

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



*caregivers*

PREVENT  PROTECT  PROMOTE  
*abuse/neglect clients dignity*

## PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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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?

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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!

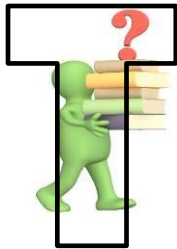
## **Activity: T.E.A.M. Talk Cards**

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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.

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

## Thinkers thrive on information.

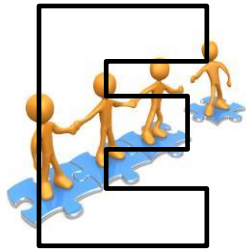


Thinkers seek facts to understand a situation. They value analysis, and like to plan before moving into action. They may be uncomfortable with impulsive decisions. Thinkers play by the rules and respect accuracy and accountability in themselves and others.

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!

## Engagers thrive on personal connections.



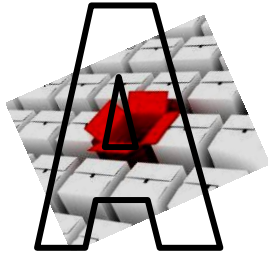
Engagers value relationships and thrive on positive attention from others. They like to be regarded as people who make connections. They tend to be concerned with how a decision will affect all people involved.

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?



## 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”

## 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!

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

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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.

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?

How could each style limit the team?

### 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.

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>

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## Improving Communication with Clients

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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.

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## Tips for Improving Communication with Clients

- 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?

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

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

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

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# 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.

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## Wrap-Up

Let's review the main learning points.

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**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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