

The Quiet Ones

Introduction

To start, I quote Nicole Fallon Taylor, Business News Daily Assistant Editor. “No one is a pure introvert or extrovert. However, every workplace has representatives of each personality type, and there are a few fundamental differences between the two that affect how they interact with their colleagues. Introverts tend to keep to themselves, preferring one-on-one conversations and solo work. Extroverts enjoy group projects, talking through their thoughts and connecting with others throughout the day. These behaviors often lead to unfair assumptions and judgments about both groups, which may cause tension within the team”. For the purpose of my article I have named the introverts the quiet ones, and extroverts are the louder ones.

Over the years I have been able to watch and work with all sorts of personalities in aviation. I have been exposed to those who assumed they knew it all and by culture or personality never allowed themselves to ask questions. Then there were those who, although highly intelligent and well trained, were afraid or reluctant to ask questions. Both these traits can cause problems when working within a team environment. I have observed many of the different human traits that are discussed in the human factors training. I found the two that I just mentioned to be among the most interesting from a teamwork and management point of view.

In discussions with Mr. Escobar, the subject of why we have on-going human factors issues came up. One reason may be the interaction between these two types of personalities. Another, for future discussion, is that as the generations change out we are not doing a

good job of passing down our hard earned experience. Magazines like DOM work to do that.

In this article I want to try and deal with one of the more interesting types of personalities and how failure to identify and manage this type can undermine your team.

Personality Traits

People who know me may say it is very strange for Roger to write about this as he is one who never stops talking. So true, and a personality trait I had to learn to control somewhat. I never quite succeeded and I have met others who could out-talk me. Enough self confession and onto why bringing out the quieter ones and listening to them is so important.

Some people, like me, have to think out loud and others just take in the information, digest it and then fail to speak up. Some are just very shy and find speaking up to be very stressful. Others simply try to win their debating points by overwhelming the opposition with thoughts and words. Not that the louder ones aren't intelligent and have many sound answers, the problem is that they eliminate any good responses from the quieter ones. As a leader or manager, especially as a leader, you want to hear every person's input.

So for this article I will say there are three distinct kinds of personalities, quiet ones, middle of the road and noisy louder ones. The middle of the road type generally participates when they need to and are not shy about speaking up. Since they are not really a management challenge we are left with the other two personality types to discuss.

Many leaders in the maintenance field do, from my experience, tend to be from the more vocal group. One reason is that aircraft maintenance technicians tend to have personality types that fall into the quiet,

introspective category. A study was done in Canada comparing pilots and technicians (AMEs) and found interesting differences. I am really generalizing but pilots were more outgoing and assertive, technicians were quiet and more solitary in nature. I am sure this is no state secret. We all know many technicians who just want to do their technical work and be left alone. It makes sense that in an aviation environment the technician who gets noticed by the pilot manager and leaders will be the louder ones. I recall that about 20% of technicians fit into this mold and 80% of pilots were in the more assertive category.

Okay, by now you know I am not a trained expert in the field of human characteristics but you can look around or back over your own career and hopefully see what I am saying does makes some sense.

Bring Them Out

So noting the issue of managing and leading these different people, what should one do? Well, the first step is to recognize your own type. If you are a very quiet person leading a bunch of the louder sorts, it will be a challenge. You will need to be firm in slowing them down and getting them to wait until you digest the issues and ask for their input. One good rule of thumb is to set good meeting rules. Then you stick to one issue and not let them lead you over to secondary matters, which they tend to do. They also like to jump in and take over from the quieter ones. You must put a gentle stop to that to allow the quieter ones continue with their thoughts.

If you are a louder kind of person, then you must use the 'round the table' system to make sure each and every one has equal input. It is also a good tactic to go back to each meeting attendee for a final comment or agreement to the decision before moving on. It is very important to get everyone to verbally support the decision. That brings

out the quiet, thoughtful ones and stops the possibility of he or she leaving the meeting thinking that they were not consulted and thus resent the outcome. The other problem here is that team members do not get the benefit of their input. Hopefully, if the quiet ones were not brought into the discussion they will come to you privately and let you know.

A couple of hangar stories to illustrate my points. Once in my headquarters job I was reporting to an Ex-Brigadier General who was also a professional aeronautical engineer. I presented him with a paper for a decision around 15:00 hours and waited for him to say, okay Roger, go for it! He just said thank you and put it in his take home work briefcase. I said, "Sir, my staff and I have studied it and it is good to go." He replied that he wanted to think about it overnight. He was the quiet type and I admired his leadership greatly. I went back to my staff and they asked what happened. I said, "He wants to think about it." Well, they were shocked as the previous director had been a fighter pilot. He had an engineering background as well, but the pilot side of his personality dominated. He would ask a few questions and then decide. One director was not better than the other but they had two very different approaches, one quiet and one louder. By the way, he did approve my program direction but I learned a valuable lesson as well. Allow people think about decisions, not everyone likes to think out loud like I do and as most of my staff did.

Incidentally, I learned later in my diversity work that we like to surround ourselves with like minded people which explains why I had so many talkative types around me. Luckily though, I also had many who were quieter otherwise I would likely have missed out on some sound advice.

Sometimes in a very technical world like aviation we ignore the quiet ones on the team who are not technicians. I recall a senior regional job I had where at my first senior staff meeting I noticed that no administrative managers were present, only the technical superintendents were there. I asked my admin manager why she was not attending and she said only AMEs were allowed. I immediately changed that office rule and included them in the discussions. It made a big difference in both in the tenor and conduct of the meeting.

Obviously a senior technical person's position on a technical matter carried more weight, but the quieter ones who had no technical background also had valuable input. I digress a bit but put simply, use all the team's talents because groups can be overwhelming as well, in this case the AME group.

Teamwork between the types

This really leads into the diversity discussions we all now have; the world has always been diverse but it is now more acceptable to note how people's differences can add to the team's strength. I was fortunate to be an executive champion of diversity for some 10 years. This notion of the quieter/louder kinds of people cuts across all ethnic groups.

During my international work I found that some countries had more outspoken citizens than others. The same rules apply; you need to listen to the quieter nationals as well.

The mixture of types works best; one can feed off the other. You, as leader, just need to ensure space is made for both in your meetings and work environment. At times you may need to slow down the more outspoken types to encourage a quiet place for the shyer ones. I found

that going for coffee with quiet thinkers was a good way to allow them to fully express their views outside the rush of urgent problem solving meetings. Some interesting points follow.

"The manager needs to recognize each team member's personality type and delegate tasks in such a way as to highlight employees' strengths and mitigate their weaknesses. You don't want to ask a talented yet scatterbrained extrovert to take lead on a project that requires an extreme attention to details." – *Tim Backes*

"An employer would do well to actively facilitate conversations from introverts and limit extroverts' talking so they don't dominate any group action. Extroverts can easily annoy an introvert by noise and too much talk, although you may never outwardly know when that has taken place." – *Dorothy Tannahill-Moran*

The outgoing types can shine in situations where events are happening rapidly and you need position papers or decisions made quickly. It's all in your skill at noting each individual's type and assigning the work best suited to their skills. Be very alert so that in the excitement of operational meetings you take the time to allow all to participate, especially the quieter people. If you do not, you may miss the benefit of their analysis. It adds to their self esteem, brings in well thought out ideas and probably will not harm most of the louder personalities self worth or egos.

Conclusion

Who knows, maybe my desire to write about this topic was a way for me to say to the quieter types I worked with, thank you. To the louder ones I hope you noticed that I was not the only talkative one around the AME community.

Hopefully none of my pilot friends will take offense to being noted as assertive, which they need to be, as I admire their ability to speak on anything at a moment's notice with confidence and self assurance.

To my technician and maintenance professional colleagues, just take a moment to make sure the quiet ones get a say. It can only strengthen your maintenance operation. Take the time to listen to them, it is very worth while and assures all staff you value their input and opinions.