

Match Your Boss's Communication Style

Plus, quitting a job before finding another: pros and cons

BY TAUNEE BESSON

Editor's Note: This month columnist Taunee Besson answers questions about common job hunting and career problems. If you have a question about your job search or career, send it to our monthly advice column, National Business Employment Weekly, Box 300, Princeton, N.J. 08543-0300. All names are kept confidential.

Q: I have difficulty communicating with my manager. When I have a new idea, he throws cold water on it by asking all kinds of specific questions that have little bearing on the overall plan. And getting a decision from him takes forever. We often lose

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critical opportunities because of his failure to act quickly.

Scheduling time with him is another sore point. He spends most of the day alone with his door shut. But the funny thing is, just when I'm about to give up on trying to get through to him, we have a moment of agreement.

I like my boss as a person. I enjoy my job and its position within the company. A career move isn't needed, just a little fine tuning. Do you have any advice on how I can communicate more effectively with my manager?

A: While you like your boss, it sounds as if you are blaming him for your communication problem. This attitude isn't going to improve your rapport. Instead, acknowledge that you and he have different decision-making styles which create problems when you're discussing a new project or course of action. Neither of your styles is right or wrong, but their divergence is obviously a frustration for both of you. He probably leaves your meetings without the data he needs to make an informed decision. You chafe because he can't make up his mind. Everyone loses.

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Fortunately, there's a relatively simple way to change your presentation style to meet his needs. Many career planners use a decision-making profile based on Carl Jung's personality types (The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) to help their clients communicate more effectively with management, peers and subordinates. Essentially, your decision-making style can be described using four sets of opposites, each of which has an important bearing on how you tackle a new task:

EXTROVERT	vs.	INTROVERT
SENSOR	vs.	INTUITOR
THINKER	vs.	FEELER
JUDGMENT	vs.	PERCEPTION

Extrovert-Introvert

Extroverts tend to ask lots of questions. They enjoy brainstorming, team work and group consensus. You generally know what they're thinking because they tell you.

Introverts, on the other hand, are self-sufficient problem solvers. They're more comfortable sitting in their offices by themselves, thinking through problems alone rather than discussing them with others. Often it's difficult to judge their position on anything—they keep it to themselves.

Sensor-Intuitior

Sensors need the facts. They want concrete explanations backed by specifics. Their comfort level increases as they become acquainted with the step-by-step process. Their co-workers would describe them as practical, matter of fact, bottom line.

Intuitors are big-picture people. They enjoy looking at possibilities, long-range agendas and new ways of doing things. Facts tend to bore them. Ideas are a lot more fun.

Thinker-Feeler

Thinkers make decisions objectively. They can distance themselves from a complicated situation and consider how to handle it through a rational thought process. They enjoy planning projects and seeing solutions fall logically into place.

Feelers have a great concern for people. They are sensitive to the way a given course of action will affect staff, customers, the community, etc. Their insights in human needs and desires are always an important key to any decision they make.

Judgment-Perception

Individuals who are high in judgment prefer making decisions to gathering information. They like to move quickly, cut through red tape and get on with the project. They have a low tolerance for indecision.

Perceptives would rather gather information than make decisions. They enjoy finding new knowledge. They're usually flexible in adapting to

changes but they may have difficulty making up their minds.

If you take an overall picture of your manager's probable type (ISTP), you'll recognize why he:

- tends to spend a lot of time alone (I).
- wants the nuts and bolts (S).
- enjoys developing flow charts (T).
- needs more information than you think is warranted to make a decision (P).

In contrast, your type (ENTJ):

- wants more contact with him (E).
- prefers to look at the big picture rather than get bogged down in detail (N).
- enjoys the objective planning process (T).
- moves quickly on decisions (J).

To communicate more effectively, try to structure your conversation to parallel his decision making style. Acknowledge that your manager needs to assimilate your information privately. Present your case in a detailed, step-by-step manner, rather than your usual big-picture approach. And don't expect quick answers. Give your boss at least 50% more decision-making time than you think he should take.

While you may feel this forces you to do all the adjusting, you'll gain measurable benefits from

Anxious and depressed people perform poorly in job interviews. It's their desperation that makes them unmarketable.

learning to adapt your communication style. With a little practice and observation, you'll be able to discuss problems and opportunities more effectively with friends and colleagues. You'll also develop an increased appreciation for the way others' differences can compensate for your deficiencies. ENTJs have many good qualities, but they need ISTPs to force them to consider the details and avoid snap decisions.

Q: I've always heard that you should never quit one job until you have another, because potential employers don't want to hire people who aren't working. While I continue to go to work every day, it's becoming harder to give it 100% of my attention and commitment. Common sense tells me to resign now and devote my time to looking for a new

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Career Q & A

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position where there's some job satisfaction. But I worry that interviewers may reject me because I'm unemployed. What do you think?

A: In the days of "The Organization Man" it was true that people without jobs were discounted as potential employees. And today, executive search firms still prefer filling their research assignments with professionals who are currently working in positions similar to the available openings.

But given the number of good people who are laid off because of budget cutbacks, mergers and takeovers, the stigma attached to being out of work has diminished considerably. Even the nation's current business demigod, Lee Iacocca, found himself without a job after Henry Ford II fired him.

Actually, people who are out of work are more likely to feel bad about it than are their potential employers. In our culture, a person's work often provides him with both identity and income. If he doesn't have another strong source of financial and emotional support, the job seeker may begin to feel worthless and unmarketable. With no regular paycheck, money can become a constant worry—even if there are sufficient resources for the next six months or so.

Employment also provides structure and order in life. It's a place to go every day. When you're not working, waking up in the morning may be accompanied by a panicky "What am I going to do today?" feeling.

Before you resign, consider how you will react to

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being unemployed. If you'll feel relieved to be out of a nonproductive situation and you'll use your time effectively to find satisfying work, then seriously consider giving notice. But if you're afraid you'll lose your sense of purpose and continually fret about a shrinking bank account, think twice before quitting your job.

Feeling good about yourself is an important key to a successful job search. Anxious and depressed people perform poorly in job interviews. It's their desperation that makes them unmarketable, not their being out of work per se.

Should you decide to resign to conduct a full-time job search, here are a few suggestions for maintaining your momentum:

- Rely on your family, friends, hobbies and volunteer work to provide you with a strong, positive identity. Continue to pursue other activities along with your job search.
- Spend no more than 40 hours a week looking for work. Avoid becoming a searchaholic who either devotes every waking moment to finding the new position or feels guilty when he isn't.
- Plan some structure into each day. Get up at a reasonable hour and start moving. Make calls, network, go to the library, send resumes and thank you notes, etc.
- If you find yourself worrying that no one will ever hire you, talk to a friend to regain your objectivity. Confronting catastrophic expectations can decrease their paralyzing effect.
- Recognize that every job search has its high and low points. Perseverance, a belief in yourself and a good support system will see you through the tough times. ●