

Exercise Learning Styles

It is obvious that we all learn things in different ways. Why then do instructors try and train exercisers in the same way?

Charlene Hutsebaut looks at the Colours model that she's successfully used with clients for well over a decade.



Do you sometimes find yourself wondering why some client sessions run smoothly, while others seem like an up-stream struggle? Some clients feel like easy friends, while others seem awkward and difficult. With the former scenario, you may literally be speaking their language because your preferred behaviours and learning styles are closely matched to theirs, or you have intuitively discovered how to work with them. And remember - this is not a one-way street; your client could be picking up on either the enjoyment or the struggles of working with you.

You can 'up' the enjoyment of your sessions for both you and your client by getting to know your client's behaviour preferences and learning style. I believe that in order to be great personal trainers or health practitioners, we need to be client-centred, which means that we need to know ourselves well first, so that we can then offer them our best service.

This may seem like a daunting task to you, but in reality, there are simple tools you can use to assess yourself and your clients. I believe that using these tools will enhance your client's and your enjoyment of sessions and ease of learning. When you know yourself and your client, it will be easier to 'speak their language'. This can then mean better results for clients, as well as better retention rates for your business; not to mention a more fulfilling work environment for everyone.

Assess Our Learning Styles

Let's start with a guide I discovered through an excellent business coach who I met years ago. It's called the Success Insights Wheel. Most online information about this method is through corporate training-type sites, although here is one which you can access: www.discinsights.com/disc-assessment-edisc-profile.html.

Simply explained; after filling in an online series of questions, you will receive a report and a wheel that shows your behavioural style (natural and adapted). These types of evaluations measure behaviour only.

The first test I took back in 2001 measured four dimensions of normal behaviour. They were:

- How I responded to problems or challenges
- How I influenced others to my point of view
- How I responded to the pace of the environment
- How I responded to rules and procedures set by others

The Success Insights Wheel

The Success Insights Wheel diagram is represented in a simple way in terms of the colours and their meanings. After you've filled in the questionnaire, you'll be categorised as a spot somewhere in the circle. Closer to the centre means that you are generally more adaptive to the other styles, whereas closer to the periphery means that you are likely more extreme in the listed traits. Often you can be quite responsive to adjacent colours, but you'll possibly find it hard to relate to the colour that's opposite to you.



“Behavioural research suggests that the most effective people are those who understand themselves; both their strengths and weaknesses, so they can develop strategies to meet the demands of their environment.”

Richard Moat

The Colours

Reds

Red behaviour types are what I term ambitious and driven. They push boundaries and are determined, competitive and purposeful. Clients in this group will love keeping score against you or other gym members, with charts. They will also demand the best out of you as a trainer. These people may also work well with goal-setting and will usually want to get down to business in the sessions.

Words that may work well to encourage reds:

- Excellent
- Distinctive
- First-class
- Strong
- Supreme
- Outstanding

Blues

Blue group individuals display precise, analytical and questioning behaviours. These people will enjoy keeping track of numbers and stats for their workouts. They will either want to keep their own log sheets or keep track with an online system such as Strava or Training Peaks. Explanations and reasoning behind the exercises or programmes you are giving may be important to these clients. Like 'reds', 'blues' will want to follow the programme in sessions and can be rigid with sets and repetitions.

Words that may work well to encourage blues:

- Exemplary
- Skilful
- On-track
- Competent
- Proficient
- Practiced

Greens

Greens exhibit behaviours such as being caring, gentle, relaxed and patient. They may like a bit of chat during sessions and will enjoy being encouraged and reinforced regarding their performance and results.

Positive and nurturing feedback works well with

these clients.

Words that may work well to encourage greens:

- Wonderful
- Enjoyable
- Fabulous
- Marvellous
- Superb
- Delightful

Yellows

Yellows exhibit behaviours such as being demonstrative, outgoing, enthusiastic and sociable. So, like ‘greens’, they may like some conversation during workouts. It is important to keep them focused to get through sessions. Strike the balance between the client enjoying the social aspect and still getting through the movements.

Words that may work well to encourage yellows:

- Sensational
- Magnificent
- Tremendous
- Terrific
- Brilliant
- Spectacular

Sensory Preferences

There are also differing ways in which human beings learn with regards to their senses. People can be **visual**, **auditory** or **kinaesthetic**.

Visual learners work well when they are shown movements first. Of course, verbal instruction should be included while teaching in order to reinforce what they are seeing. I have a client who I have been seeing for twelve years who is definitely a visual learner. I can say the name of an exercise and after all this time, she still needs me to demonstrate before she can execute the movement. These learners will also work well with visual cues using a mirror, watching themselves perform the movement. Always be sure that the client is comfortable using mirrors first. When writing programmes for these individuals, include photos or diagrams of exercises.

Auditory-based learners do well listening to instruction and processing this in their brains to what they are being asked to do. They learn through hearing and speaking. Written programmes may not work as well for these clients, although if they are taught first verbally and with discussion, a written programme which is precise and short may be a tool for them. These clients may work well with verbally repeating to you what has just been taught. So, once you have talked through and demonstrated an exercise, ask them to repeat to you what you have said. This is another way for them to process the information. Some experts state that these individuals will learn better with background sound such as music or voices.

Kinaesthetic clients learn by doing. Keeping them moving around during sessions may be important. Allow them to experiment with movement patterns you have taught them because self-discovery is important for them. They may not learn as well through reading or listening, but more so through feeling how their body is in space. Like auditory learners, experts say that these people may learn better while listening to music. Do remember that this can be a personal preference, so discuss music, song selection and volume before turning it on.

When working with a client, actively listen to the

words they use to understand which style they might be. Make notes after sessions for several weeks in order to see a pattern. Also, directly ask your client what style they think they are. This language can then be used when speaking to them. This is when ‘talking their language’ works well for enjoyment of sessions and effective learning.

Visual

- See, look, view, clear, imagine
- “an eyeful”, “appears to me”, “I see”, “eye to eye”, “see to it”, “in view of”, “mind’s eye”, “mental picture”.

Auditory

- Hear, listen, be-heard, sound
- “clear as a bell”, “I hear you”, “express yourself”, “to tell the truth”, “describe in detail”, “loud and clear”.

Kinaesthetic

- Feel, touch, grasp, catch-on
- “boils down to”, “connect with”, “get a handle on”, “sharp as a tack”, “come to grips with”, “hand in hand”, “firm foundations”.

Getting to know and understand yourself and your clients can be extremely rewarding. Being regularly mindful with clients who are opposite or slightly different to you is crucial. You may be using language or behaviours that are not natural for you. What I have found through years of sessions is that once you know individual clients better, you will develop a natural flow. Those clients you found difficult in the past, may become more engaging and their sessions more gratifying. **tsn**



*References upon request