Each of us comes with some learned or comfortable modes of operating, which shapes our leadership style. Some of us prefer to think out loud, and others prefer not to speak until we have developed a fully-formed idea in our head that makes good sense to us, or we may even want to confirm it with some research before uttering it aloud. Some of us get right down to “brass tacks” and don’t like a long-winded conversation without a clear point, and others don’t feel comfortable until we’ve had time to be social and connect before discussing business. You may be very action-oriented and want to connect everything to some immediate activity to be taken, or you may prefer to have multiple interesting discussions over time to develop ideas and thinking before committing to taking specific action.

None of these styles are “right” or “wrong” or more or less effective than the others. It is important to know which style is yours, how to recognize the style of others, and as a leader, learn to meet the other person closer to their preferred style – in order to be most effective in reaching your goals. The best leaders can connect with anyone, by being flexible in their own style to make the other person comfortable and able to contribute their best to the conversation or interaction.

At your best, when you are not feeling stressed, you may find it easy to adjust your expectations, your manner, your leadership style, to accommodate others and put them at ease. However, when we are stressed, we all retreat to our behavioral corner and fall back on the style that makes us most comfortable, and fail to adapt to that other person. This generates unnecessary friction in the relationship and makes it harder. When we need to be cultivating “positive” interactions with someone, big style differences can make almost any interaction less positive for both parties.

The magic ratio to have at least a neutral relationship with anyone is 3:1. You need three positive interactions for every negative interaction. If you give praise easily, listen attentively, respect others opinions and values, they are more likely to go the extra mile for you, forgive your mistakes when you make them, and accept criticism from you more readily and take action with it.

So how can you begin flexing your style today to improve your relationships and become a stronger, more effective leader? Start here:

1. **Understand your own natural style.** Use People Styles or Social Styles or another communication style survey to see where you fall. Contact us if you want a specific recommendation. Pay particular attention to how you behave when under high stress – this is often the marker of your most natural or comfortable style.

2. **Notice the styles of others.** Do they like to start with small talk, or are they all about getting to the point quickly and moving on? What do they do under stress? The book “People Styles at Work” is a great place to look for clues to working with other styles and learning to recognize them. You can even have your teams take the simple assessment and talk about how to use them to improve working relationships and communication.

3. **Acknowledge style differences and work to meet half-way.** When you are working with people with a very different style, let them know that your preferences are different, and that you will work to meet them closer to their comfort zone, and how you would like them to also shift to meet you part-way. Upfront communication reduces our negative judgment of other styles and makes it a common problem we can work on together.

Becoming a more flexible leader makes you a more powerful leader. The greatest leaders are those who can modify their behavior to create results, rather than staying stuck in their own behavioral box.

Where could a little more flexibility make the most difference for you right away?
Remember, instead of the Golden Rule, stop treating others the way you want to be treated, and treat them the way they want to be treated.