

THE FACILITATORsm

*BrainStyles*TM for Facilitators

The old saying goes, “to a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” It describes a one-size-fits-all mindset to solving the issues that pop up like nails on a deck, tripping us up if we’re not careful. Professional facilitators, instructors and trainers, process owners and team leaders have all experienced the phenomenon. Yet the irony in the proverb belies a better approach that more accurately selects the tools for the presenting problems. Doing “same ol’-same ol’” doesn’t pay. A seasoned facilitator targets the use of tools and methods, and skillfully applies them for client value. My favorite tool for understanding individuals and their contribution to group dynamics is The BrainStyles System®.

Simply stated, a *brainstyle* is the way your brain processes new information in the most natural, efficient way when making decisions or taking action, which, over time, establishes a lifetime pattern of strengths. You are genetically “hard-wired” to process information when it appears new to you, and you must think to make a decision, versus pull from memory. In these “*Time Zero*” opportunities, you are most uniquely you, and no amount of training can change the way you process in those moments.

When you facilitate group sessions, you have no doubt observed people’s *brainstyle* strengths and timing differences. One participant seems focused on the big picture, another on the details, yet another on the implementation, while a fourth keeps reminding the group of the people issues. Perhaps you’ve experienced a case like this one:

Body language speaks volumes

During a planned four-hour Saturday meeting of a start-up publishing company’s senior partners, conflict

seemed unavoidable. Three hours into the discussion of a new book project, the mood was tense. One participant, Laura, had become uncomfortable with the apparent sparring of words by two of her peers and wondered how it contributed to their goals for the meeting. Aware of the emotions mounting, she chose to intervene by shifting for a moment from participant to observer and facilitator.

Laura, familiar with *BrainStyles*TM principles and methods from a recent training and from her own personal coach, readily observed climate and other intangibles, a strength of her Conciliator *brainstyle*. Now she noticed Don, a right-brained Deliberator, had pushed his chair away from the table, looked down at the floor, and rubbed his face. She decided to speak up.

“Excuse me for interrupting, guys, but I noticed Don pushed away from the table. Don, is there anything on your mind that you could share with us?” The others looked Don’s way in surprise.

“Uh, yeah, I guess so.” He straightened up and returned his chair tableside slowly. Tentatively at first, he proceeded to offer his thoughts. He spoke of the group’s early meetings and the memory of his joy and commitment to their newly formed vision. He offered details about his experiences as they related to the vision. He reminded them of the overall project timeline and offered his analysis of how this dilemma would impact their accomplishment. His clarity and passion grew as he spoke and served to remind the group of its mission, goals, and timetable.

By Linda Bush

(lindabush@bushanderson.com)

The previous conflict suddenly seemed irrelevant. Laura asked how the group could get back on task. Walter, a left-brained Deliberator, brought them back to their place in the day's agenda and reminded them of the time frame for the meeting. Everyone got back to task and thanked Don for his contribution. The others remarked after the meeting that they'd not noticed Don's body language, and thanked Laura for naming it and intervening. It had been the key to a shift in the effectiveness of the participants in reaching their goals for the meeting.

The BrainStyles System

While most personality systems focus on the behaviors of an individual, *The BrainStyles System* shifts the focus to the underlying strengths based on hardwired brain processing of information, especially in decision-making situations where simple recall is unavailable. While the focus on behavior leads to an "adapt your style" technique and places the problem "out there", to be fixed or removed, *The BrainStyles System* suggests an approach based on the principle "You cannot change others nor yourself." If this is true, how empowering for both of us! Yet how challenging if we're accustomed to the expectations (and stress) of adapting our behaviors to make others comfortable.

BrainStyles was born of an entrepreneur's own experience leading a team of highly capable but floundering executives in a start-up company. His hypothesis in 1981 was based on the notion of hemispherical functionality of the brain, a body of research that won the Nobel Prize for psychobiologist Roger Sperry in 1981. David Cherry's breakthrough idea came after other teambuilding and personality systems failed to produce lasting results and his company's financial and quality struggles mounted. As he observed his senior leaders' way of dealing with information, especially in stressful settings requiring decisions, David found himself at once both frustrated and admiring of his team members' behaviors. He concluded, "It must be the brain." His observations over time also led him to notice a person's speed of access to and synthesis of *new* information.

His own strength in conceptualizing allowed him to define four natural patterns of brain processing, especially when information was new or unfamiliar.

He set about designing his own system for improving the team's performance that was easy to apply, in the moment, without requiring anyone to adapt or change. Simply stated:

- ❖ Everyone's ideas count because each *brainstyle* adds a piece to the whole.
- ❖ Each person has strengths and non-strengths. The team demands excellence from strengths and supports each other with non-strengths.
- ❖ Projects and ideas are presented to maximize everyone's natural timing.

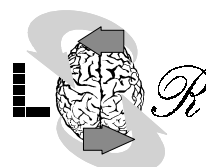
Later, with Marlane Miller's research, interviewing and writing skills, books and instrumentation became available for others to learn to leverage their own and others' strengths to create excellence and commitment. Her own consulting and organizational development practice embraced the *BrainStyles* principles and led to further clarity of the gifts of each of the four *brainstyles*. As her clients applied this information, they achieved new wins in individual and team accomplishments, providing continued validation and credibility of David's hypothesis.

The four BrainStyles



Conceptors

- Conceptors take in selected information at *Time Zero* with both the left and right brain. They are best picking out the patterns, themes, or underlying concepts in what is said. Their core strength is inventing — seeing mental images that redefine reality or making up a future possibility, regardless of what has gone before. They thrive on change and ill-defined situations where they can sort out the principles and establish new directions.



Deliberators

- Deliberators resist influence at *Time Zero*, nod or ignore, but don't react, while searching memory and assessing the situation. They make delayed decisions, but can give rapid opinions or assessments. Their primary strengths are assessing, seeing the gaps, areas of improvement, analyzing, putting pieces into a whole with a mental ordering process, learning and remembering. They thrive on setting up the plan, making the world a more rational and understandable place and telling it "like it is" with accuracy.



Knowers

- Knowers come to rapid, factual, unemotional decisions, by sorting at *Time Zero*. They are clear and logical communicators, doing best with structure and not as well with people. Their core strength is seeing cause-effect relationships between unrelated things, allowing them to craft clever and practical solutions in complex or difficult areas. They thrive on working independently, making things simple and efficient, and creating solutions that make immediate sense.



Conciliators

- Conciliators are greatly influenced at *Time Zero* by what is said, seen, and felt and react quickly and spontaneously with feeling. Their primary strength is in building relationships, bringing harmony to different elements, people, or things. They can "read body language" and climate and empathize with people readily. They thrive on starting things, supporting people and ideas, and bringing meaning to relationships and events, telling it "like it could be" with enthusiasm.

Let's examine how another team applied *The BrainStyles System* in a stressful decision-making and project-planning meeting.

Project planning simplified

The HR Director and her team had just learned they were responsible for a quick-turnaround project, laden with unpleasant tasks, mounds of data, and extensive travel. Within two weeks, they were to fan out across the US and lay off hundreds of people in their sales and marketing division. It weighed heavily on their minds and seemed impossible to implement with excellence in the time allowed. It followed their recent *BrainStyles: Leadership & Teamwork* training, so they chose to apply their insights about each other and group process to this project plan.

The six-team members began by choosing roles for the project-planning meeting. Roles were facilitator, scribe, timekeeper, participants, and myself as an observer from outside the team.

Kris, a Knower and the group's leader as HR Director, facilitated the meeting and volunteered to be scribe. She began by restating their project goal and timeframe. Diana, another Knower, told the group they had one hour for the meeting, and suggested it include a mid-point process check and a final debrief with observer feedback.

Kris lined out the work of the meeting into time estimates and posted them. She asked for a volunteer to watch the clock. Diana quickly agreed to do so.

Kris asked the Conciliators, Susan and Mona, to lead the brainstorming of all the issues they could foresee in the implementation. She asked the rest of the group not to interrupt their train of thought with comments on their input until their brainstorming was complete. Susan and Mona offered reactions stemming from their personal investment in the RIF (Reduction in Force) and from their empathy with the employees to be laid off. They had no problem listing numerous people issues related to the RIF, many which would require data collection, sorting, analysis and reporting.

Kris next asked the Deliberators, Jana and Beth, to lead a discussion of an approach to the data issues. They were quick and confident in expressing who, what, when, where and how to collect, compile and present the data to the team, and ultimately to the individual to be laid off. They also offered to design a form for each employee's meeting with HR during

the RIF process that would comprehensively outline and compute monies due in the severance package. Kris recorded their performance agreements on flipcharts.

Kris invited the Conciliators to brainstorm how to make the project as fun and uplifting as possible in view of the task (Layoffs). Their ideas even lifted the spirits of the team in the project-planning meeting and provided a way for everyone to feel engaged and committed to excellence. They offered to take responsibility to lead these aspects of the project. Kris recorded their performance agreements.

Throughout the meeting, Diana and Kris summarized what participants had said and called for agreement on process elements and performance agreements.

This team completed their project plan, the debrief, and the observer's feedback well within the designated hour. They beamed with pride in their accomplishment and expressed joy at the shift in the mood from hearing about the project's steep requirements at the beginning to the synergistic plan and results at the end. They told their observer that this meeting would have taken hours and been full of frustration prior to their knowledge of each other's *brainstyle* and *The BrainStyles System* principles.

Facilitating for high performance

High performing teams build on differences. Research demonstrates this time and again. Although relationships and trust may build more slowly than in teams where likeness was the selection criteria, their results are more complete, their solutions more effective, and ultimately their satisfaction quite high.

Knowing how your *brainstyle* influences the way you contribute to goals, processes, and relationships. Trusting others to deliver in areas of strengths and offering to supporting them in areas of their non-strengths covers the distance to reach a genuine environment of trust and a new definition of teamwork. As facilitators of those groups and teams, we can provide our group process expertise to capitalize on the strengths within the group, facilitating openness to differences and encouraging responsible, genuine collaboration. œ

A facilitator, corporate trainer, author, and consultant, Linda Bush has over 25 years experience in business management, leadership and human resource development, and in all levels of public and private education. Recognized as a Master Trainer by clients, Linda applies special expertise in designing and delivering experiential-learning events. Contact her at (940) 686-0200 or lindabush@bushanderson.com.

The Facilitator is a quarterly professional newsletter. To order a sample issue or subscribe to *The Facilitator*, contact

The Facilitator
P O Box 670705
Dallas, TX 75367-0705
Phone: 972.243.1356
Fax: 972.243.1357
Email: snurre@TheFacilitator.com
www.TheFacilitator.com

© Nurre Ink. All rights reserved.