Many of us who have been practicing for several years, may know the audiology side of the business well, but adding in personality typing could help make each day more fun and the customer experience more enjoyable.
Improving Communication Skills With Patients

Have you ever wondered why you seem to communicate with some patients better than others? Working with diverse populations of people means we have to deal with all types of personalities and sometimes getting along with all of them can be a bit of a challenge. To be successful, different approaches may be needed for specific personalities. So, how can we adjust our own communication approach to meet the style of each type of personality?

For the past few years, I have focused on incorporating different communication strategies for the most common personality types. This has helped me to more effectively communicate with my patients. After studying the Meyers-Briggs Scale (MeyersBriggs, 2016), I am better able to read a patient and then to modify my own communication style to suit their needs.

There are four unique personality styles in the Social Style Model—the Analytical, the Driver, the Amiable, and the Expressive (MeyersBriggs, 2016). The first step in learning about each one is to know that there are two types of people in each style—fast movers and slow movers.

This aspect of the personality should be easy to identify right away.

Fast movers walk into the clinic quickly moving right to the front desk announcing their arrival and appointment time—“John Doe here for my 10:30 appointment.” They often stand or pace in the waiting room and speak quickly.

Slow movers exhibit very different behaviors. They arrive early, take their time to get out of the waiting room chair, often hanging up their coats after you greet them. They have long, thoughtful pauses when responding to questions on a case history form.

FIGURE 1 provides more details on the four personality types.

Fast movers will be on the right side of the figure and will either be a Driver or an Expressive, and slow movers will be on the left side of the graph as Analytical or Amiable.

The first step is to determine if the patient is fast paced versus slow, and the second step is to assess whether the patient is task oriented (top of the figure) or people oriented (bottom of the figure). Task-oriented personalities will be either Drivers or Analyticals. Task-oriented personalities get straight to business while people-oriented personalities (Amiable or Expressive) spend more time getting to know you and may inquire about the surroundings.

In my practice, I place this figure beside the name on the front page in the patient’s chart. Once I feel I have determined which category the patient falls into, I mark an X next to the appropriate personality type and then attempt to modify my communication style to best meet the needs of the patient. If people knew their personality style, it would be great if they introduced themselves this way, “Hi, I’m Mary and I am a Driver.” If we understood this from the outset, there would be less misunderstandings, better connections, and, most importantly, it would be easier to meet our patient’s needs.

Identifying Style

The first objective in this assessment is to identify your own personality style. It’s been my experience that the most important element is to determine if a patient is a fast mover or a slow mover. If you are a fast mover dealing with a slow mover, slow down and if you are a slow mover dealing with a fast mover, try to speed up your presentation. By this I mean avoid long pauses and drawn out explanations. Minimize the small talk. For many people, small talk is harmless but it can be annoying to the Driver so get straight to the point of the purpose of the visit, and leave the small talk until the end of the visit if you have additional time.

Below is a quick guide that you can reference when meeting a new patient or to assess the style of a current patient.
Improving Communication Skills with Patients

FIGURE 1. Descriptions of each personality style.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Analytical</th>
<th>The Driver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precise</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>Candid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic</td>
<td>Decisive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prudent</td>
<td>Pragmatic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Amiable</th>
<th>The Expressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Outgoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Persuasive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic</td>
<td>Fun-Loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Driver
- Has a false sense of the value of their own time. The clinician should not be late for this appointment start time. Stands/browses in the waiting room.
- Has a firm handshake and intense eye contact.
- Is well dressed and is not a big smiler.
- Expects quick answers. Listen for the driver. “Yep, yep, yep....”
- Leans in.
- Answers briefly.
- Responds quickly to audiometry. Often closes their eyes. False positives are common.

The Expressive
- Visits easily with the receptionist.
- Is animated. Uses large hand gestures.
- Is scattered and often late.
- Is charismatic and a smiler.
- Provides extended stories through case history.
- Comments on photos in your office.

The Analytical
- Tends to be an engineer. May be weary or suspicious.
- Arrives early. Is often alone. Is not chatty with receptionist.
- Has a monotone voice quality.
- Uses minimal facial expressions.
- Provides short answers, but thoughtful with pauses.
- Avoids eye contact. Looks elsewhere when answering questions.
- Asks a lot of questions.

The Amiable
- Is personable, but not dramatic.
- Is early to appointments. Hangs up coat after the introduction.
- Is chatty with receptionist.
- Is slow moving, but warm and friendly.
- Leans back in chair and uses limited hand gestures.
Once you have identified the personality style of the patient, you will have to modify your communication style to better meet their needs, which will ultimately lead to the patient being more likely to make a decision about their hearing health-care needs at the time of their visit rather than leaving to “think about it.”

**Working with Each Style**

**The Driver**
When working with a Driver, you want to have a good strong handshake with direct eye contact. This is the personality type where you want to get down to business right away and limit small talk unless the patient initiates it (and most Drivers don’t usually initiate it). Let them lead the appointment. Most importantly, keep your answers short and to the point.

"Get there quicker" would be the motto when working with a Driver. It’s very important to be confident and professional as they will want to see that you know what you are talking about. Drivers are decisive and may make a decision on what hearing aid to order within that first appointment. You may want to inquire about the patient’s preferences as you move through your discussion about hearing aids. For example, “Do you prefer the CIC or the RIC style of aids?”

**The Expressive**
If you are working with an Expressive, you want to include body language. You could attempt to mimic their expressiveness in hand gestures and posture. The most important thing to remember about this personality type is to connect with them rather than focusing on test results and recommendations. Obviously, information is important but this type of personality will probably want to have a conversation at some point that is off topic from hearing. I used to shut this interchange down because I had felt I had important information to share with the patient and it was incompatible with my own style. Now, I understand a patient’s preferred communication style can negatively influence the outcome of the appointment if not addressed properly.

**The Analytical**
The stereotype of this personality style is an engineer. It’s been my experience that this type has received a “bad rap.” They want to know they are unique and you have to ask specific questions so these patients know that you are considering their unique needs. Slow down your rate of speech and be thoughtful in your answers to their
Improving Communication Skills with Patients

Questions. Literally, take thoughtful pauses when being asked questions.

Initially, it may feel awkward communicating with an Analytical. They also might appreciate printed specifications from the manufacturer and the marketing materials about the products. An Analytical may want to see an explanation of the differences between technology levels in detail. Often the Analytical will want to “think about it” and likely do some comparison shopping or at least online research on your recommendation. Follow up is key with this type and by key, I mean avoid a generic follow-up call with nothing to ask. The worst follow up is the kind where you say, “I’m wondering if you have any questions.” Remember, an Analytical likes to be considered unique so think of a thoughtful reason to call him or her. For example, “Mr. Jones, I was thinking about you and thought you might be interested in how the ear-to-ear transfer of information works. Would you like me to send you that article?”

The Amiable

I have found that this type of personality is the most difficult to identify because these individuals often don’t have obvious mannerisms like the other types. I have observed that this type of patient is typically slow moving but very friendly. They often make decisions for the benefit of those around them. You may hear them say, “My daughter made me come.”

The Amiable personality type responds well to consistent reassurance during testing. “Good job. We are half way through the testing process,” is a phrase I might use when I am doing audiometry. Communication will be very effective if you bring their hearing issues back to relationships with the people in their lives. Another helpful approach with an Amiable is to slow your presentation down. Check for comprehension, “Does my explanation make sense?” I have also found that this personality type is very influenced by what most people like.

One final thing to watch out for is a person whose personality is in the opposite quadrant as your personality style, because he or she will be the hardest to connect with and the easiest to lose touch with.
Conclusion

One final thing to watch out for is a person whose personality is in the opposite quadrant as your personality style, because he or she will be the hardest to connect with and the easiest to lose touch with. I am a Driver and have to really slow things down when I have an Amiable in front of me. I used to work with another audiologist who was an Amiable and she indicated that she felt very intimidated by a Driver. If you have more than one audiologist in your clinic, get your receptionist involved to attempt to book to similar personality types together. Receptionists are also your best first clue as to personality style as you can observe how a new patient is interacting with the person at the front desk.

Experienced practitioners can fall into the trap of saying the same thing to everyone and using the same presentation style with every personality type, which can lead to poor communication with three-fourths of the population that do not share your personality style. A lack of connection with patients can cause a job to become boring and may lead to burn out, not to mention that many patients will not get the help they need from YOU.

Make it a challenge to connect with the person in front of you. Think of it like an episode of CSI where you can piece clues together until you deduce the best way to communicate with a patient. Many of us that have been practicing for several years may know the audiology side of the business well and personality typing has the potential to not only make each day more fun, it will also make the customer experience more enjoyable.

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Reference