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

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Developed by:

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Center for Career Development (CCDET)

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Division of Quality Assurance

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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 other styles
- Understand communication challenges with residents and their family members
- Adapt communication skills for a more successful team

Team Members

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

- Residents
- Co-workers
- Supervisors
- Family members of residents

Identifying Communication Styles

Recognizing your own communication style and the styles of others on your team can lead to more success as a caregiver, 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 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?

Take a look at some photos of people. Think about your first impressions of the people or the situation.

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

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

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 residents. Translate your message into a “universal” style using these tips:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Tip</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Listen                             | • Give your full attention  
• Make eye contact  
• Refrain from interrupting |
| Understand                         | • Ask questions to clarify  
• Respect others’ perspectives |
| State preference, purpose          | • Say what you think  
• State why you think it  
• Explain the outcome you expect |
| Outline a problem, suggest a solution | • Avoid accusations  
• Propose a solution to the problem |
| Confirm agreements/plans           | • Restate matters in your own words. “This is what I’m hearing...” |
| Respect the needs of others        | • Include statements/questions such as “Do you want to think this over first?” or “I know this will take some time” |
| Express appreciation               | • Don’t just think nice thoughts, say them out loud! |
| Agree to disagree                  | • Smile and accept the differences all bring to work |
Improving Communication with Residents

Residents are an important member of your caregiving team. Some residents are able to make their own decisions and have no cognitive impairments. These residents may clearly show an identifiable communication style. Other residents, 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 residents. For example, Movers may have a tendency to rush and may cause anxiety in residents, while Engagers may be intimidated by a client who acts out aggressively and fail to perform necessary cares.

Tips for Improving Communication with Your Residents

- 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. Residents have the right to have choices.
- Refrain from arguing with residents 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**

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 – please don’t take it personally.
Activity: Using T.E.A.M. Talk Styles to Reduce Conflict

An important element of successful teams is reducing conflict. Let’s apply what we’ve learned by working on some examples of communication conflicts. Can you identify each character’s communication style and think of ways to improve their interaction?

Example #1: Janet and Marcia

Janet is a CNA who works at Constant Cares CBRF. Janet senses that several of the residents seem to be uncomfortable around Marcia, another CNA. Marcia is very efficient and quick in her movements with residents. She has a “no-nonsense” approach. Janet feels that Marcia orders residents around and seems impatient with them most of the time. Marcia is all about getting the job done. CBRF managers see Marcia as a high achiever. She was named employee-of-the-month a couple months ago.

Janet would like to bring up the residents’ feelings at the next team meeting, but she thinks Marcia will probably just dismiss any suggestions she might have. Janet feels very connected with the residents and wants to help everyone feel more comfortable. But she’s not sure she can risk confronting Marcia at the team meeting. After all, they have to work together, and she doesn’t want to hurt Marcia’s feelings.

What communications styles do Janet and Marcia show? Why do you think so?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style (Thinker, Engager, Adventurer, Mover)</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
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How could Janet best approach Marcia?
Example #2: Mario and Toni

Mario is a resident care technician at the Northern Pines Residential Facility Serving People with Developmental Disabilities (FDD) and has been working on a project with Toni for two weeks. They are reorganizing the recreation area and have a small budget to add more activities for residents. Mario and Toni have sketched out some different ways to rearrange the room. They also made a list of some new games and art supplies they want to buy.

Mario has told Toni which room arrangement he thinks is best and wants to move forward. Toni thinks each option has pros and cons and wants to think about them a while longer. She also wants to shop more to get the best price on their purchases. Mario realizes that the deadline is next week and says to Toni, “We have a deadline to meet—I don’t know why you can’t make up your mind!”

What communications styles do Mario and Toni show? Why do you think so?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style (Thinker, Engager, Adventurer, Mover)</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mario</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toni</td>
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</table>

How can Mario better communicate his concerns to Toni?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Example #3: Keisha and Steve

Keisha is a social worker at Hawk Haven CBRF. Elma is a new resident who seems very lonely. She tells Keisha that she really misses her dog. Keisha thinks it would really perk up Elma’s spirits if her pet could live with her at the CBRF.

Keisha is so excited about the idea that she rushes to talk to Steve, the administrator. Steve is on his way to a meeting and is a bit rushed. Steve says that there are too many things to think about to allow Elma’s dog to be in her room—health codes, infection control, having to feed the dog, etc. He thinks it’s just not worth it. Keisha thinks Steve is overly cautious and can’t think “outside the box.”

What communications styles do Keisha and Steve show? Why do you think so?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style (Thinker, Engager, Adventurer, Mover)</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
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</table>

How can Keisha and Steve communicate better?
Example #4: Michael and Mrs. Lee

Michael is an LPN at Olsen Healthcare Center. One of the residents, Carl Lee, is an 85 year-old man with moderate dementia. Recently, Michael has noticed that Mr. Lee’s dementia seems to be progressing.

One day, Mrs. Lee arrives for a visit with her husband. She has also noticed changes in Carl and says to Michael, “Carl didn’t even recognize me when I came to visit yesterday. Are you people giving him his medication? And I noticed he didn’t touch his lunch yesterday—the food here is terrible. My husband’s going to starve to death!” As Michael tries to explain that he’s reported the changes in Carl’s conditions according to the rules, Mrs. Lee waves her arms at Michael and refuses to listen.

Michael is very frustrated with Mrs. Lee. Doesn’t she understand the facts about dementia? Can’t she see that Michael is doing what he’s supposed to do? On the other hand, Mrs. Lee doesn’t want to hear about policies and procedures. She just wants her husband to get well.

What communication styles do Michael and Mrs. Lee show? Why might it be difficult to identify Mrs. Lee’s style?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style (Thinker, Engager, Adventurer, Mover)</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Lee</td>
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</table>

How could Michael best approach Mrs. Lee?
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.

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 other styles
- Understand communication challenges with residents and family members
- Adapt communication skills for a more successful team

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

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