styles by reviewing each one in more detail.

# Thinkers thrive on information.



Thinkers seek facts to understand a situation. They value analysis, and like to plan before moving into action. They may be uncomfortable with impulsive decisions. Thinkers play by the rules and respect accuracy and accountability in themselves and others.

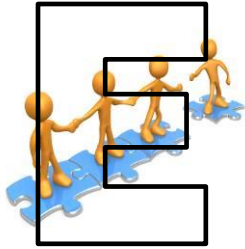
The **Thinker** might:

- Use longer, more complex sentences
- Like to review written materials, especially in advance of any decision or meeting
- Consider the consequences of the team's decisions
- Ask lots of questions to clarify or get more information
- Show an understated demeanor and speak in an unemotional tone
- Question change – unless there are facts to support it!

*[Describe the Thinker's approach at the grocery store. Thinkers will arrive at the grocery store with a list of items organized by aisle. They might bring a calculator along to figure out the best bargains or total the final cost. They might be more apt to look over their receipt for errors than a Mover who just wants to get the task done.]*

*Describe the Thinker's approach at a team meeting. A Thinker prefers to get an agenda and any meeting materials ahead of time to think both over in advance. S/he pays attention to detail and may ask for more information to get a better understanding of the topics.]*

## Engagers thrive on personal connections.



Engagers value relationships and thrive on positive attention from others. They like to be regarded as people who make connections. They tend to be concerned with how a decision will affect all people involved.

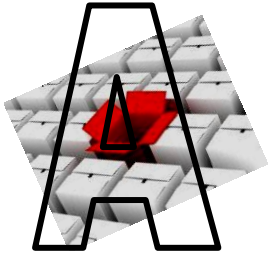
The **Engager** might:

- Begin the conversation with personal inquiries (“How are you?” “How was your weekend?” “How’s your family?”)
- Speak in terms of feelings (“This is how I feel about the situation. How do you feel?”)
- Show a range of emotions
- Ask questions about how other people might feel or be affected
- Express concern about change – how will it affect everyone?

*[Describe the Engager’s approach at the grocery store. Engagers might know many of the staff at the grocery store and make sure to greet and ask about each one. They might ask about or take the time to check out any specials. They are happy to see an acquaintance and may stop to chat.]*

*[Describe the Engager’s approach at a team meeting. Engagers want to make sure everyone is involved and on board with ideas. They value input and want to hear everyone’s point of view. They are sensitive to other people’s thoughts and feelings.]*

## Adventurers thrive on excitement.



Adventurers tire of boring explanations, and find lectures very painful. They like to move quickly, and tend to do their work in a flurry of activity. They value creativity, freedom and flexibility. Adventurers tend to be very creative in their communication and rely on their intuition.

The **Adventurer** might:

- Tell stories or give examples to support their point
- Use dramatic gestures
- Speak rapidly
- Use humor to make a point
- Use exaggeration (“I’m starving!”)
- Offer new ideas and approaches—think “outside the box”
- Embrace change – it can be “interesting”

*[Describe the Adventurer’s approach at the grocery store. Adventurers might go to the store without a list, pick up whatever strikes their fancy, and crisscross aisles to pick up things they forgot. They like to look for new or unusual items to try out and might enjoy cooking creatively.]*

*Describe the Adventurer’s approach at a team meeting. The Adventurer likes to have options and resist rules without explanation. Adventurers may offer ideas that seem “out-of-the-box” to others but offer creativity. They like to have fun at a meeting.]*

## Movers thrive on quick results.



Movers make decisions easily and may become impatient with people who can't make up their minds. They often focus on the big picture. They are very goal-oriented and can be competitive. Movers value time, action and getting the job done.

The **Mover** might:

- Use short, direct sentences
- Ask closed questions (requiring “yes” or “no” answers)
- Use words that tell you to get to the point (“What’s your point?” “Let’s move ahead.”)
- Show impatience with long-winded explanations
- Multi-task while speaking with you
- Welcome change—if it will improve efficiency!

*[Describe the Mover’s approach at the grocery store. Movers see grocery shopping as a time-consuming chore. They want to get in and get out. They go directly to what’s on their list, don’t do much impulse shopping, and use the express lines or self-serve checkouts to avoid waiting in line.]*

*Describe the Mover’s approach at a team meeting. Movers want to have an agenda, address each item and not “waste” time on details. Movers like action item charts where each task is assigned to a person with a deadline. They want to stay on topic and not stray to personal stories, etc.]*

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## Activity: Analyzing the T.E.A.M. Talk Styles

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*[Prior to the training, post four large sheets of paper or flip charts in different “style stations” around the room. Write a communication style at the top of each paper and list a column for “strengths” and a column for “limitations.” For example:*

Engager	
Strengths	Limitations

While every member of your team brings value to the group, it’s helpful to analyze how each style affects teams differently. Let’s try an activity designed to explore both the strengths and limitations of your own style.

*[Direct participants to the station of the top style they chose earlier. Encourage them to take their style cards and participant materials with them. Ask each group to appoint a recorder and a reporter. With very small groups you may have no one or just one person at a style station. If you have just one person representing a style, join that person yourself to support them in the process.]*

Since we now understand the basic characteristics of each style, we’ll use that knowledge to consider the following questions:

What strengths does each style bring to the team?

*[To elaborate, how might some of the traits have a positive influence on the team? If you notice a group having trouble getting started, offer one example: E.g. an Engager might ensure that everyone has input; a Mover might keep the group on task; a Thinker might bring up important details; an Adventurer might contribute an original, unique idea.]*

How could each style limit the team?

*[To elaborate, how might some of the traits limit the team? Can some traits be “too much of a good thing”? If you notice a group having trouble getting started, offer one example: E.g. an Engager might focus too much on everyone’s feelings, sidetracking progress; a Mover might be impatient with others; a Thinker might get bogged down in “what-ifs”; an Adventurer might lose interest, get bored with details or offer “off the wall” ideas (rather than outside the box ideas).*

*Give each group 5 minutes or so to list their thoughts. Ask each group to report out to the larger group when they’re done.*

*Direct participants back to their seats. If a style(s) is not represented, ask the group in general to answer the same questions from their seats while a volunteer recorder documents the groups’ thoughts at the style station. They should refer to their participant guides and style cards to form responses.*

*NOTE: To avoid conflict, following the steps above prevents a participant of one style from commenting on the style of another participant. Because your audience will be comprised mainly of caregivers, expect that a large percentage will self-identify as Engagers with smaller numbers spread across the other 3 categories.]*

## Avoiding Stereotypes



Because the four communication styles are very simple and straightforward, it is sometimes tempting to stereotype a person based on the limitations of his/her dominant style.

We may say things like:

“Thinkers can’t see the forest for the trees!”

“Engagers are overly emotional do-gooders!”

“Adventurers are flighty and unreliable!”

“Movers are bossy know-it-alls!”

In order to have effective teams, it’s helpful to focus on the strengths instead.

*[Ask participants to look at the statements above and suggest examples that focus on strengths instead of the limitations. For example, Thinkers don’t miss the details. Movers get the job done. Adventurers give us great ideas. Engagers make sure everyone feels part of the team. Jot some suggestions on a flip chart.]*

It's important to understand that we are a blend of all four styles, and it takes a combination of styles to make an effective team. While under stress, we may show more of our limitations than our strengths. Sometimes we behave differently in certain situations. For instance, someone might show Thinker traits at work, gathering information before making a decision, but may demonstrate Mover traits with children at home. This is perfectly normal.

Also, style is never an excuse for bad behavior. Someone who is a dominant Adventurer shouldn't show up late for a meeting and say, "Get over it, I'm an Adventurer! Time is relative!" A Mover shouldn't tell everyone what to do and then say, "I'm a Mover. It's my way or the highway!"

## Reducing Conflict with Others



While it's quite natural for us to focus on our own strengths and minimize our limitations, it might be helpful to find some "middle ground" that takes our communication to the most effective level.

Understanding others' styles gives you a chance to improve your communication and reduce conflict. But the most important key to successful communication is recognizing your own strengths and limitations. Reducing limitations allows others to appreciate those fabulous strengths!

# Communicating with Other T.E.A.M Talk Styles

Showing respect in your communication with other team members is crucial to the success of the team, and ultimately, the care of your clients and residents. Translate your message into a “universal” style using these tips:

Communication Tip	Example
Listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give your full attention</li> <li>• Make eye contact</li> <li>• Refrain from interrupting</li> </ul>
Understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask questions to clarify</li> <li>• Respect others' perspectives</li> </ul>
State preference, purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say what you think</li> <li>• State why you think it</li> <li>• Explain the outcome you expect</li> </ul>
Outline a problem, suggest a solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid accusations</li> <li>• Propose a solution to the problem</li> </ul>
Confirm agreements/plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restate matters in your own words. “This is what I’m hearing...”</li> </ul>
Respect the needs of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include statements/questions such as “Do you want to think this over first?” or “I know this will take some time”</li> </ul>
Express appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don’t just think nice thoughts, say them out loud!</li> </ul>
Agree to disagree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smile and accept the differences all bring to work</li> </ul>

*[Ask participants to take a private moment to consider and circle the tips they might use more often.]*

## Improving Communication with Clients

Clients are an important member of your caregiving team. Some clients are able to make their own decisions and have no cognitive impairments. These clients may clearly show an identifiable communication style. Other clients, however, may have cognitive disabilities or disorders as a result of conditions such as mental illness, Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia, autism spectrum disorder, deafness, blindness, brain injury, etc.

Persons with cognitive disorders and other emotional or behavioral disabilities may not demonstrate an identifiable communication style. But knowing your own style will help you communicate with those clients. For example, Movers may have a tendency to rush and may cause anxiety in clients, while Engagers may be intimidated by a client who acts out aggressively and fail to perform necessary cares.

Use the tips that follow to coach your staff toward better communication with clients and residents.

## Tips for Improving Communication with Clients

*[Ask participants to review the list—don't read it to them. Ask if they see any tips that their staff might find useful—any particular challenges they have noticed in this area. If you are not getting a response, choose a few of the tips and mention them briefly.]*

- Think about how your client may interpret your style.
- Remember that a client's communication style may be due to illness or disability. Don't take it personally.
- Resist the urge to push forward with a resistive client. Clients have the right to have choices.
- Refrain from arguing with clients with cognitive impairments—they may not be able to process your point, even if it's a good one.
- Watch for nonverbal communication if the ability to speak is diminished. Concentrate on body language and facial expressions instead.
- Always consider re-approaching a client who is uncooperative or upset at a later time.
- Practice empathy—try to put yourself in your client's place.
- Know your client's care plan so that you are fully aware of their physical and emotional condition. A thorough care plan also will provide good tips for communication.
- Use simple language and short sentences. If assisting a client, simplify steps and list them one at a time.
- Repeat words and sentences as needed. You can't assume that a client understands your words, even if the client understood them yesterday.
- Project a calm and friendly approach. A client may sense a tense or hurried approach and become more resistive.
- Make sure that your client can hear you. Don't automatically write it off as dementia. Ensure that an assessment has been done.
- Always ask yourself: Are my actions geared to my client's needs or my own?

# Improving Communication with Family Members of Residents

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Like other members of your team, family members demonstrate communication styles as well. However, it may be more difficult for family members to communicate successfully because of the strong emotions many experience over the illness or disability of a loved one. What are some of the feelings that may cloud family members' ability to communicate?

- *Grief* – feeling sad about the loved one's declining health
- *Stress* – assuming additional responsibilities or financial burdens at home due to the absence of the client
- *Guilt* – being unable to continue to care for the loved one at home
- *Anger* – feeling upset about being left alone or blaming the loved one for becoming ill

In these instances, it may be best to focus on the universal communication techniques that we discussed earlier. And above all – don't take it personally.

## Activity: Using T.E.A.M. Talk to Strengthen Your Team

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*[Give participants about 5 minutes to work independently on the questions below. Then ask participants to team up with at least one other person to review the ideas each person has about building teamwork and cooperation (Question 3 below). Participants have a worksheet in their participant guides.]*

1. Think about the members of your team – what styles do you see in them?

*[A high percentage of your participants (and their staff) may self-identify as Engagers. This seems to reflect the idea that Engagers highly value other people and are naturally attracted to the health care field. Take care to emphasize the importance of all communication styles, as in the next question.]*

2. What skills and strengths does each communication style bring to a team?

*[Possible answers:*

- Thinker = attention to details, logic, skill in planning*
- Engager = warmth, caring, consideration of others*
- Adventurer = creativity, excitement, fun*
- Mover = efficiency, organization, attention to deadlines*

3. How can you help to build more teamwork and cooperation among staff members by understanding a team's communication style?

*[Possible Answers:*

- Have staff review the T.E.A.M. Talk cards and complete this exercise*
- Ask staff for ways that everyone can contribute*
- Think of ways to pull out the strengths of the members of your team. E.g., think about how a Thinker may not contribute much in a meeting. Now you know they may need more prep time.*

*After participants have discussed ways to use communication styles to build teamwork and cooperation, ask for volunteers to share some ideas.]*

# Why It's Important to Understand Communication Style



Recognizing that the people on your team have different communication styles helps focus on the message instead of the personality. Each of us deserves the right to be heard and the opportunity to express our thoughts and opinions.

When we treat team members with respect and listen to the content of their communication, rather than the context, the goals of a team are much more likely to be met.

As we've learned, each communication style has strengths and limitations. This training provides an opportunity for all of us to maximize our strengths and be more aware of our limitations.

Take a moment to think about some positive outcomes that may result from understanding communication style.

*[Participants have space to write responses in their participant guides. After 2-3 minutes, ask participants to volunteer some responses. You might write some responses on a flip chart.]*

*Sample answers may include:*

- Reduce conflict*
- Recognize and respect others' styles*
- Understand the perspective of others*
- Project a more professional image*
- Provide a higher level of care for clients*
- Improve relationships with co-workers*
- Be viewed as a skilled communicator/skilled supervisor]*

# Wrap-Up

Let's review the main learning points.

- Identify your personal communication style and the style of others
- Improve communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal
- Communicate successfully with those you supervise
- Adapt communication skills for a more successful team

*[Briefly refer back to areas of the training when reviewing the bullet points. For example, review the four T.E.A.M. Talk communication styles by name with a few words about each.]*

**NOTE:** This material was developed by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services-Division of Quality Assurance and the UW Oshkosh Center for Community Development, Engagement and Training (CCDET) as part of the federal Caregiver Abuse and Neglect Prevention Project.

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# Training Materials Checklist

## For this training, you will need:

- Laptop computer (recommended)
- MS PowerPoint (PPT Viewer can be downloaded for free at [Microsoft.com](http://Microsoft.com))
- LCD Projector (recommended)
- Screen for viewing the PPT (recommended)
- Flip chart and markers
- Printed Participant Guides
- A set of T.E.A.M. Talk cards for each participant
- Pens or pencils
- Evaluation (optional)
- Certificate of completion (optional)

Note: It is strongly recommended that the PPT be viewed using an LCD projector. If that option is not available, the PPT may be downloaded and printed as a handout.