

Making Leadership Simple by Understanding Yourself and Others

By Ed Oakley

I was working with a leadership development team in Ft. Worth, TX last week with some of our self-awareness assessments, and it brought back memories of my Hewlett-Packard days. HP always did a lot of management and leadership training, for which I am grateful. But of all the classes I attended over twelve years, THE most valuable was the one related to “communicating with style,” where style refers to our behavioral style. It could have also been accurately called “leading with style.” I continue to use what I learned there today. It has served me in many different situations to better relate to people whose styles are very different than mine. It definitely contributes to making leadership simple.

Some people resist being put in boxes or labeled as a particular style. Some assessments are very limited in their distinctions, which would tend to contribute to that feeling of being labeled. While it is true that no one fits in a single box, we all have certain ...behavioral tendencies that we repeat consistently. Our research has found that some assessments do much better than others in distinguishing the finer points of our behaviors and, therefore, provide reports with much more precision and depth, thus more value (we'll let you try ours). It is unlikely to have two people on the same team with the exact same behavioral report, because there are not going to be two people on a team who are exactly the same - even just from a behavioral perspective. Degree of distinction is one thing to watch out for in evaluating assessments.

To be the best leader and person you can be, you need to understand yourself as thoroughly and honestly as possible. The better you understand yourself, the better you can understand how other people might perceive you. You can also better understand how certain other people might misunderstand you. Your behavioral style is a small part of who you are, but we are focusing our attention in this posting on that aspect of people that are observable.

The other value of understanding behavioral styles that has stuck with me and served me well in many situations is understanding other people and how they are different behaviorally from me. This is a huge leadership skill development opportunity. To the extent you can recognize different behavioral styles and understand how they are different from your own, you have the ability - we all do - to adapt your style to better relate to people with different styles. That ability makes a huge difference in effectiveness of your communication and relationships - your leadership. And all you are really doing is honoring the style of the other. You are respecting how they like to communicate and be communicated with by shifting more toward their preferred style for a period of time.

Behavioral styles are neutral. There is none better than another. Each “basic” style has its strengths and limitations. That is one of the things I learned in that HP class that is critically important.

A team environment is a place where many dividends are available to those team members who understand the behavioral styles of their teammates. People communicate more effectively, better understand others' perspectives, understand the cause of some conflicts, and are better able to resolve conflicts.

As I write this, I am becoming re-excited about the value of team members better understanding the behavioral style preferences of all other team members. One way to benefit from these reports is to have your team take them. It takes about 10 minutes to take online, and the report is emailed to them/you. You as a manager can review the report with them and better understand how to work and relate to them. That could have immense value for you and them! It's also a tool to work with together as a team.

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