

# Straight Talk®

## Training Guide

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# I. Welcome

## Materials Needed



- Straight Talk® Communication Styles survey
- Pre-Workshop Assessment Form (optional)
- Chart paper and easel
- Colored markers

[Note: ascertain prior to beginning the workshop that everyone has completed an online or a hard copy version of the Straight Talk® Communications Style Survey. Anyone who has not done so should take the survey before you begin "What's My Style?" on page 10 of the participant workbook. Tell people to have a printout of their results with them (if taken via the web) or the copy of their scoring summary sheet (if taken via hard copy).]

[Preprint the following list on chart paper. Keep this information covered until directed to reveal it.

- We can all be better communicators.
- By understanding what makes communication difficult, we can improve.
- By using certain tools and skills, we can counteract the difficulties.
- By admitting we're not perfect, we take the first step.]

## Tell Participants

Welcome to Straight Talk®! This workshop is about understanding yourself using a tool called the Matrix of Communication Styles®. It is based on a framework for understanding and improving how we communicate with each other.

Most of us think we're good communicators. Listening and talking are things we engage in all the time, so we assume we do it well. Unfortunately, that's often not the case. As it turns out we all have different communication styles. These styles can easily give rise to poor communication, which can dramatically affect our success both at work and at home. In some professions, it can cost lives. In many relationships, it can cost years of unhappiness.

This workshop is designed to bring you a number of skills and tools to improve the way you communicate with others. [Reveal preprinted chart paper.]

Behind these skills are these foundational concepts. [Read the concepts aloud.] We hope you will take away these concepts and translate them into the way you communicate with other people:

- We can all be better communicators.
- By understanding what makes communication difficult, we can improve.
- By using certain tools and skills, we can counteract the difficulties.
- By admitting we're not perfect, we take the first step.

The word “communicate” literally means, “to make common.” It means translating my thoughts or feelings into your head, nuance for nuance, and vice versa. But the different communication styles make it difficult to achieve this result. Once we understand the role of communication styles, we can become much better communicators. This is the first lesson to learn in this workshop. Communication is inherently difficult – but by learning how to use communication styles, it becomes easier.

Keep in mind that I didn’t say easy. I said easier!

## Directions

1. Speaking of communication, please turn to "Welcome" on page 1 of the workbook you were given for this course. You will see my opening remarks repeated.
2. Following these remarks, use the white space on the page to write one or two reasons why you decided to take this workshop.
3. **Optional:** If it helps to clarify why you are taking this workshop for yourself, take out the Pre-Workshop Assessment Form that you completed before coming today.

[Hold-up copy of Pre-Workshop Assessment Form. Distribute copies to anyone who neglected to complete it or neglected to bring it to the workshop. Ask those participants to fill it out now.]

4. Please take a moment to write your reasons now.

[Allow 2 minutes.]

5. Please pair with someone seated near you.
6. Share with your partner one of the reasons you wrote down about why you chose to attend this workshop. If another one comes to mind as you talk, share that one as well.

[Allow 3 minutes.]

## Ask

Who has some reasons to share with the rest of the group?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- It’s always been difficult for me to communicate.
- Improving how I communicate is vital to my new job.
- My boss says I need to improve my communication skills.
- I want to improve things with my colleagues.



## II. What Is Straight Talk®?

### Materials Needed



- Chart paper and easel or writing board
- Colored markers
- **Optional:** Copy of the book *Straight Talk: Turning Communication Upside Down for Strategic Results at Work*

[Preprint on two separate sheets of chart paper.

- 1st sheet: <http://www.leadingresources.com>
- 2nd sheet: Changes]

### Tell Participants

We've already talked about the fact that interpersonal communication can be challenging, particularly because we all have different styles of doing it. What we'll learn in this workshop is the role that communication styles play in causing conflicts between people – and how to resolve these conflicts.

Straight Talk® was developed by communications expert Eric Douglas over a period of 15 years. As founder of Leading Resources Inc. (LRI) – the developers of this workshop – Douglas and his team of consultants have taught Straight Talk® to hundreds of organizations. If you are interested in learning more, you can order the book “Straight Talk: Turning Communication Upside Down for Strategic Results at Work” directly from the LRI website at [www.leadingresources.com](http://www.leadingresources.com).

[Hold up copy of book if you have it. Point to the website address on the first preprinted sheet of chart paper]

### Directions

1. Please turn to page 2 in your workbook, “What is Straight Talk®?”
2. Follow along as I read this aloud.

[Read the following aloud as participants follow along.]

Straight Talk® is a system of communicating that enables individuals and groups to be honest, candid and direct in discussing sensitive or complex issues. It uses a set of tools that raise the quality of communication, yielding many benefits, including:

- Better understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses as a communicator;
- Better understanding of how conflict arises between people and within groups;
- Increased trust among people with different backgrounds or with different perspectives;
- Increased ability for groups to solve problems or negotiate solutions;

- Deeper understanding of the dynamics of effective teams;
- Greater understanding of how to influence other people, and how others can influence you;
- Deeper self-confidence and self-awareness.

[Encourage participants to underline two reasons of the benefits listed above that they think would help them be a more effective communicator]

## Ask

What changes do you see occurring in the workplace that require more direct, effective communication?

[Field responses: Allow ideas to flow and write the gist of them on the second sheet of preprinted chart paper under the heading, "Changes." If none are immediately forthcoming, prompt the group with the following questions.]

## Ask

What about speed – the pace of information and innovation?

## Ask

How about remote, global communication?

## Ask

Where do virtual companies and telecommuting fit into improved communication skills?

[Participants will be discussing in small groups one of the changes listed in this activity. If you do not have enough changes listed, add any or all of the following to the list.

- Speed of innovation
- Quantity and pace of information
- Remote, global communication
- Virtual companies/telecommuters
- Decentralized decision-making
- The rise of teams]

## Tell Participants

We must be able to exercise tremendous self-leadership in this new environment. And that's what Straight Talk® is about. It's not that these skills weren't important before. In the time of Socrates, there was a premium placed on effective communication. But it was concentrated in a few people. Today, with less time, more technology and more teams, everyone needs to know how to communicate well. In fact, good communication skills are the best predictor of your success.

## Directions

1. Please form teams of three people.

[Allow 30 seconds]

2. Each person select one of the changes on this list and discuss how you might meet the challenge of communicating in the face of this change.
3. Identify what skills or tools might be necessary to communicate successfully with this change in place.
4. Take about five minutes to do that now.

[Allow 5 minutes.]

5. Now go around your group and see if someone has an actual change in their workplace that is causing a real challenge in communication. Maybe it's a group of computer programmers who are now working out of their office, making communication more challenging. Or, perhaps the company is merging with another, causing a clash of cultures. Perhaps a boss is particularly difficult to work with.
6. Brainstorm for a couple of minutes the challenges presented by this real-life workplace change and discuss what would be needed to improve communication in this particular situation.

[Allow 3 minutes.]

7. Select someone as recorder. Together, decide what you think are the top two challenges facing the people in your group. What are the most significant skills you need to learn?

[Allow 3 minutes.]

## Ask

Who has some challenges to share?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- People need to cut to the chase, to get to the point quickly.
- We need to include more than just a few people in the communication process – everybody needs to know.
- Overcoming conflicts between people from different cultures.
- Finding out who's in charge, if anyone!



## III. Learning Goals and Objectives

### Materials Needed



- Chart paper and easel or writing board
- Colored markers

[Preprint the following on chart paper.]

1. Understand the elements of communication
2. Raise awareness about communication styles
3. Appreciate strengths of different styles
4. Understand conflicts between styles
5. Fine tune your communication style]

### Directions

1. Please turn to page 3 in your workbook, “Learning Goals and Objectives.”
2. Take a moment to read through the learning objectives of this workshop.

[Allow 1 minute]

### Tell Participants

Here’s an outline of what we’re going to learn today. First, we’re going to understand the three elements of communication – and where communication styles fit in. [Point to first item on chart paper.] Then we’re going to get a solid grounding in the different communication styles. [Point to the second item.] Oftentimes simply being aware of different communication styles will make you a better communicator. You’ll learn the strengths of the different styles. [Point to third item on chart paper]. Each style can be effective under different circumstances.

Then you’ll learn the natural conflicts between styles. [Point to fourth item.] As you’ll see, one of the most powerful ways to improve your communication with another person is to acknowledge these conflicts openly to one another.

Finally, you’ll learn how to tune your communication so that you can be more effective communicating with any other style. [Point to fifth item.]

### Ask

Are there any questions about these learning goals and objectives?

### Directions

At the bottom of this section, you will see some space to write. Please take a couple of minutes to write down your own learning objectives for this workshop. What knowledge, skills, or understanding would you most like to take away from this workshop?

[Allow 2 minutes.]



## IV. Straight Talk® Skills, Processes, and Tools

### Materials Needed



- Chart paper and easel or writing board
- Colored markers

### Tell Participants

Straight Talk® is a set of skills, processes and tools that will allow you to communicate more effectively. Before we begin, we need to be clear on the difference between a skill, a process and a tool.

### Directions

1. Please turn to page 4 of your workbook, "Straight Talk® Skills, Processes and Tools."
2. On page 4, you will see a list of the skills processes and tools we will employ in learning about Communication Styles.
3. Now it's time to define what we mean by these things. A skill is something that you have learned how to do because it is worthwhile. You can perform the skill and others can see you doing it. It is visible and measurable.
4. A process is something you go through to understand and achieve a skill. While the process follows a certain train of thought, it is more subjective, fluid and less finite than a skill.
5. A tool is something that you use to perform a skill. A saw is the tool you use to perform the skill of cutting wood.
6. Take a moment to review the list of skills, processes and tools now.

[Allow 1 minute.]

### Ask

Are there any questions about our focus in this workshop?

[Field questions and answer them. Then go to the next section.]

## V. The Elements of Communication

### Materials Needed



- Chart paper and easel
- Colored markers

[Preprint on chart paper the following information.

Communication Style – How you think, listen, and respond.

Intent – The purpose of your communication. Reflected in your tone of voice, body language.

Content – What you say: Opinions, ideas, information, stories]

### Directions

1. Please turn to page 5 in your workbook, "The Elements of Communication."
2. Take a moment to briefly read through the page.

[Allow 1 minute.]

### Tell Participants

Before we can talk about communication styles, we need to know the three elements of communication. They are style, intent, and content. This workshop focuses on communication styles, but it's important to talk first about intent. Why? Because intent can drown out everything else. You have to be a master of your intent before you can become an effective communicator.

For example, if I am speaking angrily [Instructor should mimic speaking angrily], you will no longer pay attention to what I am saying or to the way I think. Instead you'll be asking: What got him/her so upset? What do I have to do to get out of this situation? What's wrong with him/her?

But if I am using a positive intent [Instructors should mimic speaking in an affirming tone], then you will listen carefully to what I say and feel comfortable responding in the same manner. Many of us recognize the power of intent when we speak to our pets. You say [smile and use a happy, high-pitched, friendly voice], "Oh, Spot, you are such a bad, bad dog. You bark all the time. Don't you, you dumb little doggie?" Or, you can say [frown, point your finger, and use a deep, harsh voice], "You are a very good dog, Spot. I want you to be my pal forever."

The point is that intent – not content – is the main thing that people listen and respond to.

## Directions

1. Please read through the "Understanding Intent" section on pages 5 and 6, which lists the four types of intent: Affirming, Controlling, Relinquishing, and Defending.

[Allow 2 minutes.]

## Ask

Which of these forms of intent do you see most often in your workplace?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- Affirming
- Controlling
- Relinquishing
- All of them



## Ask

How much more productive would your workplace be if everyone used an affirming intent?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- I would be able to raise sensitive issues with my boss.
- People would feel more creative.
- We wouldn't experience such "group think".
- We would recruit and retain better quality people.



## Directions

1. Turn to page 6 and take a minute to read through "Communicating Positive Intent."
2. If a real-life situation comes to mind, jot it down at the bottom of the page.

## Tell Participants

To be able to communicate effectively, we need to have an affirming intent. It's reflected in a willingness to listen, to ask questions, to understand other peoples' points of view. It paves the way for open sharing of ideas. When we affirm, we allow space for other peoples' ideas and knowledge to surface.

There are three other forms of intent. We use them as strategies to try to get things our way. The first is a controlling intent. When we have a controlling intent, our purpose is to persuade or to influence at the expense of other peoples' points of view. There is little opportunity for sharing of ideas.

When we relinquish, we surrender our position. We stop participating and only accommodate. At some level it is passive aggressive communication – it's a way of saying, "I'm taking my marbles and going home." Relinquishing often occurs when we are matched up against a controlling intent.

When we defend, our intent is to fight for our position. We don't want to give an inch. A controlling intent against a defending one can escalate into real conflict.

We exhibit controlling, relinquishing, and defending intents more often than we like to admit. Any one of these will overwhelm communication. The intent drowns out the content.

In order to use communicate styles effectively, we have to lay the groundwork for positive communication. Using an affirming intent establishes mutual respect: It's the foundation of trust. If we do this, we can use more advanced skills of communication. If not, it's back to the same old thing.

## Directions:

1. Please pair up with another person to create a two-person team.

[Allow 30 seconds.]

2. You have three minutes to reach agreement on the most important invention in human history. You'll be asked to communicate your decision to the rest of the group.

[Allow 3 minutes]

## Ask

What were some of your answers?

## Ask

Now, which teams experienced an affirming intent? Controlling intent? Relinquishing intent? Defending intent?

[Field responses.]

## Ask

Describe what it felt like to be part of a team in which there was controlling intent. Relinquishing intent. Defending intent.

[Field responses.]

## Ask

What could you have done differently to create a more positive, affirming intent?

[Field responses.]

## Ask

Do you see a correlation between the intent and the quality of the responses?

[Field responses.]

## Ask

Do you feel that there are situations in which an affirming intent is simply not possible? What are they?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- When I'm under attack or being criticized.
- When someone else is being a bully.
- When it's simply not worth the effort.
- When people aren't very friendly.



## Tell Participants

While there are circumstances where an affirming intent is difficult or impossible, it's still the case that the most effective communication occurs when it's present. The key message is this: When the stakes are high, and the outcomes are important to you, learn the discipline of using affirming intent. It will always work in your favor.

## Directions:

1. Please turn to page 8 and complete the exercise by identifying the type of intent used in each piece of dialogue. Then rephrase the dialogue using an affirming intent.

[Allow 3 minutes.]

2. What type of intent do you think was reflected in the first example? The second? The third?

[Field responses.]

[Correct answers: Relinquishing, Controlling, Defending]

3. Would someone share the way you rephrased Sentence 1? How about someone else?

[Field responses. Get at least three possible rephrasings.]

4. Of these proposed rephrasings, which one best reflects an affirming intent? Why?

5. Would someone share the way you rephrased Sentence 2? How about someone else?

[Field responses. Get three possible rephrasings for each example. Repeat for the third example.]

## Ask

In summary, what aspects of communication reflect an affirming intent?

## Possible Responses

- Asking open-ended questions.
- Showing genuine interest in my views.
- A moderate tone of voice.
- Friendly body language.
- Respect.



## VI. Introduction to Communication Styles

### Materials Needed

- Poster showing the four primary styles

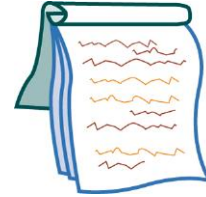


### Directions

1. Turn to page 9 in your workbook "Introduction to Communication Styles" and read through the page.

[Allow 1 minute]

## VII. What's My Style?



### Materials needed:

- Poster showing the four primary styles.

### Directions

1. Please take out the printout of the results of the survey showing your communication style and turn to page 10 in your workbook, "What's My Style?" Write down your primary and secondary styles, followed by your scores for all four styles: Director, Expresser, Thinker and Harmonizer.  
[Allow 1 minute. Refer to poster showing four primary styles.]
2. To the right of your scores, you will see a copy of this poster that shows all four primary styles: Director, Expresser, Thinker, and Harmonizer. [Point to poster.] Below the graphic is a brief list of characteristics of each style. Take a moment to read through the characteristics for your primary style.  
[Allow 30 seconds.]
3. Please form a group with two other people in the training.  
[Allow 30 seconds. Note: if there are several people in your group from the same company, encourage them to form groups together.]
4. In your groups, share with one another your primary style as indicated by the Straight Talk® survey. Give an example of how you exhibit that style in your communication.  
[Allow 1 minute.]
5. Now read through the description of your primary style on pages 11 through 12 of your workbook. Read only your primary style. If you have equal scoring on two primary styles, read just one for now.  
[Allow 2 minutes.]
6. If you identified more of your communication style behaviors when reading the description, take a moment now to share them with the members of your triad.  
[Allow 1 minute.]
7. Take a couple of minutes to share your secondary style with your group and, once again, give an example of how you might exhibit this style in your communication. . Those who had two equal primary styles, read your other style now.  
[Allow 1 minute.]
8. Now read through the brief description of your secondary style on pages 11 to 12.  
[Allow 2 minutes.]
9. Again, if you identified more of your communication style behaviors when reading the description, take a moment now to share them with the members of your triad.  
[Allow 3 minutes]



# The Straight Talk® Game

## Materials Needed



- Poster showing the four primary styles

[Participants are asked to move to a new location to change the environment of the training room as well as to signal to them that a new activity is beginning. This also serves to give them a break.]



## Directions

1. Please pick up your belongings and move to a different location in the room.  
[Allow 1 minute.]
2. Partner with someone seated near you.
3. I'm going to ask you to do some role-playing so that each of you can try out different communication styles.
4. For this first role-play, one of you will be a salesperson selling a product or service. The other person will be a prospective customer. Decide now who will play which role. You will have an opportunity to play both roles, so it does not matter which role you will play at this time.  
[Allow 10 seconds.]
5. Next select what product or service is being sold. It can be something your company produces or offers, or you can make something up. Decide that together now.  
[Allow 30 seconds.]
6. Those of you who are customers, your job is to be sold on this product or service. You are interested, but you are not persuaded yet. In your mind, select one of the four primary communication styles – Director, Expresser, Thinker, Harmonizer. As you role-play, illustrate the characteristic language and gestures of that style. Do not let the salesperson know which style you are taking on.
7. Salespeople, your job is to discover as quickly as possible the customer's style of communicating – and address him or her accordingly. Talk to the customer, ask questions, listen and otherwise deliver your sales pitch. The only question you cannot ask is "What's your style?"

## Ask

Are there any questions?

[Field responses.]

### **Directions** *(cont.)*

8. Begin now with your role-play.

[Allow 5 minutes.]

9. Please stop your role-playing.

10. Each salesperson write down, on a slip of paper, the communication style that you suspect your customer was using. Customers – write the style you selected before the activity.

### **Ask**

Among the customers, who wants to go first?

[Go around the room and let customers share what styles they used. Then ask the salespeople to share what they thought the roles were.]

### **Directions** *(cont.)*

11. Take a minute and share with each other why you picked the communication style that you did.

[Allow 1 minute.]

12. Now switch roles, select a different service or product if you like and begin the role-play again. Again, customers should quietly select a communication style to which they can adapt their language and mannerisms. Salespeople need to identify the style and sell accordingly. Begin now.

[Allow 4 minutes.]

### **Ask**

Who wants to share their style?

[Let customers share which style they selected and have salespeople share their assumptions. If there is an improvement in the accuracy of style assumption over the last round of role-playing, make a point to share that with the participants.]

### **Tell Participants**

As we get more and more familiar with these basic communication styles, you will be able to readily recognize them. In this way, you can also learn how to adapt your way of communicating to more effectively reach all styles.

## VIII. Communications and Assumptions

### Materials Needed:



- Poster showing the four primary styles

### Directions:

1. We are going to see how communication styles play into our use of assumptions, and we are going to form into teams where all styles are represented.
2. Those who have Director as a primary style, please pick up your participant workbook and stand up.
 

[Note: if an attendee's two highest scores are equal, ask them to choose one as a primary style, and one as a secondary style for the purposes of this exercise.]
3. Expressers, please raise your hands, and Directors, stand next to an Expresser with his or her hand raised.
4. Those who are Thinkers, take your workbook and join any pair of Directors and Expressers where they are standing.
5. Harmonizers, please do the same.
6. Now find a place to sit together.

[Allow 1 minute]

7. In your teams, share with one another your style - first the primary then the secondary style. Take a couple minutes to do this now.

[Allow 2 minutes]

8. Please turn to page 13 in your workbook, "Communications and Assumptions," and read to yourselves the assumptions each communication style makes because of the way they process and interpret information.

[Allow 2 minutes]

9. Take another minute to discuss these in your teams, pointing out areas where you might agree or disagree with the assessment of your communication style as it relates to assumptions.

[Allow 1 minute]

10. Please turn to page 13 in your workbook, and read the workplace problem called "Moving the Office."

[Allow 1 minute]

11. In your teams, work at resolving this problem. Notice as you discuss this problem what assumptions you are making. Are you making judgments? Who is jumping to conclusions? What actions are being taken or contemplated?
12. Think about how your communication style influences your thinking as you discuss this problem. Take about 5 minutes to discuss this now. If you come to some resolution or decision, select someone to write it down and share with the group.

[Allow 5 minutes]

### Ask

Who has some resolution of the problem to share with us?

[Field responses.]

### Ask

What are some observations you had about your assumptions while doing this activity?

[Field responses.]

### Possible Responses

- We kept going over the same information.
- The process was slowed down because each person took a stand.
- We never even got to the real problem at hand.
- The solution was easy; the process was difficult.



### Ask

How well did you identify your various assumptions as you discussed the problem?

[Field responses.]

## IX. The Matrix of Communication Styles®

### Materials Needed

- Poster showing the Matrix of Communications Styles (16 styles)



### Ask

How many of you think your primary style completely defines how you communicate?

[Show of hands. There should be few or none.]

### Directions

1. Once again, please take out your scoring results from either the Straight Talk® web site or from the hard copy of the survey.
2. On your scoring sheet, you will see your primary style, your secondary style and your individual communication style. This last style represents the combined effect of your primary and secondary styles.

**Example:** If your primary style is Director and your secondary style is Expresser, you have a communication style called "Initiator." This means that you like to take on big challenges, to act boldly, to communicate your ideas assertively.

3. Once again, we are defining communication styles that tend to be similar among people. It's important not to read too much into the labels for the individual styles. The names were chosen to indicate behaviors. Most are names that can be used as verbs, to show a person's tendency toward certain actions or behaviors.
4. Take a few seconds to look in your workbook at the Matrix of Communication Styles on page 15. Write down your individual communication style in the space provided.  
[Allow 30 seconds.]
5. The Matrix is a map. On it, you can see your individual style in relation to other styles. Just as a road map helps you get where you want to go, your position on the Matrix helps you understand how you might stretch or adapt your style to better communicate with people with different styles.
6. Now read the description for your individual style. People whose primary style is Director, begin on page 16. Expressers begin on page 20, Thinkers on page 23, and Harmonizers on page 26.
7. Take a few minutes to read about your individual communication style – the combination of your primary and secondary styles.

[Allow 3 minutes.]

8. In your groups of three, please share your individual communication style and the ways in which the description seems to fit you – or not fit you, as the case may be. Take a minute each to share your style now.

[Allow 5 minutes.]

9. Take another couple of minutes to read about your teammates' styles, assuming one or more is different than your own. See if you can get inside their thinking and their communication styles as you read.

[Allow 3 minutes.]

10. In your group, share whatever insights or observations you have after reading about other peoples' communication styles. Talk about how your differences might cause you to approach a problem differently.

[Allow 5 minutes.]

## Ask

Who has some thoughts or ideas to share?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- I can see that Thinkers approach problems more conservatively than Directors or Expressers.
- I can see that a Harmonizer would like to keep everyone feeling happy.
- When you have lots of people in a room, it's important to keep a very flexible approach to make sure you're connecting.



[Allow for some discussion. Probe for areas of potential conflict between styles.]

## Ask

Are there any comments or questions?

# Walk the Talk

## Materials Needed



- Poster showing the four primary styles
- Poster showing the Matrix of Communications Styles

## Directions

1. Please stand up and stretch. At this point in the training, take a ten-minute walk. This is a good time to get some oxygen in your brain and to reflect on the communication styles we've covered.
2. While you are walking, think about your own style and how you might appear to others as you communicate with them. In what way does your communication style affect other people?
3. As you walk, think of three people with whom you find it challenging to communicate. Think of someone to whom you report, a colleague, and a third person from your personal life. See if you can identify their communication styles, and consider how your conflicts with those people may be a result of your differences in style.
4. Please be back here at \_\_\_\_\_. [10 minutes later]
5. When you get back, open your workbook to page 29, "Reflections on my Communication Style" and write any ideas, thoughts, or feelings you had while walking. Reflect on how you might improve communication with the three people you chose.

[Allow 5 minutes.]

## Ask

Does anyone have any insights or observations to share?

## XI. The Language of Each Style

### Tell Participants

In order to be able to recognize the style of others, it is important to observe their language and behavior. In that way, you can adapt your own style of communicating to their style, thereby improving the odds of better communication. There are basic differences in how each style is exhibited and, with practice, you will be able to spot the differences immediately. One of the best ways is to listen to the language of the communication.

Earlier, in Section V, The Elements of Communication, we learned that intent can overwhelm a person's communication style. If you need to observe a person's behavior to figure out their style, how do you distinguish style versus intent - especially since some communication styles are inherently more controlling, some more relinquishing? To avoid confusion, you may need to observe a person several times. Remember, intent seems to change relatively quickly - over the course of a few hours - whereas style is relatively constant. Ideally you can catch people in a relaxed setting, where their true communication style is most likely to emerge.

### Directions

1. Please turn to page 30, "The Language of Each Style."
2. Take a moment to briefly review the behaviors exhibited by the different styles, "Identifying a Person's Communication Style."
3. Now read through the various language cues for each style, including how one might listen and speak to each style.
4. Note the language cues are both for speaking and for listening to each style.

[Allow 30 seconds.]

5. Would all of you who have a primary style of Director please stand up and remain standing?
6. Those of you who are Expressers, please take your workbook and join a Director.
7. Those who are Thinkers, please take your workbook and join any pair of Directors and Expressers where they are standing.
8. Harmonizers, please do the same.

[If you do not have four styles represented by each group, ask someone to use their secondary style and orchestrate it so that you have all four styles represented in each group.]

9. Now find a place to sit together.
10. Go to pages 31 through 34 and locate again your own style. Going around the group, take turns reading the preferred ways of listening or speaking to your style.



11. Instead of reading it the way it is written, however, rephrase it and personalize it.

**Example:** If you are a Director, you would say, "When you listen to me, I would like you to maintain eye contact and I would like you to stand or sit squarely facing me." Or, if you are a Harmonizer, you might say, "When you speak to me, I would prefer that you present your information in a way that is 'people-friendly' and that you talk in a quiet manner."

12. It is not necessary to follow the sequence exactly as it is written in your workbook. Feel free to jump around. And if you have your own specific way you would prefer people to listen or talk to you, use that example as well.
13. Take a minute or two to express to the others how you would prefer that they communicate to you.

[Allow 5 minutes. After each minute, indicate it is time to move to the next person in the group.]

## Ask

Are there any insights, thoughts or ideas that came out of this exercise?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- I want people to translate things into a few succinct statements [said by a Director.]
- I really prefer a free-wheeling, unstructured conversation, where we talk about lots of things [said by an Expresser.]
- It's easy for people to have conflicts just because they think differently [Make sure this message gets driven home.]



## XI. Management Profiles

### Directions

1. Each communication style has a preferred way of managing people. On pages 35-37 you can read about the management styles of the Director, Expresser, Thinker and Harmonizer. Make particular note of the strengths and weaknesses of each style as a manager.

[Allow 4-5 minutes.]

### Ask

Are there any insights, thoughts or ideas that came out of your reading?

[Field responses.]

### Ask

Who felt that one profile reflected their management style? Why?

[Field responses.]

### Ask

Who did not see themselves in one of these profiles?

[Field responses.]

### Ask

What should you remind yourself to do more often?

[Field responses from majority of people in the room]

### Possible Responses

- I need to remember to allow more time for give and take, especially when I'm working with non-Directors. [said by a Director.]
- I need to write down the agreements I reach and keep them handy. [said by an Expresser.]
- I need to listen for stylistic differences and not mis-interpret them as substantive disagreements. [Make sure this message gets driven home.]



## XIII. Modifying Your Style

### Materials Needed



- Poster showing the four primary styles
- Poster showing The Matrix of Communication Styles

### Tell Participants

Each communication style is equally important and valuable. However, a particular style might be more effective in a given situation. For example, if you're trying to brainstorm, an Expresser style is valuable. If you're trying to explain a process to a group of engineers, a Thinker style is valuable. If you want to build trust, a Harmonizer style is useful. If you're trying to deal with a crisis, a Director style can be valuable.

Communication styles differ from personality types. Personality types are relatively fixed and unchangeable, but communication styles are more flexible. In fact, your communication style may naturally change over time. We play various roles in our lives, and each role tends to rely on one of these communication styles. So as your job changes, or you enter into a new relationship, your style may change, too.

You can modify your own communication style once you're aware of the four dimensions in which you can move. You can practice using other styles just as you would exercise different muscles. The more you practice flexing different styles, the stronger a communicator you become.

As we discussed earlier, the Matrix [point to poster] is a map. The important thing is to understand where you are on the map so you can change your style to fit a given situation, and also to strengthen your weakest communication style.

This information is repeated on page 40 of your workbook.

### Directions

[Ask participants to remain in or return to groups formed in the "Language of Others" activity.]

1. Turn to page 38, "Modifying Your Style"
2. Take a minute to read the "Tips about Communication Styles" quietly to yourself.

[Allow 1 minute.]

3. Within your group, divide into pairs, each person having a different style.

4. Put your initials on the style that matches yours on the Matrix of Communication Styles on page 39. Have your partner do the same. [Point to poster.]
5. Together, pick a topic for discussion – it can be something you are both familiar with, something in your workplace, or a discussion item from this training.
6. Pick something that would require some back-and-forth discussion.
7. As you discuss the topic, modify your style in order to communicate in a way that matches your partner's style.

**Example:** If your partner is a "Charmer," you would want to use gestures, speak about feelings, and get to the point in a friendly sort of way. If your partner is an "Investigator," you may want to focus on details and be direct and analytical in your approach.

8. To help you understand your partner's style, look in the workbook and briefly read up on it. That will give you some tips on how to best communicate with him or her.
9. Also refer to "Identifying a Person's Communication Style" on page 30 of your workbook as a quick primer of your partner's style.
10. Take about 6 minutes to have your discussion – modifying your own communication style to fit that of your partner's.

[Allow 6 minutes.]

## Ask

Who has some thoughts or insights to share?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- It's awkward at first to talk in a different style, but it gets easier.
- I didn't realize how obvious my communication style was.
- I'm an "Initiator" and I really had to stretch to be a "Socializer."



## XIII. Resolving Conflicts Among Styles

### Materials Needed



- Poster showing the four primary styles
- Poster showing The Matrix of Communication Styles
- Chart paper and easel
- Colored markers

### Ask

Who can identify some potential conflicts or problems among styles?

[Field responses.]

### Possible Responses

- Someone who is more of a Harmonizer may get his or her feelings hurt by a Director.
- A detail-oriented person who is only given a broad picture of things may feel confused.
- Some ways of communicating may seem offensive to others.
- Anyone whose style is different from yours could cause some conflict.
- Even people with the same style can be in conflict – they may resent being in each other's face.



### Ask

What suggestions might you make to help resolve these style differences?

[Field responses.]

### Possible Responses

- Openly acknowledge your style.
- Know the other person's style.
- Reduce differences between the styles by changing your own.



## Tell Participants

We tend to be in conflict with people whose styles are different from our own. It's only natural that we should find it easier to communicate with someone who thinks and communicates like we do. The Matrix of Communication Styles helps us predict the styles that will cause us communication problems.

One of the keys to effective communication is taking seriously the responsibility of understanding how your style may cause problems for other people. At the same time, by acknowledging conflicts between styles, it allows the conflict to be placed into perspective and accepted for what it is – a natural part of life.

Not only do people with different styles experience conflict. People with the same styles can also feel conflict. This is especially true of the assertive styles – Directors and Expressers – who like to be in control. So while they may think alike, two Directors can experience a conflict over control.

Again, the key to minimizing this conflict is to be conscious of the dynamic and to acknowledge it to each other. For example, two Directors could acknowledge that they clash, and agree to privately meet often to air out their differences. That way they could be more comfortable in group settings.

## Ask

Who has some thoughts, ideas or insights to share?

## Directions

1. Please turn to page 40 in your workbook, "Resolving Conflicts Among Styles."

## Tell Participants

There are generally two ways to improve your ability to communicate with others. The graphic on page 40 illustrates the idea of shifting your style temporarily to match more closely another person's style, in this case from a Director to an Expresser. But it could be a shift from any style to another. [Point to different quadrants and move your hand to other quadrants as you talk to show movement.]

With practice, you'll see that you can adapt to any style temporarily. You can tailor your listening and responding so that potential communication barriers are preemptively eliminated. Again, think of the Matrix of Communication Styles as a map. You're in one place. You leave your turf for a while to communicate to another person, just as you might use a different language when you visit a foreign country.

**Example:** Suppose you are a Thinker and you want to persuade a colleague to join an organization to which you belong. Your colleague is a Harmonizer. Rather than give the Harmonizer a factual listing of the club's achievements, or list the details of when and where you meet, you might instead talk about how many great people are in the club and how the Harmonizer might make some really wonderful friends.

You can also work on improving your communication style more permanently. The graphic on page 41 illustrates the idea of personal growth by working on your weakest style. To identify your areas of growth, look at your scores on the Straight Talk® survey. [Trainer – You can disclose your weakest area of communication and talk about how you have worked on it.] By emulating the habits of your weakest style, you are flexing or stretching your abilities as a communicator. This makes you grow and improve as an overall communicator, on a more permanent level.

**Example:** If your weakest style is Thinker, you would work on keeping lists, on being organized in your work, on keeping detailed records of how you do things, and on reviewing each step to make sure you have not made any errors.

Jodie Foster, star of many films including the Academy Award winning film *The Silence of the Lambs*, expressed in an interview that she was not necessarily a brave or strong person in real life, but that she chose parts that showed bravery in order to improve herself in that area. Likewise, you can work to strengthen whatever weaknesses you have in your communication style.

Over time, as you practice “growing within,” you’ll discover you will feel equally comfortable with all four styles. At that point, you’ll be at the center of the Matrix. This is the trademark of highly successful communicators. They can listen attentively, they can advocate their position forcefully, they can empathize, they can be creative, they can be detailed, they can articulate the big picture – just as the situation warrants. Using the Matrix as a guide, we can all achieve the same result.

## XIV. Managing Conflict

### Materials Needed



- Chart paper and easel
- Colored markers

[Preprint on chart paper the following table. Keep covered until directed to reveal it.]

#### Under Stress

- Directors + Controlling Intent = Dictatorial, Autocratic
- Expressers + Controlling/Defending Intent = Personal Attacks
- Thinkers + Relinquishing Intent = Avoidance
- Harmonizers + Relinquishing Intent = Avoidance, Acquiescence]

### Directions

1. Let's combine communication styles with intent to see how styles might be affected under stressful situations or under conflict.
2. Turn to page 42 in your workbook, "Managing Conflict," and take a moment to review responses of each style under stress.

[Allow 1 minute.]

3. When confronted with conflict, the best response for any style is to adopt a positive, affirming intent. We can say: "I want to understand why you are feeling this way. Please let me hear what's going on." But most of us are not saints, and we are not always affirming.
4. Recall a recent situation where there was conflict present, whether in your workplace, at home or perhaps at a public gathering.
5. Turn to someone seated near you and share what you think occurred in that conflict. See if you can identify the communication styles of the people involved, then see if you can predict what intent was behind their communication. Take a couple minutes each to reconstruct that situation now.

[Allow 4 minutes. Reveal preprinted chart paper when 4 minutes have elapsed.]



## Tell Participants

When people are under stress or in a conflict situation, communication may get off track. Directors and Expressers are typically more assertive communicators than Thinkers and Harmonizers, so they tend to take a controlling or defending stance. [Refer to chart paper as you cite these examples.]

Under stress, the Director wants to get his or her way – that’s a controlling intent. The combination often leads to a response or behavior that appears dictatorial, autocratic. It is difficult to talk with someone in that state of mind, so the conflict typically continues.

The Expresser, wanting to get his or her point across in a conflict situation, typically adopts either a controlling or a defending intent. This combination of style and intent often leads to personal attacks and yelling, which escalate the conflict.

The Thinker under stress typically adopts either a defending or relinquishing intent. He chooses to defend his position with a barrage of facts and details – or avoids the conflict altogether. The Thinker may become sarcastic, arrogant, and feel that mediation is not worth his or her time. This does nothing to help resolve the conflict.

The Harmonizer typically chooses a relinquishing intent. He or she acquiesces, trying to make the conflict go away as soon as possible. This escape from the conflict does little to help it. However, the Harmonizer – unlike the Thinker – might revisit the matter later in an attempt to make sure everyone is getting along again.

In order to communicate effectively, we need to deal with conflicts without losing our cool. This means we need to express our differences in a way that repairs the problem without compounding the conflict. The key lies in communicating a positive affirming intent to resolve the conflict productively.

## Ask

Does anyone have any questions, observations, or insights about the intent behind our communication styles?

[Field responses. Allow for discussion.]

## Tell Participants

It’s difficult to remain open and affirm the other person when conflict is present, but that is exactly when we should use affirming intent. With practice, it’s a skill that can be used to defuse any situation.

## XV. Straight Talk<sup>®</sup> with a Colleague

### Materials Needed



- Chart paper and easel
- Colored markers
- Straight Talk<sup>®</sup> Poster showing the four primary styles
- Straight Talk<sup>®</sup> Poster showing The Matrix of Communication Styles

### Directions

1. We're going to take what we have learned about conflict and apply it to people with whom you work.
2. Please turn to page 44, "Straight Talk<sup>®</sup> With A Colleague" and read through the three steps at the top of the page. Hold off reading the example for now.

[Allow 30 seconds.]

3. Identify five people with whom you work frequently and write their names down in the table on page 44. If any of the people on your list are in this training session, find out their communication styles and record them.
4. If not, then use your judgment to decide their individual communication styles. To do this, you'll have to decide which two styles – Director, Expresser, Thinker or Harmonizer – you think they use most often. Write these in the table. Then decide which is dominant and which is secondary. After you do so, write down your guess as to their individual style.

[Allow 3 minutes.]

5. Next, recall your own style of communicating. In the space provided in the table, indicate with "high," "medium," or "low" the probability of communication conflict you may have with each of the five people you identified above.

[Allow 2 minutes.]

6. Taking only those people with whom you have indicated a high probability of conflict, think of a few examples of the typical conflicts you experience with them. Then write down some ground rules you would like to use to improve your communication with them.

7. Let's read the example at the bottom of page 44. [Read the following aloud as participants follow along.]

**Example:** One person on your list is an Initiator (a Director/Expresser). He likes to be in charge, speaks abruptly, makes quick decisions, and tends to keep feelings to himself. You've seen him jump to conclusions, make snap judgments about people, and forget to take into account others' opinions or feelings.

On the other hand, you are a Supporter (a Thinker/Harmonizer). You are patient, cautious and caring. You also have difficulty expressing yourself and tend to avoid dealing with conflicts between people.

Your communication with the Initiator leaves you baffled and intimidated. You don't understand how he can move so quickly. He seems not to care that people get trampled by his style.

The Initiator finds your style infuriating, as you seem slow, cautious and unable to address sensitive issues. He thinks you spend too much time worrying about people and not enough time doing your job.

As far as ground rules go, you'd like the Initiator to spend part of each conversation asking you what you think. You'd like him to be patient while you explain your ideas and concerns. From your side, you agree to respect the Initiator's style and to make your points clearly and succinctly. You agree to address conflicts that affect the organization at the first opportunity.

So the ground rules might look like this:

**Initiator:** Ask for the Supporter's point of view before making a decision.

**Supporter:** Present your points clearly and succinctly. Address conflicts early on.

**Both:** Agree to express your concerns directly to each other. Agree to acknowledge openly and frequently your appreciation for each other's style

8. If the person for whom you have created communication ground rules is in the training today, please partner up with him or her now. If no one in the session is on your list, please partner with someone seated near you.

[Allow 1 minute.]

9. Take a few minutes to share with one another the predicted or actual styles of the colleagues on your list, why the communication conflicts occur, and any ground rules you developed.

[Allow 10 minutes.]

10. Each of you please take on the role of your partner's identified colleague. Those of you who are working with actual colleagues play yourselves.
11. Keep in mind this may be the first time this topic has been broached with your colleague. Explain what communication conflicts you have experienced with him or her in the past, and then suggest the ground rules for better communication.
12. Take about two minutes to complete the role-play or ground rule discussion, then switch roles and repeat the activity.

[Allow 5 minutes.]

## Ask

Who has any insights, thoughts, concerns, or ideas to share?

[Field responses. Allow for discussion.]

## Possible Responses

- It helps to know my colleague's style. It allows me to get some distance from the way his communication affects me.
- Ground rules need to be monitored by mutual agreement.
- When two people have conflicting styles, it may actually result in less conflict because there's more room to be yourself.
- Some of the biggest conflicts occur between two people with the same style. Ground rules can help everyone.



## XVII. Straight Talk® with Your Manager

### Materials Needed



- Straight Talk® Poster showing the Matrix of Communications Styles

### Tell Participants

We all have someone we report to – someone to whom we need to be accountable. It could be a manager, supervisor, client, teacher or parent. It might also be your customer or shareholder. For purposes of this exercise, we will call this person your manager. Most of us have occasion to communicate with this person, and we usually want to put our best foot forward and get our points across clearly.

### Directions

1. Please turn to page 46 in your workbook, "Straight Talk® with Your Manager" and take a minute to read the directions there.  
[Allow 1 minute.]
2. Initial the position in the Matrix of Communication Styles that corresponds to your style. If you know it, put the initials of your manager in the appropriate box. If you don't know the communication style of your manager, try to guess what style he or she is and write the initials in the appropriate box.
3. Take a moment now to recreate in your mind your interaction with your manager. Recall a recent exchange that you had. [Pause.]
4. In the space provided, jot down what you could do differently to make communication with your manager more productive. Could you modify your style? Choose a different approach? Keep in mind your intent. How could you make the communication more affirming? Take a couple minutes to jot those thoughts down.  
[Allow 2 minutes.]
5. In the space below, write down a few ways in which your manager might communicate differently with you. What would improve the interaction for you? What could he or she do to make the communication better for you? Take another couple of minutes to write down your thoughts.  
[Allow 2 minutes.]
6. As a final step of this exercise, you might make it a point to talk to your manager about these thoughts within five days of this workshop. See if the two of you could work out some agreements that would help you communicate more effectively.

## XVIII. Group Cultures

[Note: Depending on the composition of your group, you can adapt the following directions. If your participants are from a variety of organizations, the directions below for the mock group approach are sufficient. If your participants are predominantly from a single organization, modify the directions by forming smaller groups from the same company. The training will be more relevant for these participants. You may even wish to separate managers from front line employees, if that applies to your group. The point is to optimize participant understanding of group culture.]

### Materials Needed



- Poster showing the Matrix of Communication Styles
- Several packets of 1" Post-It, Notes

[Place a packet of 1" Post-It© Notes at each table or distribute to every other participant seated so they can share with others.]

### Directions

1. Please write your name on one of the Post-It© notes at your seat or table. Take your note and affix it to the box that indicates your individual style on the Matrix of Communication Styles poster.
2. If you have more than one individual style, place your note so that it straddles your two styles.

[Allow 2 minutes.]

3. Thank you. Please take your seats.
4. The Post-It© notes indicate the communication styles represented in this group.

### Ask

What does this display of communication styles tell us about our group?

[Field responses.]

[The individual styles will either be widely represented across all the quadrants or they may be clustered in one or two quadrants. Allow participants to make observations about the group's style. There are no right answers.]



## Tell Participants

So far, we have discussed our individual communication styles. In most organizations, of course, there are groups or teams of people who work together. Each of those groups and teams also has a communication style of its own. We call this its “group style.” A group’s style is a key component of its culture. Once we know a group’s style, we can predict the way group members will communicate and work together. We can predict its strengths and its weaknesses. In short, knowing your group’s style can help you make your group more successful.

The most successful groups are composed of members with a balance of communication styles. This ensures a healthy variety of approaches to solving problems. It guarantees that regardless of the activity that the group engages in, certain people in the group will be naturally strong in that activity. It also helps to ensure that no assumptions will pass unchecked.

It’s also true that group leaders, or managers, tend to be more comfortable with people like themselves. Groups tend to homogenize – to gather people of similar styles rather than dissimilar styles. Over time, this can cause the group to regard its business in very similar and predictable ways. The loss of multiple points of view can cause a company to “go blind.”

## Ask

Generally speaking, what kind of communication style would you say is predominant at Microsoft Corporation?

[Field responses. Allow for joking and humor.]

## Possible Responses

- Dictator
- Initiator
- Investigator
- Analyzer



## Ask

How about The Oprah Winfrey Show?

[Field responses.]

## Possible Responses

- Director
- Expresser
- Thinker
- Harmonizer



## Directions *(cont.)*

5. Please take another Post-It® note and in bold letters, write your individual style.
6. Place your name on the note if you choose.

[Allow 30 seconds.]

7. Go around the room and locate five other people, preferably with styles that differ from yours. Form a group with them at a table or pull chairs into a circle.

[Note: if there are participants from the same company or organization, make sure that they group together.]

8. In your groups, discuss what you think your "group style" is. By analyzing your group style, you can identify the strengths and weaknesses of your group. Take a couple minutes to discuss that now.

[Allow 2 minutes.]

9. Once you have a picture of what your group culture might be – and how others might perceive it – discuss how you could use that information to help define and improve the quality of your group's communication and decision-making.
10. Please turn to page 48 in your workbooks, "Improving a Group's Style." You will see the strengths and weaknesses of groups falling under each of the primary styles. Take several minutes in your group to review and discuss these now. As you discuss these strengths and weaknesses with your own group, think about the people with whom you work and weave in real-life examples of how group style plays out in your organization.

[Allow 6 minutes.]

11. Next review together the ways in which a group style can be improved. Again, discuss this with your group and share ways in which you think your own workplace, team, organization or company can improve its group culture based on its communication style.

[Allow 6 minutes.]

## Ask

Who has some insights, thoughts, or observations about your group's culture?

[Field responses. Allow for discussion, particularly if your group is all from the same organization.]



## **Tell Participants**

We don't have enough time in this workshop to talk about all the elements of group culture. A culture is reflected in the group's values, the way people organize their work, conduct meetings, greet each other in the hallways, decorate their offices and socialize after hours. A culture is difficult to change. But it always begins at the top. By selecting a leader carefully, based on the type of culture you wish to create, an organization uses one of the most powerful instruments of change at its disposal.

An important issue for groups and organizations is recruiting new talent. It is important to have people carry forward the organization's culture, yet the culture may need changing. Selecting people who can bring the right balance to the group is an important element. Effective managers understand that the right combination of individual communication styles can have an enormous impact on group style and culture.

## XVIII. Taking it Home

### Materials Needed



- Poster showing the four primary styles
- Poster showing Matrix of Communications Styles
- Chart paper and easel
- Evaluation forms, one copy for each participant

[Preprint on chart paper the following information.

- Elements of Communication
- Types of Intent
- Communication Styles
- Identifying Styles
- Modifying Styles
- Managing Conflicts
- Group Styles]

### Tell Participants

This concludes the Straight Talk® Communication Styles workshop. [Point to items on chart paper as you talk.] In this workshop, we learned the three elements of communication. We discussed the four types of intent. We identified our primary and secondary styles which then form our individual styles – with names such as "Initiator," "Charmer," "Supporter," etc. We talked about communicating with other people who have different styles and how we can flex our own style to reach them. We worked on strengthening our weakest style by "growing within." We discussed how different styles respond to conflict, and the importance of communicating with positive intent. We practiced communication styles in role-plays – as a customer, with a colleague, and with our manager. Finally, we touched on groups and how they have a style all their own.

### Directions

1. Please turn to page 49 in your workbook, "Taking It Home" where you will see some questions and space to record some thoughts or ideas that you would like to take back to your organization.
2. Please take 10 minutes to make those notes or action plans.  
[Allow ten minutes]
3. This page also makes the valuable suggestion that you revisit what you write within five days of this workshop. Make a calendar note to do that, and the material you learned at this workshop will be substantially reinforced.
4. While you are filling in your thoughts, I will be handing out an evaluation form. Please fill out the form and return it to me before you leave. Please complete the evaluation only after you have had a chance to complete pages 49 and 50 in your workbook.
5. Thank you for participating in this Straight Talk®: Communication Styles workshop.

[Allow 10 minutes. Hand out evaluation forms and then collect them from each participant.]

## End of Workshop