



Office Archetypes

By Craig Harrison

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You don't have to work for Dunder Mifflin, Inc. to be surrounded by a challenging cast of characters. Recently I interacted with four distinctly different "types" of characters in the same morning. How many of these vignettes do you recognize?

The Mouth That Bored

On my way to my desk I was intercepted by Chatty Matty, the office mouth. Some might call Matt verbose, others would refer to him as loquacious. Simply put, Matt talks a lot! We all know chatty Mattys and chatty Cathys. Whether colleagues or customers, these people share endless details, lots of feelings, and often emotions as well, with a few vitals mixed in. They often spew forth a stream of consciousness. As listeners at times it feels like we're drowning in drama as they prattle on and on, often about nothing! Think "Trivial Pursuit."

Unlike Jeopardy, HE Just Wants Answers!

When I finally excused myself from Matt and made my way to my desk I was immediately confronted by my boss, Bottom Line Bob. Bob doesn't mince words. He cuts to the chase. He states facts and proclaims conclusions at every turn. And he's not interested in details. He barked out an edict. He needed results by lunchtime. I had my marching orders!

Unfortunately for me, I needed two colleagues' help before I could comply with Bob's request. Just my luck I needed input from Ms. Mean, Madeline, and Silent Sarah, the Thinker.

Moody's Moods Lack Love

Ms. Mean is gruff and abrupt. If she were a man her name would be Kurt. She speaks monosyllabically. Sometimes instead of a word Madeline would just grunt. I took a deep breath before approaching Madeline, if only to bolster my defense mechanisms. Ms. Mean resembles a volcano. Some days she simmers, other days she spews. One never knows what to expect from Madeline. Being mad and short-tempered, we naturally call her Maddy for short, though often not in her presence.

Silent Night And Day

After a terse exchange with Madeline I beat a hasty retreat with some hard-earned information I needed for my assignment. Next I prepared for the extraction procedure required to glean more needed information and support from Silent Sarah.

I may never know why Sarah took a vow of silence. She may be shy, reticent to mingle, weary of office politics, or lacking self-confidence. Or perhaps, being the thinker, she does her processing internally. The key with her is that we have to ask. She doesn't volunteer information. She guards it like it's the Holy Grail. She seemingly hoards her ideas and information. Our only choice is to ply her with questions in hopes of penetrating her wall of silence. This morning I succeed in gleaning enough critical information to handle my business. I rejoiced!

Tips for Traversing These Office Archetypes

❖ **Wordiness Has Worth**

In life there are fast talkers, close talkers and long talkers. Your strategy for communicating with the latter is to build rapport through commonalities. As you patiently listen to the Chatty Mattys and Cathys regard the time spent as rapport building. Look for shared experiences, commonalities you can build upon and bond through. Nodding in agreement may curtail some of the these colleagues' loquaciousness.

❖ **Line For Line with Bottom Liners**

Mirror Bob's and Betty's style of communication by providing executive summaries, abstracts and short responses, explanations and descriptions. If Bob or Betty want more detail, depth or background, he or she will ask for it. Be deliberate, focused and pointed in your communication with these types of managers, co-workers and customers.

❖ **Short and Sweet**

When dealing with Mr. or Ms. Mean you needn't mire them in endless conversation. They clearly don't revel in dialog. I recommend testing the waters to gauge their mood. Use a trial balloon. Give a peace offering in the form of an opening greeting or question. If they bite or bark, back off. If they are human, proceed further. You needn't impose yourself on them if they're having a bad hair day, nor subject yourself to their moodiness. Don't demean yourself. They can keep their mood all to their self!

❖ **Drawing Out The Thinker**

Use a blend of open- and closed-ended questions to draw out The Thinker. Solicit their opinions on matters. Pointedly ask her or him what they think about key issues or concepts at play. We're all conditioned to respond to questions. This transitions the thinker to speaker, articulating their deep thoughts, ideas and perspectives on matters.

Now, ask yourself: "what's my type?" What are my characteristics as a communicator? How do I like to communicate? How do I like to be communicated with? Am I one of the four types above, or another type? Now let others know how best to communicate with you!



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