

Being conscious of people's working styles, which are based on personality traits, can go a long way in creating better relationships...and higher productivity. Give what follows careful thought and then pass it on to *your* direct reports. What we think is obvious may not be to everybody. This simple exercise can make a big difference!

Four Preferences to Watch

Here are four work-related preferences that influence behavior, and tips for dealing with each type of person.

Hard work and an enthusiastic attitude will only take employees so far. To really establish a healthy relationship with their boss, employees need to understand what makes their boss tick. Here are four work-related preferences that influence behavior, and tips for dealing with each type of person. So the next time an employee needs advice about dealing with a difficult supervisor, this cheat sheet can help determine if personal preferences may be the problem.

Look for these preferences:

1. *Making Decisions*

Does your boss make decisions rapid-fire or does he/she weigh all options carefully? A boss that prefers to make decisions quickly wants bullet points, not a 40-page report. When you make recommendations to this boss, give them the summary page. But be sure to have the other 39-pages on hand just in case. And be prepared to answer questions, since the boss will probably make a decision on the spot.

If your boss prefers to make decisions cautiously, present material in a logical sequence, citing your sources. If in doubt, include more data than less. And be sure to build time into the project schedule, since the decision will probably take a while.

2. *The Pace of a Day*

Does your boss prefer to focus on one project at a time, or does he/she enjoy juggling 20 projects at once? A boss who prefers a jam-packed day can get bored easily, so make each interaction quick, direct and to the point. Don't expect long conversations and don't be offended if he/she doesn't appear interested in what you did over the weekend. Define the amount of time you need for meetings – and if you ask for 10 minutes, don't stretch it to 20.

On the other hand, for a boss who prefers a more sequential pace, overload is a constant threat. In this case, you want to identify the tasks they enjoy, and then try to take the other tasks off their plate. Also beware of "delegating up," or handing unnecessary work off to this boss.

3. *Feedback*

Some bosses prefer subjective feedback (feelings); others want objective feedback (measurable data). And some prefer a balance of the two.

If your boss wants subjective feedback, be sure to tell him/her how you feel about the progress of a task. But don't get lazy. Always be prepared with data in case your boss needs specifics.

Bosses who like objective feedback may come across as non-trusting and micro-managing. They continually want to be updated on the status of projects. They want numbers, charts and timetables. In this case, it's especially important to keep your boss updated about problems and how they are being resolved. "Fine" is not a satisfactory answer to a question from this boss.

If the supervisor wants a balance of subjective and objective feedback, regularly send him/her data-specific updates, but follow up with a phone call to discuss your feelings about the progress. When in doubt, communicate more rather than less.

4. One-to-one involvement

Some bosses prefer to interact on a personal level; some see this as a waste of time.

For a boss who prefers little one-to-one involvement, keep the conversation task-focused. Don't share personal information unless specifically asked, then keep it short. If the boss isn't chatty, don't be offended or assume that he/she dislikes you. Recognize the behavior as a preference, not a personal affront.

Bosses who prefer one-to-one involvement want to hear about your weekend. Even if you personally don't like one-on-one involvement, it's important to share some information because personal interaction is one way this type of boss measures the strength of relationships with subordinates. If you don't want to share personal information, at least ask questions.

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