

## SOCIAL STYLES

### DAVID MERRILL & ROGER REID: SOCIAL STYLES

Social Styles form a model of personality that focuses on our outer behaviour, rather than the inner you. Its founders described it as *'the you that's on display'*.

In the early 1960s, two industrial psychologists, David Merrill and Roger Reid wanted to understand whether they could predict managerial, leadership and sales performance. To do this, they explored *how* people behave in social situations. They chose not to concern themselves with *why*.

Starting with BF Skinner's ideas of behaviourism and James Taylor's structured list of behavioural descriptions, Merrill and Reid discovered that people's behaviour follows two continua, which they labelled: *assertiveness* and *responsiveness*.

#### Assertiveness and Responsiveness

Assertiveness styles range from 'asking' behaviours to 'telling' behaviours, while our responsiveness varies from 'emoting', or displaying our feelings, to 'controlling' our emotions.

From these two dimensions, they defined four behavioural styles that we each display. As with other models, we each have our preferences, but can display all of the styles from time to time.

The value of the model lies in using it to assess the people around you, and knowing how to get the best from people with each preference.

Merrill and Reid labelled our ability to adapt to other people's styles as 'versatility'.

#### Assertiveness

In social interaction it is common for people to want things from others. In making *requests* they may be highly assertiveness or they may make requests at a lower, even passive level.

This dimension is sometimes also called 'dominance'.

#### High assertiveness

A highly assertive person is likely to tell others or demand things that they want rather than asking or not saying anything.

People who prefer using higher levels assertiveness are more likely to face up to difficulties rather than avoiding them. They have a higher confidence in themselves and believe they have the right to demand what they need. They may see life as 'dog eat dog' and that they must fight for what they want, which makes them more competitive and ready to act quickly and take risks.

In the social styles grid, high assertiveness typically has the label 'Tells'.

#### Low assertiveness

In low assertiveness, a person who wants something from another is likely to ask rather than demand or tell. If they are particularly passive, they may not even ask, avoiding what may be perceived as possible conflict. Likewise, they tend to avoid risks, which may be an even deeper cause than low assertiveness. Being slower than the competitive high-assertives they tend to be more inquisitive and collaborative.

People may have lower assertiveness for several reasons, for example a self-based fear of

social criticism or perhaps an other-based fear, disliking the idea of embarrassing or distressing others. They may have been taught when young that one should not push oneself forward.

In the social styles grid, low assertiveness typically has the label 'Asks'.

### Responsiveness

Whilst assertiveness has to do with communicating to others, responsiveness is about how the person responds to the requests or demands of others on them.

This dimension is sometimes also called 'sociability' or (in reverse) 'task focused'.

### High responsiveness

A person with higher responsiveness has a higher emotional response to others. This may appear as empathy although it may simply be that they have less control over their own emotions and react in an emotional way. They are generally people-oriented, whether this is for purposes of company or altruism.

In the social styles grid, low responsiveness typically has the label 'Emotes'.

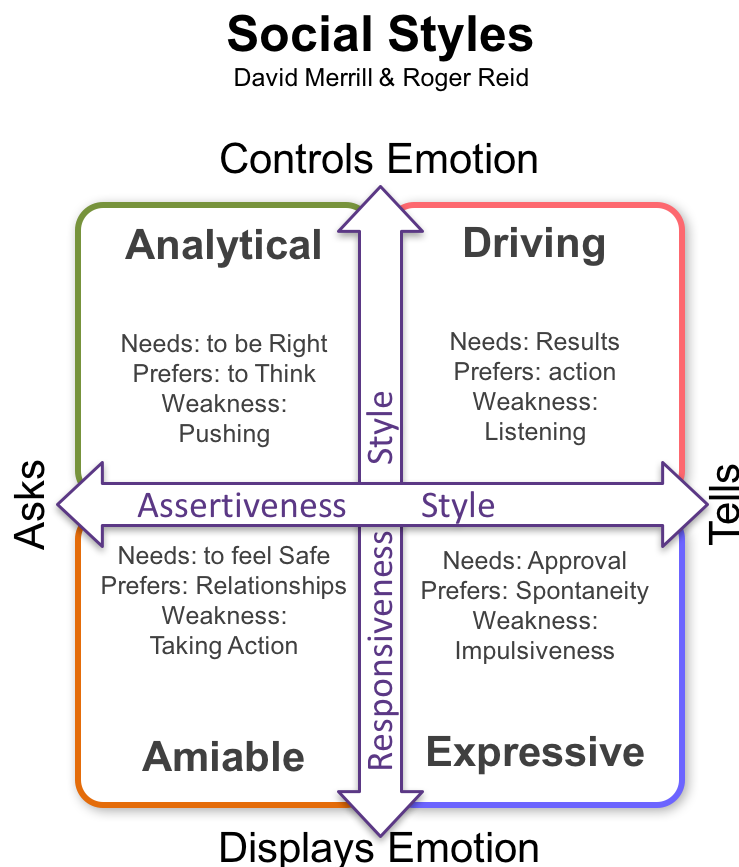
### Low responsiveness

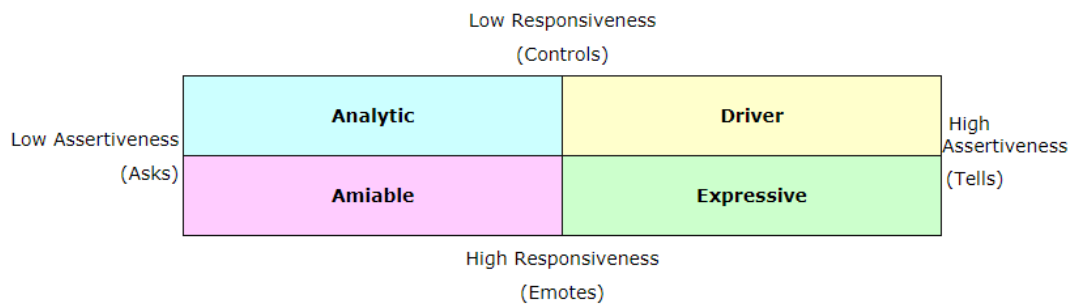
A person with lower responsiveness is less likely to be empathetic as there is less emotional content in their reactions. Their response has a higher cognitive element and so they think more before responding, which can make responses slower.

In the social styles grid, low responsiveness typically has the label 'Controls'.

## Four Quadrants: The Social Styles (David Merrill & Roger Reid)

The four quadrants that the two dimensions of assertiveness and responsiveness create, give the four social styles.





## Driving

The driving style is the typical task-oriented behaviour that prefers to tell rather than ask and shows little concern for feelings. It cares more about results. This is a fast-paced style, keen to make decisions, take power, and exert control. Often unco-operative, this is an efficient, results-driven behaviour, the inevitable compromise of which is to sacrifice personal relationships in the short term and, in extremis, in the long term too. The weakness of this style is evident: a frequent unwillingness to listen and accommodate the needs of others.

With high assertiveness and low emotional response to others, Drivers are not so worried by how others react and are hence more independent and candid. With less concern about people they have a greater concern for results and are quite pragmatic. They may also be poor collaborators and upset others with inconsiderate words and actions.

Some characteristics of Drivers:

- Competitive and needs to win
- Seeks control and being in charge
- Fast-acting
- Plans carefully
- Decisive
- Results-oriented
- Task-focused
- Dislikes inefficiency and indecision
- Can be impatient and insensitive
- When stressed may grab control be overly critical

## Expressive

The expressive style is also assertive, but uses feelings to achieve its objectives. The behaviour is highly spontaneous and demands recognition and approval, and favours gut instinct in decision-making. At its best, this style comes across as charismatic, enthusiastic and idealistic. At its worst, however, the expressive style can be seen as impulsive, shallow and even manipulative.

Expressive people have higher assertiveness and greater responsiveness to others. With less concern for what others think they are typically articulate, quick and visionary. On the down side, their assertiveness may make them poor listeners and with a tendency to distract. This can also lead them to be impractical and impatient.

Some characteristics of Expressives:

- Intuitive
- Creative
- Outgoing and enthusiastic
- Spontaneous and fun-loving
- Interacts well with others at work
- Good at persuading and motivating
- Fears being ignored or rejected
- Like to be acknowledged
- Dislikes routine and complexity
- Tendency to generalize and exaggerate
- When stressed may get sarcastic and unkind

### **Amiable**

The amiable style expresses concern for people above all else. Keen to share emotion and not to assert itself over others, building and maintaining relationships dominate behaviour. These concerns manifest a slow, deliberate pace, coming across as sensitive, supportive and dependable. The corollary is a certain nervousness about, and even a resistance to, change. This arises from a deep need for personal security. The weaknesses of this style are the reverse of the strengths of the opposite quadrant: a low willingness to initiate change, and take action.

People with higher responsiveness than others and lower assertiveness are people-oriented and sociable. Without a need to lead, they can be steady and reliable workers. They may also avoid any conflict and be rather passive, lacking drive and becoming careless.

Some characteristics of Amiables:

- Friendly and relates well to others
- Good at listening and teamwork
- Wants to be respected, liked and approved of
- Dislikes of conflict and risk-taking
- Seeks security and like organized workplaces
- Slow decision-making
- Prefers to be told what to do than to lead
- Fears change and uncertainty
- When stressed may become indecisive and submissive

### **Analytical**

The analytical style of interaction asserts itself by asking, rather than telling. It is also characterised by a high level of emotional control. It values facts, logic and accuracy, presenting a disciplined and unemotional – some would say cold – face to the world. This manifests in a deep need to be right about things, and therefore a highly deliberative, data-driven approach to decisions. As with all styles, there is a weakness, which is a lack of willingness to state a position until the analytical person is certain of their ground.

Analytical people are less assertive and less responsive to others. They hence tend to focus more on tasks than people and are less interested in leading, being happier to work by

themselves. They may be prudent and systematic, making them good at analytic work. They may also pay excessive attention to detail in ways that annoy others.

Some characteristics of Analyticals:

- Focuses on tasks more than people
- Likes to be right and will take time to ensure this
- Thoughtful, careful fact-oriented and precise
- Good at objective evaluation and problem-solving
- Likes organization and structure
- Avoids group work, preferring to work alone
- Can be over-critical and unresponsive
- Cautious in decision-making
- When stressed may withdraw or become headstrong

## You and the customer: Beginner's guide to 4 social styles



Customers vary in the way they approach us, talk to us (or don't talk to us) and make decisions. Just as we differ in the way we deliver service to them. Most of the variety comes from different social styles we all use in contact with the outside world.

### What is a social style, anyway?

The social style is our public "I", that we use to interact with people. Our social style is **our best, most comfortable and easiest way** of dealing with others. It's like our favorite clothes we put on in the morning while getting ready to go through the day. Our social style is developed when we are babies and toddlers. At that time, some of our behaviors are reinforced while others are repressed. This way, we learn that some behaviors are more likable than others. Here's the tricky part: other people, on their journey to adulthood, get different messages about their behavior and develop different styles of communication.

When we grow up, we meet with a variety of behavior expressed by other people, **feeling "likes" and "dislikes"** towards each other due to our own social style. The key to understanding each other better is to understand ourselves first. As you go on reading, try to place yourself in one of these styles. Then take a look at how you can approach customers who differ from you.

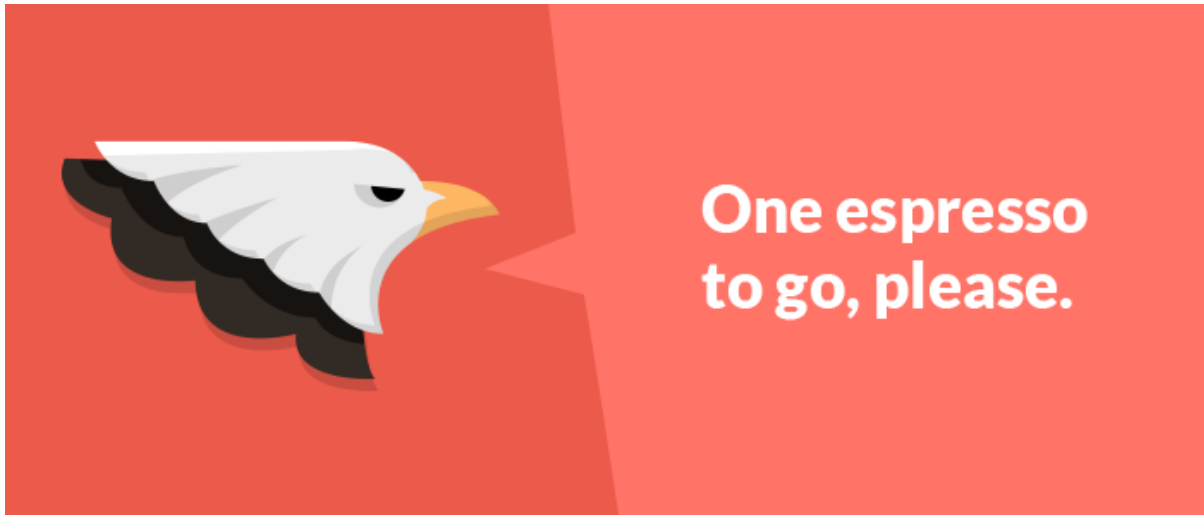
### 4 social styles in bird's disguise

I'll describe our personal styles using a model developed by two psychologists – Reid and Merrill. The model is over 30 years old, but it's still applicable.

Reid and Merrill introduced four styles: Driver, Expressive, Amiable, Analyst. Although these styles are pretty descriptive, for me bird (yes bird!) representations would be more imaginative. I call them Eagle, Peacock, Dove and Owl.

The styles are defined by two dimensions: **assertiveness** that is, how likely they are to force or direct others and **responsiveness** how likely they are to express their emotions. When these two dimensions are combined, four social styles emerge. Once you learn them, it would be easier for you to have a positive communication with them.

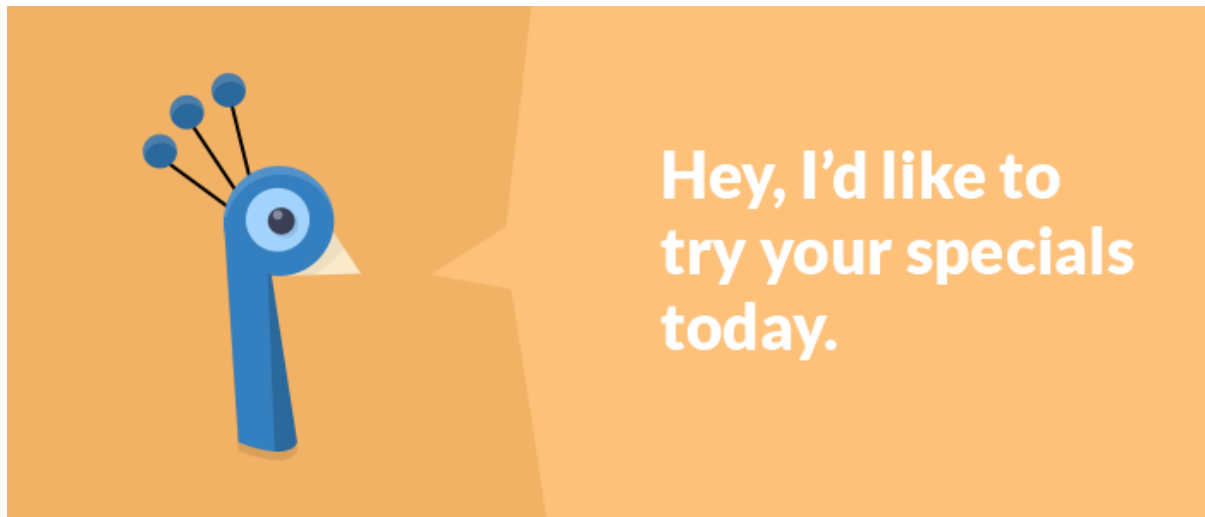
### The Eagle



Confident and dominating. They tell you straight away what they want. They love having control over the situation. The Eagle is a hunter. He or she is mostly driven by a **great need to achieve**. Challenges make them alive. Power makes them feel secure. They are quick in decision making. In times of trouble, those types tend to be autocratic, enforcing absolute power.

When dealing with Eagles, forget small talk and get to the point. Lay out the facts. Be brief. Give them two or three choices with precise, short reasons for buying. Remember that they have a strong hunting instinct and shopping is like hunting for them, too. **Let them feel their power** by leaving the decision completely up to them.

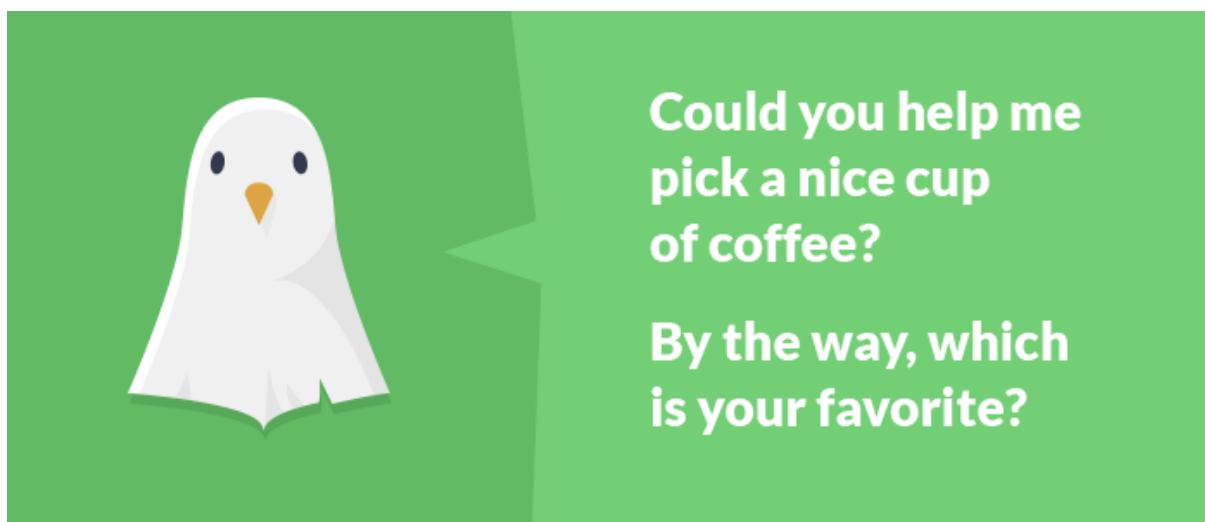
## The Peacock



Expressive fun lovers. Think of the way peacocks show off their colorful plumage and all eyes are right on them. Same thing happens with this social style. They make grand entrances and enjoy being in the spotlight. You can't miss them. **They need to be around people.** They easily get bored and need constant stimulation. Under a lot of stress, they tend to be offensive or sarcastic.

Peacocks respond to the following words: amazing, beautiful, awesome, fun. And that is what they are looking for in a shopping experience. It is a social event for them. They will eagerly start a conversation with you. But don't give them too many details. Remember they get bored easily. **Show them the big picture** instead and try to come up with something that will light their eyes up and make them say "Wow, I'm buying this!"

## The Dove



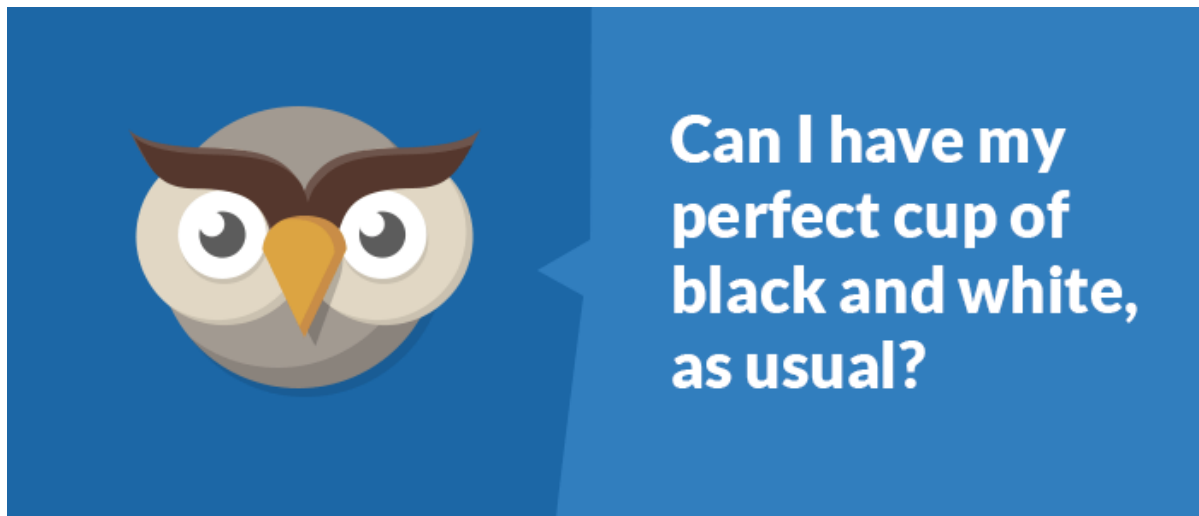
Calm and caring. Those types avoid conflicts, fights and arguments at all costs. A dove carrying an olive branch in its beak has been a representation of peace since the beginning of Christianity. People with this dominant type of social style are peace lovers. **They tend to be cautious rather than impulsive.** They avoid risk-taking and prefer



sticking to methods that have been successfully tested by other people. They are followers who feel comfortable with being told what to do. When stressed out, they submit.

With Doves, you need plenty of time for conversation and establishing a personal relationship. Don't rush them. They need time to feel safe and secure to make decisions. You may be surprised to notice that the decision may come not only from Doves but also from their close ones. **Doves usually include others in their decision-making.** Let them make a quick call to a friend, ask a loved one for second opinion or simply give your point of view on the choice he or she is making. Remember that they are not risk-takers, so avoid pointing to "brand new features", and rather go with the "loved by other customers" assurance.

### The Owl



Precise and quiet. An owl is in its nature a solitary bird, perceived as a symbol of wisdom. People of this type just love independence. They are not much of talkers, usually being lost in their thoughts. They are **constantly analyzing things, conversations, and situations** without even noticing it. All the facts they gather are carefully placed into structures so that an owl can keep its life organized. They are perfectionists saying "*Do it right or not at all.*" When they are stressed out, they pull back immediately.

Owls are cautious when making decisions, so don't rush them to make one. Keep them informed about the pros and cons of the deal. Focus on product details and proven examples of usage. **Give them facts and figures.** Do not make a statement unless you can back it up with relevant information. And don't be surprised when an owl comes to you knowing actually more about the product you sell than you do. Owls are knowledge hunters. They usually do in depth comparative research before they even ask you the first question.

### Tensions between styles

For most of us, styles that are closest to our own **create the least discomfort** and we have a good feeling about people with that behavior. You can usually strike a deal smoothly with clients closest to your style.

Styles that differ from our own create tension as they violate our comfort zones. We may **feel uncomfortable around those people** or even dislike them. Clients that differ the most from our own style would be the ones that we struggle with the most, usually ending up with unclosed sales.

### **Accept the differences**

Reid and Merrill claim that our social style is hardly changeable. There is little we can do to turn from an owl into a peacock. And there's really no need to do that. **We can stay as we are, and let others stay as they are.** Simply, but not so easily, accepting each other's differences.

As we get better at observing and letting ourselves and others be as they are, we can add new behavior to our usual habit patterns, **stretching our comfort zones** bit by bit. Get into the details with the owl, let the eagle spot the prey, chit-chat with a dove or look at pretty things with a peacock.

### **References**

Merrill, D. W. and Reid, R. H. (1999). Personal styles and effective performance. New York: CRC Press.

TRACOM (1991). The social style profile—Technical report: Development, reliability and validity. Denver, CO: Author