

# The 4 Different Communication Styles and How Each Can Improve

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Have you ever heard a boring presentation? Sometimes when I speak to business groups, I ask them to raise their hand if they've ever experienced one. Everyone laughs and raises their hands. Then I ask how many of us think we might have been the reason someone else raised their hand.

Public speaking certainly can be daunting but it's inevitable in any organization. This isn't limited to speaking on a platform, though. I define public speaking as any form of communication where you are sharing an idea or information to another human being.

When people tell me, they aren't a public speaker, I ask if they ever speak in meetings. The answer is, of course, yes. Then I congratulate them. They have spoken in a public setting. They are now officially a public speaker. This is especially true for leaders. Eventually, leadership comes with a microphone.

Literally or figuratively, when we communicate, we are handed a microphone and asked to lead. It could be our family, a friendship, a company, a team, a homeowner's association (God be with you), a school, a volunteer group, etc. This is why as leaders we must be very intentional about becoming better communicators. There are several reasons why but this one might be the most important:

The better we communicate, the better we lead. This is true whether we are in front of five people or 500. If we aren't communicating clearly and effectively, we put a lid on the potential of the organization and our leadership.

The problem is that public speaking doesn't come easily for many of us. In fact, it's been said there are two great fears in life: death and public speaking. I understand. And yet, the reality is that most great things in history (and bad) have happened when someone got up to speak and rallied people around their idea.

## The 4 different presenter voices

For this to happen in your organization and mine, there are a few techniques we can use to help us improve as communicators and leaders. One of the most effective techniques is to discover what I call is your "dominant presenters voice."

Over the last 20 years, I have coached business leaders, preachers and teachers on how to make their next presentation their best presentation. During this time, I've noticed there are four presenter voices and that we usually have one of these as a primary voice.

When we discover which one of these four voices is our dominant voice, it allows us to leverage the strength of that voice while avoiding the weakness. This helps in a variety of ways but most importantly it helps in our preparation process. This is why discovering your presenter voice is so important. The better you prepare, the better you present.

One of the reasons many leaders struggle with their communication is due to the fact that they aren't aware of their primary presenter voice. I have seen dozens of leaders improve their presentation skills almost overnight by simply understanding how to leverage their particular voice.

Too often, we spend way too much time on our keynote slides and not enough on how we are going to communicate what's on those slides. How we communicate is just as important as what we communicate.

Knowing this, I want to briefly describe the voices outlining the strength and weakness of each one. I have listed an example of a great communicator to help with the description of each voice. Additionally, I'll give you a few questions to ask yourself during the preparation process.

Let's describe the Four Presenter Voices of Leadership: They are the voice of the Teacher, the Motivator, the Storyteller, and the Visionary.

## 1. The Teacher

The Voice of the Teacher is instructional with explanation as the goal. If you have the voice of a teacher, you have great content. One of your challenges is trying to fit all of your great content within the allotted time, right?

The weakness of this voice can potentially be a lack of connection with the crowd. This is a hard truth for teachers to embrace. Teachers can assume that great content automatically makes for a great presentation. This is a dangerous assumption to make.

We all know teachers who knew their content very well but lost their audience in the first five minutes. This is why the first part of a presentation is vitally important for those who have this voice. They must work really hard to connect with their audience by giving them a reason or reasons to keep listening.

When you combine great content with a strong connection with the audience, you have the recipe for a great presentation. Content alone rarely works because it doesn't necessarily give the audience a reason to listen.

Knowing this, here are a few questions the teacher must answer for their audience in the first five minutes of the presentation: "Why should I listen?" "What's at stake if I don't?" "What compelling problem will this solve in my life?"

The great news if you have this voice is that you have strong content. Leverage this strength and avoid the weakness by answering these questions in the preparation process. It's how you'll make your next presentation your best one yet.

**Example:** Coach John Wooden

## 2. The Motivator

The Voice of the Motivator is action-oriented with personal change as the goal. In many ways, the voices of the Teacher and Motivator are the complete opposite. For example, the first 5 – 10 minutes of a presentation for a Motivator is easy. They lean into their natural gifting as a communicator. They quickly engage the crowd and bring energy to the presentation.

However, if they aren't careful, as the presentation moves along the energy and connection begin to wane. The reason for this is that those with the Motivator voice can lean more on inspiration and less on content and clarity.

When I coach leaders, I can usually tell whether a leader who has this voice has done the hard work of preparation by around the 10 – 15-minute mark. At this point, they are into the content portion, and this is where the weakness of this voice begins to grow.

It's why I ask leaders with the Motivator voice to work twice as hard on the middle section of their presentations. To do this, here are a few questions a motivator must answer in the preparation process: "What do I want the audience to do with this information?" "Are the action steps clear?" "Am I combining motivation with helpful content?"

**Example:** Oprah Winfrey

### 3. The Storyteller

The Voice of the Storyteller is engaging, with emotional connection with the crowd as the goal. So many of history's best communicators had the voice of the storyteller. As you well know, stories are often more memorable than content. In fact, Dan and Chip Heath in their book, *Made to Stick*, encourage presenters to focus primarily on stories.

If this voice is your strength, you have a huge advantage on the rest of us because you can easily draw your audience into your presentation. However, like the other voices, this one has a weakness to avoid.

The weakness of the Storyteller can often be a lack of direction and clarity regarding the purpose of the presentation. If you're not careful, it can seem like you're just sharing stories with no purpose.

This is why the Storyteller must have a clear destination and purpose for the talk. During the preparation process, they must answer questions such as, "How does this story connect to my message?" "Where am I taking the audience?" "What is the message that these stories illuminate and illustrate?"

**Example:** Abraham Lincoln

### 4. The Visionary

The Voice of the Visionary is inspiring with organizational/world change as the goal. Visionary leaders have a way of helping us see something that currently doesn't exist. They turn good intention into reality. They help change the world and part of the way they do it is through communication and presentations.

The weakness of the Visionary voice is clearly articulating the how behind the why of the change. This is tricky because so often the how is unclear, which is understandable. However, if over time, there is no substantial way to help turn the intention into reality, the talk simply becomes rhetoric.

The question the visionary must ultimately answer is, "How are we going to accomplish this?" "What are we going to do to bring about these results?" "What is our plan of action?"

**Example:** Martin Luther King, Jr.

