



# Why Learning Styles Matter In Workplace Communications

Get Your Audience to Connect With  
Your Communications by Accomodating  
Their Different Learning Styles

a special white paper from



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“The two words ‘information’ and ‘communication’ are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through.”

– Sydney J. Harris

All individuals have a dominant or preferred learning style that they rely on to gather, process, and ultimately use to digest the messages being relayed to them.

Some people prefer reading articles or brochures. Others may do better listening to a presentation. Still others might appreciate actively participating in whatever is being taught.

## The VAK System

A widely accepted approach to looking at learning styles is the VAK system that bases one’s learning preferences on the three main sensory receivers. In the VAK system, learning styles include:

- **V**isual
- **A**uditory
- **K**inesthetic (*movement*)

Becoming familiar with these various learning styles and applying communication strategies that take into account the different styles can positively impact employee-employer interactions and lead to healthy organizational and individual wellbeing.

According to Dudley Lynch, in *Your High Performance Business Brain*, “we can use this powerful new way of understanding people to design better organizations, ... do a more effective and productive job of hiring and placing people, and to frame our management messages so that they can penetrate the natural filters of the mind.”

On the flip side, when organizations don’t consider the various learning styles and only, or predominantly, rely on one approach, some employees may become bored or inattentive, get discouraged, not participate in an organization’s wellness program at all, and may even get frustrated with organization and management itself and leave.

Your employees and your organization are too important to not better understand and apply communication tactics that cater to the various learning styles. If you achieve a balance in the mix of different learning/communication approaches that you use, all employees will receive information:

- Partly in the manner they prefer, which will lead to an increased comfort level and willingness to learn, and
- Partly in less preferred styles, which can also be valuable to help employees broaden their ability to think and act based on styles that they may not initially be comfortable with, but which they will have to use to be fully effective professionals.

What’s more, using a mix of communication strategies can reinforce messages. Information tends to “stick” with the intended receivers when they are exposed to the communications multiple times and in multiple ways.

# Visual Learning Style

## “Show me.”

Visual learners prefer to see or observe things, such as pictures, photographs, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, flip-charts, etc. These individuals tend to say, “show me” or “let’s take a look at that.”

They likely will best perform a new task after reading the instructions or watching someone else do it first. They work well from lists, and written directions and instructions.

“ Visual learners are readers — newsletters, brochures, emails.

Avoid verbal instructions.”

Typically, more than half of people in an organization will fall into the visual learning category. According to [Education.com](http://Education.com), visual learners are typically good readers, often pick up on details, don’t perform as well in noisy environments, and are highly organized. To promote the success of visual learners, you might want to create quiet environments and give employees reading materials about whatever it is you want them to know. Also, employees may appreciate having writing utensils handy so they can take notes.

Avoid verbal instructions with this group. If it isn’t written down or you don’t have anything to show, they likely will have difficulty absorbing the information/message.

### Communicate with visual learners by:

- Using article, graphs, diagrams, pictures, and outlines.
- Showing a PowerPoint presentation.
- Using a dry-erase board to capture the main points of a presentation or conversation.
- Encouraging note taking.
- Sitting individuals in meetings/presentations where they have direct eye contact with the facilitators/presenters.
- Using videos to make a point.
- Using color to categorize key subjects and categories.

# Auditory Learning Style

## “Can I talk to you a minute?”

Auditory learners prefer to learn by listening — to the spoken word (*either themselves or from others*) or from sounds and noises.

These individuals use phrases such as “tell me” or “let’s talk about it.” They can remember all the words to songs that they hear. They likely will best perform a new task after listening to instructions from an expert.

Two-way communication is key with this group. Although videos and presentations work better for these individuals than they do for visual learners, engaging the employees in conversation helps auditory learners best. Just be prepared for questions; auditory learners crave open dialogue.

Typically about 20% of a workforce falls into this learning style. They do well with lectures, sounds, and music. Because they learn better with sound, you might consider letting them have computer speakers and/or headphones at work so they can listen to music while working or processing health and wellness information. Be sure to also tape any presentations so they can go back and listen to them again.

“ Auditory learners are listeners — to the spoken word, sounds, and noises.

Avoid visual presentatons that don’t include sound or music.”

### Communicate with auditory listeners by:

- Communicating with the individual in person.
- Providing oral directions.
- Asking the individual to repeat back and summarize information that they heard.
- Asking questions to draw as much information as possible out of the learner and fill in the gaps with your own expertise.
- Providing oral reports.
- Engaging the individual in a conversation with a story.
- Encouraging the tape recording of presentations.

- Using videos to make a point.
- Holding group discussions.
- Using audiotapes.

# Kinesthetic Learning Style

“Let me try.”

“ Kinesthetic learners  
crave hands-on  
experiences.

Avoid learning that  
involves simply sitting  
and absorbing  
information. ”

Kinesthetic learners prefer physical experience — touching, feeling, holding, doing, and practical hands-on experiences. These individuals use phrases such as “let me try” or “how do you feel?” They likely will best perform a new task by trying it and learning as they go. They like to experiment, be hands-on, and typically don’t look at instructions first.

Reaching this type of learner may be the most challenging because it likely will require some creative thinking and execution. For example, to connect with employees about meditation techniques for stress management, it won’t be enough to just explain the meditation techniques through an article or have the kinesthetic learners passively watching or hearing instructions. Kinesthetic learners will need to try it out themselves.

True kinesthetic learners are a very small group. However, many people have a strong secondary kinesthetic style. These people won’t be able to sit still in meetings. Avoid static situations where kinesthetic learners must just sit and listen. Instead, to engage them, put them at the whiteboard taking notes, let them stand or walk around, or provide items to keep their hands busy. Have kinesthetic learners participate in simulations, demonstrations, or lead in role playing.

Kinesthetic learners are also empathetic toward others. As a result, your mood and approach will impact how they accept and process information. Try a friendly, positive approach or you may get push back.

## Communicate with these individuals by:

- Describing the feelings of your actions.
- Offering breaks in long presentations so they can re-energize and come back focused.
- Holding a conversation while moving (*taking a walk*).
- Keeping a conversation brief and letting the person take action.

- Encouraging note taking and drawing as physical activities.
- Role-playing key points you want the individual to learn.
- Using objects (*flash cards, balls*) to make a point and keep people moving.
- Offering experiential learning.
- Engaging the individual in learning with expressive interaction (*song, vocal tone*).

## What To Do Next:

People typically have a main preferred learning style and a secondary learning style. Some people have a very strong preference; other people may have a more even mixture of two or, less commonly, three styles.

The keys are recognizing that your team likely is composed of a mix of learning styles and that you will need to use a variety of communication strategies to effectively reach everyone.

When you know your employees' preferred learning style(s), you can select the learning/communication approaches that best works for them.

To get an idea of the learning styles makeup in your organization, consider having each of your team members take the Learning Style Assessment in the next section. This quick, 20-question assessment will help to get a better idea of who has what learning style.

Knowing this information will not only help you when communicating about health and wellness topics, but all information you need employees to know about.

If you need help with your communication efforts, the Hope Health team is always available. We have more than three decades of communications experience and have a keen understanding of how to blend the tried-and-true tactics with latest communication tools and strategies.

Contact us today at **800-334-4094** or **[info@HopeHealth.com](mailto:info@HopeHealth.com)**, and let's find a solution for your workplace!

# Learning Style Assessment

Circle the answer that best describes you.

1. **When using new equipment, I usually:**
  - a) read the instructions first
  - b) listen to an explanation from someone who has used it before
  - c) give it a try, figuring it out as I use it
  
2. **When needing directions for traveling, I usually:**
  - a) look at a map
  - b) ask for spoken directions
  - c) follow my gut and maybe use a compass
  
3. **When cooking something new, I:**
  - a) follow a written recipe
  - b) call someone for an explanation
  - c) follow my instincts, testing as I cook
  
4. **If I am teaching something new to someone, I usually:**
  - a) write down instructions
  - b) provide a verbal explanation
  - c) demonstrate first and then let the person try to do it him/herself
  
5. **I tend to say:**
  - a) watch how I do it
  - b) listen to me explain
  - c) give it a try
  
6. **When I shop for clothes, I tend to:**
  - a) imagine what the clothes would look like on me
  - b) talk about the clothing options with the store staff
  - c) try on the clothes
  
7. **If I were buying a new car, I would:**
  - a) read reviews
  - b) talk about what I need with my family or friends
  - c) just start test driving several types

- 8. When learning a new skill, I am most comfortable:**
  - a) watching what the instructor does
  - b) talking with the instructor about what I'm supposed to do
  - c) giving it a try and working it out as I go
  
- 9. When selecting food from a menu, I tend to:**
  - a) imagine what the food will look like
  - b) talk through the options in my head or with my companion
  - c) imagine what the food will taste like
  
- 10. When I concentrate, I:**
  - a) focus on the words or pictures in front of me
  - b) discuss the problem and the possible solutions in my head
  - c) move around, fiddle with pens and pencils, and touch things
  
- 11. My first memory is of:**
  - a) looking at something
  - b) being spoken to
  - c) doing something
  
- 12. When I'm anxious, I:**
  - a) visualize the worst-case scenarios
  - b) talk over in my head what worries me most
  - c) can't sit still, fiddle, and move around
  
- 13. I feel especially connected to other people because of:**
  - a) how they look
  - b) what they say to me
  - c) how they make me feel
  
- 14. When explaining something to others, I usually:**
  - a) show them what I mean
  - b) explain to them in different ways until they understand
  - c) encourage them to try whatever it is that I am explaining and talk them through it as they do it
  
- 15. I really love:**
  - a) watching movies/TV, looking at photography or art, or watching people
  - b) listening to music, the radio, or talking to friends
  - c) taking part in sporting activities, eating fine foods and wines, or dancing

16. **I first notice how people:**  
a) look and dress  
b) sound and speak  
c) stand and move
17. **If I am angry, I tend to:**  
a) keep replaying in my mind what it is that has upset me  
b) raise my voice and tell people how I feel  
c) stamp about, slam doors, and physically demonstrate my anger
18. **I find it easiest to remember:**  
a) faces  
b) names  
c) things I have done
19. **If I need to remember a list of items, I remember best if I:**  
a) write the list down and study it  
b) say the items aloud or in my head over and over  
c) move around and use my fingers to name each item
20. **I tend to say:**  
a) I see what you mean  
b) I hear what you are saying  
c) I know how you feel

Total how many A's, B's and C's you selected.

A =

B =

C =

If you chose mostly A, you have a **VISUAL** learning style.

If you chose mostly B, you have an **AUDITORY** learning style.

If you chose mostly C, you have a **KINESTHETIC** learning style.

You may find your learning style is a blend of two or three styles.

Sources:

“Studying Style: What’s Your Personal Learning Style?”

“Helping Visual Learning Succeed,” by Shannon Hutton

The Charmm’d Foundation

“Differentiation Through Learning Styles and Memory,” by Marilee Sprenger

We encourage you to share and forward this white paper  
to your colleagues and friends.

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It is intended to help managers produce or improve upon wellness and benefit  
communication. Please source excerpts (*source: Why Learning Styles Matter in  
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A note about this white paper: You’ll notice we didn’t include a lot of graphics in this  
white paper. We did that on purpose to keep the loading time fast and efficient for  
our readers. However, we wanted to note that in your communications, which are  
not in a white paper format, we encourage you to include graphics, charts,  
illustrations, or photos to complement your message and bring it to life visually.

To see how we do that in our products, visit **HopeHealth.com**.

# About Hope Health

We specialize in producing health, wellness, and business communications with break-through power for your employee and community populations.

## Our unique capabilities...

- **More than 30 years of serving workplaces, health plans, and communities.** We have more than 3,000 clients, in all 50 states, and of different sizes and descriptions.
- **Health, marketing, wellness, benefits, technical writing, clear design, and creative skills** — all combined into one powerful communication engine.
- **Easy-to-read and high comprehension content.** We're committed to Plain Language, improving health literacy, and producing relevant, actionable information.
- **Industry-leading custom content and design capabilities.** We customize more than 500 versions of communications each month — everything from simple branding to full-blown custom designed communications. How? Experienced staff, procedures developed over 30 years, technologically advanced business partners, and a powerful, proprietary software platform.
- **A robust and demanding medical review process** to ensure accuracy, credibility, and evidence-based health content. Our Medical Advisory Board is second to none, and employs a host of experts covering health, wellness, and financial issues.
- **And you get us.** A second generation, privately-held business. There is longevity, stability, and history here. Plus, energy, optimism, and a can-do attitude. It's just fun to work with us, because we love our clients and enjoy what we do for a living.

## Our history:

- **Founded in 1964 as Pension & Group Services, Inc. (P&G).** P&G was a full-service, third-party administrator. In the early 1980s, the International Health Awareness Center (*IHAC*) was established as a division of P&G. Today we're called Hope Health (*a dba of IHAC, Inc.*) with a complete dedication to producing easy-to-read and relevant health content.
- **In the mid-1980s a strategic alliance was established between** The Hope Heart Institute (*The Hope*) of Seattle, Washington, and IHAC for the purpose of developing health content that the average consumer can understand and act upon.
- **To this day,** The Hope remains our partner and friend, and we are proud to support their cardiovascular research and education programs with a portion of our proceeds.

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