



Making the Most of Your Business Communication with Learning Styles

by Dahlia Miller, Director of Smart Tutor Referrals

Want to create huge results in your business communications? Imagine the impact you could have if each and every person found you easy to talk with and to understand. You can optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of your communication by adjusting your speaking style to match the learning style of each person you talk with.

Each person you talk with has a different learning style. More specifically, each person has a preferred means of receiving information. Some people like to see things (Visual Learners), some like to hear things (Auditory Learners), and some like to move things around (Kinesthetic Learners). Actually, most people are a combination of these three with one or more of the modalities (i.e. preferred means of receiving information) being dominant.

If you will adjust your speaking style to match the learning style of your listeners, they will find you easier to understand.

So, how can you assess another person's learning style without giving them a test?

Start by imagining how you are coming across from their point of view. How do you think they would like to hear information from you? If you are a confident speaker and comfortable with the material you are presenting, you can practice stepping back from your conversation to consider clues to the other person's learning style.

To be on the safe side, it's a good idea to incorporate materials and communication to suit all three learning styles (Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic).

When speaking, try to have a visual for people to refer to. Be dynamic and move your hands, move the materials you are discussing or presenting to keep everyone's attention. Incorporate different textures (glossy, matte, bumpy, smooth) and different visuals (with a mix of text and pictures, colours and shapes). Use several different approaches to the material – repeat your main points in at least two different ways to appeal to different learning styles. Consider offering a hands-on prop or activity rather than simply a visual. Clients will remember your ingenuity.

Below are behaviours that offer clues to each of the learning styles, and tips for working with each style of learner. If you'll integrate some of these ideas into your speaking or presentation style, people will be knocking on your door wanting to work with you.

Clues Revealing Auditory Learners

- ▶ Do they like to talk or do they listen intently as you speak?
- ▶ Do they ask you to explain or describe concepts or information?
- ▶ Do they like to repeat main points discussed?
- ▶ Do they notice music playing in the background? Or do they seem distracted by background noises?
- ▶ Do they ask a lot of questions?
- ▶ Do they discuss their needs in detail?
- ▶ When you ask a question or describe something, do they understand immediately or do they need more information, like a visual?

Tips for Working with Auditory Learners

Auditory learners need to hear and talk about information in order to process it. They need to discuss what they are learning, and it can often help them to “teach” newly learned information to someone. These learners often need background noise or music to think effectively.

When presenting information to an Auditory learner, allow as many opportunities as possible for the person to ask you questions and discuss their understanding of your position. Ask questions of the other person so that they have an opportunity to recognize their thought patterns aloud - this will help them to prepare to take new information in.

Using handouts, refer to them only to back up what you are discussing. If possible, explain all situations orally, give the Auditory learner a chance to discuss topics before you ask them to interpret visual information.

Clues Revealing Visual Learners

- ▶ Are they watching your every move?
- ▶ Do their eyes follow along as you write or refer to written materials?
- ▶ Do they look around the room and gaze at pictures, or other visual stimuli?
- ▶ Do they take notes, draw diagrams, or doodle as you speak?
- ▶ Do they move their hands to emphasize or express a point?
- ▶ Have you seen them with books?
- ▶ Do they run their finger along under text that they are reading or point to visual props often?
- ▶ Do they read or scan materials that you hand to them?
- ▶ Do they ask questions while looking at brochures or other information?
- ▶ Do they watch you and what you are doing closely?

Tips for Working with Visual Learners

Visual learners need to see information in order to understand and learn. Some Visual learners learn best with pictures, and some with words. These people will “see” words or images in their mind’s eye when remembering things. They’ll be much more likely to retain information if they read it.

When presenting information to a Visual learner, be sure to have something written or drawn (like a graph) to back up what you are saying. If you don’t have handouts or other visuals, take notes, if you can, while you are speaking and draw the person’s attention to your notes.

If possible, give a written or diagram synopsis of information you’ve covered. Be sure to include any information or steps you expect the Visual learner to follow up on.

If you are a manager of a Visual learner, you could ask her to give you a brief written synopsis of what you’ve discussed in a meeting or what actions need to be taken. This will help her to synthesize the new information.

Clues Revealing Kinesthetic Learners

- ▶ Do they run their fingers or hands over materials?
- ▶ Do they take notes?
- ▶ Do they jiggle their pen or play with something they are holding?
- ▶ Do they reach out to touch or move something in the room?
- ▶ Do they move their hands a lot?
- ▶ Do they move or jiggle their body (feet, cross legs repeatedly, rub chin, touch hair or clothes)?
- ▶ Do they seem distracted if you’ve been speaking, sitting, or reading for an extended time?
- ▶ Do they touch their fingers to make points or remember lists?
- ▶ Do they shift materials around?

Tips for Working with Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic Learners need to touch things and move their bodies to process new information. It can often help them to doodle or tap a foot while working. Hands-on projects give Kinesthetic learners the opportunities they need to manipulate the objects they are learning about or working with.

When presenting information to a Kinesthetic learner, offer a handout so that there is some material to manipulate (circular revolving charts work really well). If possible, present the information on a large chart and ask the person to come to the chart to write information in. At the very least, try to ask the person to point to information you are discussing, to move their hands to express the dimensions of a project, or to move objects on a desk to describe a scenario.

If you are a manager of a Kinesthetic learner, be sure to provide opportunities for active, hands-on learning.

Dahlia Miller is the Director of Smart Tutor Referrals, a Victoria, BC agency matching students to tutors for academics and languages. Dahlia has written a variety of articles on the topic of education and learning. She enjoys discovering the many ways to blend her passion for education with her enjoyment of the business world. For more information on learning styles, the benefits of private tutoring, or Smart Tutor Referrals, call 995-2632, or visit www.SmartTutorReferrals.com