

Learning Styles

PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 24

Background Information: Sandra Strick is the author of Strategies to Embrace the Adult Learner in *Professional Meeting Management*[®], fifth edition (Chapter 18). In that chapter, she delves into:

- Characteristics of adult learners
- Adult learning principles
- Various learning styles (visual, kinesthetic, auditory)
- Elements of the learning environment
- Generational differences in adult learners

PMM5 Postscript[™] Use: This PMM5 Postscript[™] discusses learning styles in more depth. The understanding of learning styles important is important to meeting managers because it will enable them to plan better meetings. In addition, this understanding will allow people to be a stronger:

- Communicator
- Manager
- Team member
- Presenter
- Sales person

Other PMM5 Postscript[™] touch on related subjects include PMM5 Postscript[™] Number 10 on training meetings and Number 25 on adult learning principles. This PMM5 Postscript[™] also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter.

Learner Outcomes: At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- Describe three styles of learning.
- Describe clues of each learning style.
- Identify strategies within meetings to reach all three learning styles.

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 18, Strategies to Embrace the Adult Learner
Author: Sandra Strick, Ph.D.



Learning Styles

As babies, our preferred mode of learning is gustatory and tactile evident in the fact that everything to be explored goes into a baby's mouth. As we grow older, people's learning style moves more into three styles of learning:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinesthetic

People have a blend of learning styles but typically one style is predominant.

If Visual... Predominant sense is sight/vision.

If Auditory... Predominant sense is hearing

If Kinesthetic... Predominant sense is touch

Estimates on visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners vary. Another source cites percentages slightly different than Strick (Smith):

- Visual 60%
- Auditory 30%
- Kinesthetic 10%

In reality, people are typically a combination of auditory styles Dr. Silverman examines the combination of styles in middle-school students. Her results indicate that at a high confidence factor of over 80% that (Silverman):

- At least one-third are strongly visual-spatial
- One-fifth are strongly auditory-sequential
- The remainder are a balance of both learning styles

Of that remainder (who are not strongly visual-spatial nor strongly auditory-sequential):

- Another 30% show a slight preference for visual-spatial learning style
- Another 15% show a slight preference for auditory-sequential learning style

The key for meeting managers is to ensure that the meeting appeals to all modalities offering a "hook" for visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners.

Pathway to Successful Communication

The pathway to successful communication whether in meetings, one-on-one or during sales presentations depends upon the ability to establish a two-way communication path between the speaker and the audience.

People enter a communication through a certain sensory pathway — either visual, auditory or tactile. Everyone has their own preferred style. But any receiver, the person or persons receiving the communication, in turn, has their own style. Based upon their own personality, they filter the messages in such a way that is most efficient for them.

People can improve communication when they respond to a person (the receiver) in a way that is in “sync” with the way they (the receiver) view the world.

The Clues

In one-on-one communications, one can observe what is the learning and preferred communication style of a person. This help be in “sync” with the other person while communicating. There are three areas to watch:

- Behavioral clues
- Language clues
- Body language clues

Behavioral indicators or clues for the three learning styles include the following:

Visual

- Organized
- Neat and orderly
- Observant
- Quiet
- Appearance oriented
- Deliberate
- Good speller
- Memorizes by picture
- Less distracted by noise
- Has trouble remembering verbal instructions
- Would rather read than be read to

Auditory

- Talks to self
- Easily distracted
- Moves lips / says words
- Can repeat back
- Math and writing difficult
- Spoken language easy
- Speaks in rhythmic pattern
- Likes music
- Can mimic tone, pitch and timbre
- Learns by listening
- Memorizes by steps, procedure, sequence

Kinesthetic

- Responds to physical rewards
- Touches people and stands close
- Moves a lot
- Learns by doing
- Memorizes by walking, seeing
- Points when reading

- Gestures a lot
- Responds physically
- Physically oriented
- Large physical reaction
- Early large muscle development

Auditory clues for the various learning styles are evident in the language used. A person can learn more about a person by listening to their vocabulary.

Visual learners will say:

Are you clear about it?
 I see what you mean.
 I get the picture.
 I am picturing...
 The way I see it...

Auditory learners will say:

I hear you.
 What I heard you saying...
 It sounds to me like ...

Kinesthetic learners will say:

I can get in touch with that.
 Can you grasp the concept?
 I found that...
 This feels like...

Finally, body language is the third area that helps differentiate learning styles:

Visual Learners adopt an open body position with head up and shoulders back

Auditory Learners may even turn their ear toward you when you are speaking. They tend to sit with their shoulders forward.

Kinesthetic Learners are often restless. They often adopt a posture of rounded shoulders and arms crossed in front with their hands folded.

Improving Communication

Understanding these different styles will allow people to be a better communicators. This translates into more effective relationships

By thinking through how a person learns and processes information, a meeting manager will be able to better communicate with that person. They will appear to put themselves in the other person's shoes. Ultimately, establishing rapport more easily and making the other person feel that you are effectively communicating with them

Ideas for Meetings, Training Events, Conferences or Communiqués

When challenged with a variety of different learning styles in a meeting, use the following suggestions to improve the effectiveness of speakers and presenters:

- Use a variety of styles to reach everyone in the audience
- Read the audience by studying their body language
- Respond more effectively to questions by answering the question using the same language as the question was posed
- Offer information in a way that benefits all learning styles. Diagrams, charts, pictures, films, and written directions benefit visual learners in an audience. Written notes also benefit visual and kinesthetic learners (the latter because the very movement of writing the words helps them learn).
- Regulate voice tone, inflection, and body language. This variety will help the auditory learners in the audience maintain interest and attention.
- Encourage participation to engage kinesthetic learners. They acquire information fastest when participating; they like toys, things to manipulate, other "props" and a more hands-on approach.

Summary

In today's business environment, finding better ways for people to learn will propel organizations forward. Strong minds fuel strong organizations. Meetings planners have an obligation to their stakeholders (meeting organizers and the participants) to plan meetings that appeal to all learning styles.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. Explore your own learning style using one of these websites <http://vak.free.fr/usa20110.htm> (10 questions) or the VAK (Visual Auditory Kinesthetic) test at <http://www.vaknlp.com/>. What new insight do you have about yourself?
2. What type of learning activities (icebreakers, group work, etc.) could be used to involve more learning styles in a meeting?
3. How might a meeting manager structure learning to occur in an informal setting? How about in a formal setting? Do you think one learning style favors a formal or informal setting type?
4. How would the following room sets appeal to each type of learning style?
 - Theater
 - Crescent rounds
 - Hollow-square

5. Differentiation is a popular technique in today's school systems where teachers work to uniquely position lesson plans to individual learners. If the students of today experience differentiation in the school system, what might they come to expect from meetings in the future?
6. How might participant's motivation be affected if a presenter does not appeal to their learning style? What is the long-term impact of a demoralized employee or member?

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