

Interaction Styles™ A Social Styles Model



Linda V. Berens, Ph.D., is recognized internationally for her theoretical contributions to the field of psychological type, for developing related models, and for developing user-friendly training materials that apply practical understanding to individual differences. In addition to training a generation of type professionals, Berens is a human and organizational development practitioner who has helped individuals and teams recognize their strengths, transcend their weaknesses, and work together better. Berens founded InterStrength Associates and developed an integrated framework for individual differences through a three-model approach: Interaction Styles®, Essential Motivators and InterStrength™ Cognitive Dynamics. Berens is a former APTI President and long-time contributor to the type world.

Why Interaction Styles?

The Interaction Styles lens is rooted in social styles research done in the US in the 1920s.¹ Because Interaction Styles looks at personality from another perspective, it provides insights that you cannot get from using only psychological type. Berens' expertise in the 16 Types and Temperament models enabled her to develop a version of social styles that integrates well with these models.

Interaction Styles is a powerful addition to your personality type toolbox. It is based on behavioral and neurological observations and research—not on the internal mental functions of psychological type. What you learn from the model compliments your understanding of type. Using this lens gives you powerful insights and extends your understanding of yourself and others.

¹ See Berens 2008, pages 45-46, for the historical roots and framework of the Social Styles research and DiSC.

Interaction Styles®: The “HOW” of Us

Interaction Styles are patterns of behavior—not a set of traits. These patterns are organic and derive from neurophysiological tendencies. We naturally use one pattern over the others. An Interaction Style is a pattern of communication. Berens refers to Interaction Styles as “the ‘HOW’ of us,” as in how we choose to influence and engage with other people.

There are four Interaction Styles:

- Chart-the Course
- Behind-the-Scenes
- In-Charge
- Get-Things-Going

Interaction Styles have three main elements:

- Communication—Ways We Influence Others
 - Directing
 - Informing
- Roles—Ways We Define Relationships
 - Initiating
 - Responding
- Attention and Interest—Ways We Focus
 - Outcome Focus
 - Process Focus

Table 1: Roles and Communication Elements of the Four Interaction Styles

Roles	Communication	Communication
	Directing	Informing
Responding	Chart-the-Course	Behind-the-Scenes
Initiating	In-Charge	Get-Things-Going

Table 2: The Focus Element of the Four Interaction Styles

Focus		
Outcome	In-Charge	Behind-the-Scenes
Process	Chart-the-Course	Get-Things-Going

Communication: Directing and Informing Language

While we use both directing and informing language, we tend to prefer one style over the other. Problems arise when our differing preferences lead us to misunderstand each other, and those problems can potentially damage trust. For communicating, the best course of action is often to use directing language to provide clarity and to use informing language to get buy-in.

Here are brief descriptions of the differences between directing and informing communication.²

Table 3 Directing and Informing Communication

	Directing	Informing
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The task and the time it takes to accomplish it. • Actual accomplishment of the task. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation and giving information • Getting buy-in from others to the goal or process.
Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To give structure or to direct action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To evoke, draw forth, inspire, seek input.
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell, ask urge. • Moving forward non-verbally, sounding definite. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform, inquire, explain, describe. • Flowing, openly eliciting
Tendencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be impatient with emerging processes. • To try to act certain that they are right. • May be seen as bossy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be more patient with emerging processes. • To seem non-committal. • May be seen as indecisive.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ask John for specifics on this project.” • “Would you call and get the pricing and dates at the hotel for a conference?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “John has some information that might help you with this project. • “Do we have information on pricing and dates from that conference hotel?”

Roles: Responding and Initiating

When we engage with someone, we make a choice to *initiate* the conversation and get the interaction started, or to take a *responding role* and let the other person start the interaction.

² For more in-depth descriptions of Directing and Informing language, see Berens, 2008, page 19.

Responding and Initiating roles tend to look like this:³

Table 4 Initiating and Responding Roles

	Initiating Role	Responding Role
Focus	External world	Internal world
Intent	To reach out, to interact	To reach in, to reflect
Behavior	Initiate interactions Fast pace, active Extraverting and gregarious	Respond and reflect Slow pace, patient Introverting and solitary
Tendencies	To be impatient with slow pace. To be frustrated when others don't seem to want to talk or give feedback. May be seen as obtrusive.	To feel pressured by fast pace. To be surprised when people think they are angry or nonresponsive. May be seen as withholding
Examples	Think out loud. Jump right in.	Think before commenting. Reflect before speaking or acting.

Attention: Outcome Focus and Process Focus

Table 5 Outcome and Process Focus

	Outcome Focus	Process Focus
Focus	The product or end result.	How you get to the goal.
Intent	Ways to control aspects of production, resources, content.	Ways to have movement toward the goal.
Behavior	Control information flow Check against the ideal outcome as in artistic control. Ensure the result is achieved.	Create milestones or benchmarks. Check in with the others for progress. Motivate and forge ahead.
Tendencies	To get too focused on the outcome and ignore the role process plays in getting the outcome.	Get too focused on moving forward and ignore the impact on the outcome. Be too stuck on following the process or rushing to act without considering the result.
Examples	Behind-the-Scenes "Let's make sure things are in place before we go ahead." In-Charge "Let's get it done now!" "We don't have time to . . ."	Chart-the-Course "Let's trust the process." "What's the plan?" Get-Things-Going "We need to include everyone in this decision, then let's start."

³ For more in-depth descriptions of Responding and Initiating Roles, see Berens, 2008, page21.

An Overview of the Four Interaction Styles

The following chart is an overview of each of the Interaction Styles. Think about how what you see applies to yourself, as well as to others who you interact with. Imagine how the differences in styles can contribute to misunderstandings and conflicts. Knowing the styles informs you—but the goal is to commit to making space for each style, instead of thinking others are just wrong. Then you can flex your behaviors to help your interactions with others be more productive and less prone to creating misunderstandings or to damaging trust.

Table 6 Brief Descriptions of the Four Interaction Styles

Chart-the-Course	Behind-the-Scenes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a course of action in mind before proceeding. • Create one or more usable plans. • Make deliberate decisions. • Focus on giving guidance to make the right decision. • Analyze and figure out what needs to be done. • Aim for a desired result. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do what it takes to get the best decision possible. • See value in information from many sources and people. • Make consultative decisions, integrating many sources of input. • Focus on understanding the process to get a high-quality outcome. • Aim to produce the best possible products and results.
In-Charge	Get-Things -Going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get things accomplished, often through people. • Take rapid action to get things done. • Make quick decisions with confidence. • Execute actions, work all angles, and remove obstacles. • Focus on getting achievable results as soon as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get everyone involved to participate. • Move the group to action. • Make enthusiastic, consensual decisions that ensure buy-in. • Focus on interactions to get more from the group or individual members. • Explore options that keep things moving along. • Focus on getting an embraced result.

Learning More

Here are selected videos and printed resources to give you a more well-rounded and complete view of Berens' Essential Motivators model.

Printed Resources

Your first stop:

Order Linda Berens' *Understanding Yourself and Others®: An Introduction to Interaction Styles 2.0, 2008* book at [InterStrength](#). You'll also find laminated cards and other printed material for Interaction Styles at this link. You can buy an online version of this book at [InterStrength Institute Online Books](#).

The following are relevant selections to read in the book:

- **Interaction Styles and Stress: page 34.** Understanding Interaction Styles and stress can help you understand yourself *and* the sometimes mysterious stress reactions of others to you.
- **Perspective Shifting: pages 38-39.** Once you understand your own Interaction Style and how it differs with others', the next step is to use your knowledge to *flex your own behavior* to increase your effectiveness in dealing with others and how well you can avoid misunderstandings.
- **The Multi-Model Approach to Understanding Personality Differences: pages 41-43** Berens explains the relationship between the three psychological type models: 16 Types, Essential Motivators, and Interaction Styles.

Another book by Linda available on Amazon is:

[How to apply Interaction Styles to Improve Communications Interaction Essentials: 3 Proven Strategies to Remove Communication Barriers](#). This 2006-page book is a gold mine of information to help you apply your knowledge.

An article by Linda in the Bullet of Psychological Type – Volume 37, Issue 3 [Integrated Type™](#): *How Using Multiple Lenses Made a Difference*

Video Resources

Videos are a powerful way to explore personality type. Here is a selection for your consideration.

[Personality Types – The InterStrength™ Approach](#)

Linda Berens introduces an overview of the InterStrength Model and its applications

1. [History of Interaction Styles and Differences with DISC and Social Styles](#) – Linda shares the history of how she created Interaction Styles.
2. [Linda Berens & Interaction Styles - Joyce Meng's Type Talk Interview with Linda Berens](#) Joyce interviews Linda Berens to learn the four interaction styles: Chart-the-Course, In-Charge, Behind-the-Scenes, and Get-Things-Going
3. **Type Talks – Conversations with different Interaction Styles** - Joyce Meng's Series of Interviews with four people of each Interaction Style
 - a. [Behind-the-Scenes](#)
 - b. [Chart-the-Course](#)
 - c. [Get-Things-Going](#)
 - d. [In-Charge](#)
4. [Carol Linden on Natural Working Styles using Interaction Styles](#)
5. [Conversations about Berens Interaction Styles](#) – InterStrength-certified practitioner Carol Linden shares her successes with using Interaction Styles.
6. [Linda Berens Interview with Julia Mallory](#) - Leader and management consultant Julia Mallory explains how Interaction Styles has become the bedrock of her practice.
7. [Linda Berens InterStrength Playlist](#) – An entire YouTube playlist covering Interaction Styles, Essential Motivators, Intentional Drivers, and more.