

## People Styles – what they are

We are all similar, but we are also all different. ‘People Styles’ allow us to predict, usually with a high degree of accuracy, how a person will react in a particular situation. Let me give you an illustration:

Recently I was asked by a colleague ‘*why*’ another colleague was behaving in a particular manner. My colleague was clearly quite troubled by the third colleague’s behaviour, and was even feeling some personal responsibility for it.

Once I had an understanding of the situation, the answer was quite obvious. The third colleague was clearly severely stressed, and knowing them as I did, I found that their behaviour was exactly what I would expect. I would also say that while this explained the behaviour, it did not excuse it or make it right.

While I am not a psychologist, I do have a sound understanding of human nature. From experience, I know that it is often possible to accurately predict a person’s response to something. The key to being able to do this is to understand their ‘*nature*’; which means their ‘*normal manner of thinking or behaving*’.

## Why we need to know about People Styles

When we can identify someone’s ‘*normal manner of thinking or behaving*’, we can predict how they are likely to react in various situations. This knowledge allows us to modify our own behaviour, which in turn helps us to relate better. The result should be a “win-win” as we are able to communicate clearly and to build sound relationships.

Think about somewhere you have been today where there have been people. The chances are that you were amongst a rather diverse group of different cultures, generations, social and political values, religions and faiths, genders, etc.

As our society becomes more and more of a ‘global village’, we as individuals need to be able to inter-relate more and more with people who are different to us. This may be co-workers, professional colleagues, neighbours, family members, and even strangers. Those who cannot inter-relate effectively will inevitably become more and more marginalised.

## How People Styles work

While I am using the term ‘People Styles’, what I am talking about is also known by a number of names, including: Temperaments; Personality Types; Social Styles; Communication Styles; and Work Preferences, plus several others [See Note 1 for a fuller list].

I came across ‘People Styles’ a good many years ago (*for anyone interested, it was around the time of the LA Summer Olympics*). The effect that it had on me, and particularly on my work (as a Trainer/Personal Coach), was revolutionary. It was more than a new toy – it was like the key to a secret world!

By observing certain behaviours from people, I was able to determine their likely reaction during a training or coaching session. I soon learned to quickly

assess a person’s likely ‘style’, and to modify my own approach to suit. Things like ‘reading’ someone’s office, or perhaps their desk space, became second nature for me.

At the time, I was doing a lot of one-on-one coaching with people from diverse backgrounds, each with their own set of needs, ranging from ‘C-Suite’ executives to Mums who were returning to the workforce. This not only gave me a lot of opportunity for practice, it also allowed me to improve my effectiveness. At the same time, it turned me into a ‘believer’ in the value of using ‘People Styles’.

## People Styles – exploring the models

The original ‘People Style’ model appears to be from the ancient Greek Physician Hippocrates (c. 460 - 370 BC), whose work is known as the Four Temperaments (Melancholic, Phlegmatic, Sanguine, Choleric). A number of variations or adaptations of this model were developed during

### People Styles – an overview [2]

[based on Merrill & Reid]

<b>Analytical</b> <i>“I think ....”</i> Strengths: the ability to organise, to set long-range goals; the holding of high standards and ideals; a strong sense of duty; an ability to analyse matters/solve problems	information oriented key focus: – process Let’s do it the right way	<b>Genial</b> <i>“I like ....”</i> Strengths: a balanced disposition; a pleasing personality; promoter of harmony; loyalty to the team and to friends; a genuine concern for people	relationship oriented key focus: – consensus Let’s do it the easy way
<b>Driver</b> <i>“I know ....”</i> Strengths: directness; the ability to quickly take charge and make decisions; a focus on achieving the task; a willingness to take risks; not easily discouraged	action oriented key focus: – results Let’s do it my way	<b>Expressive</b> <i>“I feel ....”</i> Strengths: the ability to talk about anything, anywhere, any time (with or without information); a sense of humour and optimism; a bubbly personality	intuition oriented key focus: – recognition Let’s do it the fun way

A brief overview of the four styles: **Analytical, Genial, Expressive, Driver**

the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The majority, but not all, of these use four distinct behavioural styles.

One of the most well-known ‘People Style’ models, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was created in 1942. MBTI is based on the work of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961). In his book ‘Psychological Types’, published in 1921, Jung identified four types: Sensing, Feeling, Thinking, Intuitive. While some find similarity here with the Four Temperaments, it is not apparent that Jung did use Hippocrates’ work.

Some ‘People Style’ models are ‘intra-personal’, i.e. about a person’s internal preferences, while others are inter-personal, i.e. about interaction and relationships with others. MBTI is an ‘intra-personal’ model. Its types are derived from self-perception of needs and preferences; however, how people feel about themselves is often not necessarily the same as how they behave towards others.

The model that I use is based on the work of David Merrill and Roger Reid (published in 1981 as *Personal Styles and Effective Performance*); they use the term ‘Social Styles’. This is an ‘inter-personal’ model. The four behavioural styles within this model (Analytical, Amiable, Expressive, Driver) closely reflect the Four Temperaments of Hippocrates.

### Using the ‘People Styles’ model

Each behavioural style within the model has a set of characteristics. Most people show characteristics of two or more styles, rarely just of one. Usually one of the four styles will be more dominant than the others.

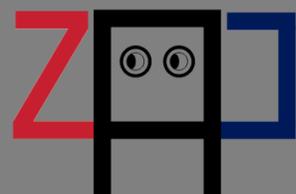
The first thing that we need to do is to establish our own style, or style combination. In my

experience, very few people can accurately self-diagnose their own style. I would recommend seeking input from colleagues and family – they need to be objective and honest (and we need to accept that!).

By observing and identifying a person’s behaviours, it is possible to quickly work out their likely dominant and secondary styles. Then, we can modify our behaviour to suit that of the person we’re interacting with. This enables us to establish rapport with them more easily, to avoid miscommunication, and to deliver our ‘pitch’ in a manner that suits their personal style.

I have found the Merrill and Reid model to be quite intuitive to use, primarily because the names for each of the styles are simple and self-explanatory. The model is also much less complex than most of the other models (e.g. MBTI). This makes it so much easier to remember and apply. Finally, the inter-personal focus of this model addresses how I can better understand both myself and others.

This is why ‘People Styles’ models are often used by Sales Departments, as they enable sales representatives to give each of their customers the type of personal service that will lead them to buy. The ‘People Styles’ model is not solely for use with customers/sales. As I have found, using a ‘People Style’ model can help in almost any relationship situation, be it family, social, professional, whatever.



ZAPNUGGETS

#### Zap

A concentrated burst of energy or power.

#### Nugget

A piece of wisdom or knowledge that helps to inform, empower, motivate, or inspire.

*Note:* In the model I use, I have made a couple of variations to the original from Merrill and Reid:

1. I use the term ‘**Genial**’ rather than Amiable – I found (long ago) that no-one wanted to be an Amiable
2. I have changed the diagram positions of Driver and Genial (Amiable)

### Free nugget for this Post

Our free nugget for this Post is a 2010 video (5min:01sec) from the TRACOM Group giving an [introduction to the Merrill and Reid model](#) (TRACOM is a workplace performance company, founded by David Merrill and Roger Reid).

### Coming next:

Brand You - it's about personal branding

### Note 1. Alternative names for ‘People Styles’:

Personality types  
Temperaments  
Personality temperaments  
Personality styles  
Social styles  
Behavioural styles  
Interpersonal styles  
Communication styles  
Work/Working styles  
Work preferences

**Note 2.** *There are a large number of useful reference books available, including:*

### People Styles at Work... and Beyond

(2009): by Robert Bolton, Dorothy Grover Bolton

### The Social Styles Handbook

(2004): by Larry Wilson

### Personal Styles and Effective Performance

(1981): by David W. Merrill, Roger H Reid

<http://freezapnuggets.com/wordpress/?p=648>