

Strategies for Working with Styles of Others

You can do a lot to help people with styles different from your own feel more comfortable in conflicts and thus function more constructively. Read and discuss the information below with people who live or work with you. If you talk when things are calm about your styles and what you need, you will know what to do to make things easier in difficult times. As you get familiar with the styles, you will soon find you can recognize style preferences even in complete strangers, and you will know how to respond in situations that previously confounded you.

How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in **Competing**

- People who use the **Competing** style a lot are often task oriented. They are usually quite productive and concerned to get the job done. Engage them and let them know you are committed to the task at hand or resolving the issue satisfactorily. If you need time to think things through or cool down, they are usually fine with this if you ask, so long as you indicate clearly a commitment to returning to resolve things. You will get a more positive response if you state specifically when you will come back (e.g., in an hour, or tomorrow at nine o'clock, etc).
- Though their task focus makes it easy to forget the feelings and needs of others, the **Competing** style feels responsible for those around them and may feel quite bad if they realize they have wounded others. Look for ways to engage them about the needs of others in settings where they are not in the middle of a big job.

- This mode usually prefers to deal with things *now* and gets anxious when others are silent or passive. Don't withdraw without giving some clue about your intentions. Lack of information about this will increase their anxiety and anger.
- A **Competing** person who is angry can be quite intimidating, for this style is the most active, and "in your face" when anger is high. If this person has a history of abusing others emotionally or otherwise and holds more power than you, look for a path to safety or shelter. If the person is basically healthy emotionally, simply asking for a chance to cool off and think often helps, so long as you state clearly your intention to return and work on things.

How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in **Collaborating**

- Feeling heard helps all styles, but **Collaborators** respond particularly well to efforts to structure conversation around listening. Hear them out fully and you are

likely to be surprised at how well they listen to you in return.

- The **Collaborative** mode values directness and candor, so long as you are polite. Saying what you want and need will be appreciated, particularly if you manage to say it in an attitude of “providing information about what matters most to me” rather than criticizing or making demands.
- If you are an **Accommodating** or **Avoiding**, resist the temptation to back off from an assertive Collaborator. Yes, Collaborators speak out, but they truly want to hear your views too. If you are silent or too quick to agree, the Collaborating mode can feel like Competing, which is not at all the intention.
- Bring a blend of task and relationship focus to the conversation. Affirm work well done.
- Like the Competing style, Collaborators particularly appreciate information about what is going on, and tend to become anxious or upset if others pull away without signaling their intentions. Don’t withdraw without giving a clear explanation, such as, “I want to take a break for half an hour to think things through. Then I’ll come back and we can talk more.”

How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in **Avoiding**

- **Avoiders** benefit more than any other style from an offer to give them time and/or space to withdraw and think things through. You are more likely to get a “yes” answer about

anything you need from them if you use a “two-step” approach. The first step is to let **Avoiders** know – in thoughtful tones - what you want and that you’d like them to think about it. Then come back later – an hour, a day, a week - and hear their response.

- Stay low-key. The more intense or demanding you are, the more likely the **Avoider** will go into major withdrawal.
- There is a significant subgroup of conflict **Avoiders** who are actually quite task focused, but in a particular way. They bring a high level of caution and attention to detail to everything they do; they are concerned not to put important things at risk. These Avoiders need data and information, presented in a calm and methodical way before comfortably enter negotiations. Look for ways to provide them with relevant details, about plans, options, costs, rules, precedents from elsewhere, expected results, how surprises will be dealt with, etc. If possible, give them time to absorb this information before expecting them to negotiate. See two-step approach above.
- Haste in decision-making tends to push **Avoiders** into withdrawal or analysis paralysis. Move slowly, one step at a time.

How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in **Compromising**

- **Compromisers** have a strong sense of reciprocity. More than other styles, they are likely to respond in kind if you back

off somewhat from your initial position. Leave room to negotiate when you make your opening request.

- **Compromisers** value fairness and moderation. Think and speak in terms of “being fair”, “fair play”, “reasonable”, “you give some, I give some”, “give and take”, etc.
- **Compromisers** tend to value efficiency of time and energy and are eager to find a way through to a practical solution that ends the difficulty. A sense that a fair and moderate deal was achieved probably matters more than talking through all options.
- As the **Compromiser** does not enjoy prolonged debate, a determined partner in **Competing** or even **Collaborating** style may, with strong logic, be able to persuade her she is wrong, creating an appearance the more forceful person has “won”. However, the victory may be hollow. The Compromiser’s deep inner sense that conclusions should be reciprocal and balanced will be disturbed. Trust, openness and cooperativeness will suffer on the long-term. Find concessions for the **Compromiser**, even if you are sure your argument is stronger.

How to bring out the best in someone who scores high in Accommodating

- **Accommodators** want to please and be pleased. Pay attention to small social niceties. More than any other style, this mode will be positively affected by gestures of thoughtfulness – a kind note, an

appreciative comment, forms of empathy and caring, etc.

- You will get more cooperativeness in doing serious work with **Accommodators** if you use a two-step approach. First, connect at a human level (ask how they are doing, inquire about a family member, tease a little, compliment them, thank them for something, etc.). Then, and only then, settle down to business. The human connection always comes before work for **Accommodators** (an insight that is especially difficult for the task-oriented **Competing style** to remember).
- Stay light. Seriousness or heaviness in others quickly stirs anxiety in **Accommodators** and makes it hard for them to focus or stay on task. Appreciate the relationship and/or their good qualities out loud if you can honestly do so.
- Assure them repeatedly that you really want to know their preferences and views. Thank them sincerely if they do level with you. If they bring criticism, thank them generously, for it requires great effort for **Accommodators** to be direct about anything negative.
- In meetings or extended conversations with **Accommodators**, take breaks and lighten up on a regular basis. Long, heavy discussion unsettles **Accommodators** and pushes them to unhelpful places more quickly than other styles.