As I mentioned in my last article, Jeff Bardin, CISO of the Hanover Insurance Group, recently wrote an interesting article about communicating with upper management <http://www.csoonline.com/read/040106/communicate.html> and his points prompted me to expand on a couple of his points.

Mr Bardin wrote, “4. Know your professor; get an A. Query those who have had at least one audience with the C's as to their style and expectations. Learn of their personality types if possible (the Myers-Briggs test is one good way to approach this task).”

The Myers-Briggs personality model is described in detail at <http://tinyurl.com/9lpxy>. It uses four dimensions to categorize preferred personality types and helps people relate to each other more smoothly. The dimensions are direction (extraversion and introversion), processing (sensing and intuition), decision (thinking and feeling) and organization (judging and perception). Another valuable tool for helping people understand each other’s motivations is the Wilson Social Styles model <http://tinyurl.com/l3tu7>, which uses two dimensions to identify preferred ways of interacting: assertion and affect. In this model, people are described as Drivers, Expressives, Amiables and Analyticals – each with particular strengths, weaknesses and preferences for how they work best with others.

Both Myers-Briggs and Wilson Social Styles can help people work more effectively together by adapting to contrasting styles through good will and sensitivity. When I worked at Hewlett-Packard in the early 1980s, all employees participated in a fascinating seminar from Wilson Learning experts – one of the best courses I have ever taken in my life. We learned practical methods for working smoothly and effectively with people who might have rubbed us the wrong way if we had not understood that we were simply used to different expectations. One example that has come up many times in the decades since that course is the conflict that can occur between people with different needs for social interaction. Without going into detail, it’s enough to say that Analyticals and Drivers are goal-driven and put relatively little emphasis on social interactions at work, whereas Amiables value friendly interactions and need to get to know people to be able to work with them. I was rated as a type of Analytical; for example, when my wife asked me about a fellow Analytical friend at work with whom I had worked closely for four years, “Is he married?” I had to answer, “I have no idea.” The subject had never come up – we mostly talked about operating system internals.

So when I used to enter an Amiable’s office and be greeted with “Hi! How are you? How was your weekend? How’s your wife? How’s your dog? What about those Expos, eh?….“ I used to feel irritated and would sometimes cut the poor Amiable off abruptly – making this person-oriented colleague uncomfortable and even angry. After the Wilson Learning training, I learned to relax and to realize that a few minutes of friendly chat was a harmless way of establishing a rapport. Similarly, Amiables learned that when dealing with Analyticals and Drivers, most of whom like to get right down to business, perhaps a shorter period of friendliness would be appropriate – a minute or two, say, rather than ten minutes of banter.
As you will understand, such techniques are especially useful for information assurance specialists. We are constantly raising touchy issues that raise people’s hackles; starting off on the wrong foot or offending people by failing to realize what makes them uncomfortable or irritated just makes our job harder.

Now if we could just figure out how to apply these wonderful techniques to intercultural and international differences, perhaps we could prevent each other from bombing various parts of our planet into glassy wastelands.

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