

Conversation Style Inventory

Following, guiding, directing: where do I tend to land?

Time
20 to 30 minutes

Group
Individual, then group

Pages
Three

Discuss

About 3 minutes

- What is a personal inventory of our approach?
- Why does it help to understand our own approach?
- How can we look honestly at our approach and growth areas?
- We agree to go easy on ourselves and each other.
- Notice what comes naturally, happens most often and feels most comfortable.

Think of four people

About 2 minutes. Jot initials or a nickname only.

Think of people you work with who stretch your skills. For example: someone who has recently been without housing, someone struggling with alcohol or drugs, someone who has said they'll never reach their goal, and someone who has turned down a service that could help.

Fill in the inventory

About 3 minutes, on the next page. Then find yourself on the continuum.

Talk it over

- How does this feel? Does it seem accurate?
- When might each style be the right fit?

Self inventory

For each person, mark the column that happened most often in the past month.

Person	I seem unconcerned with their wishes	I recognize and honor their choices, including no change	I struggle with their choices or press them to change
1			
2			
3			
4			

Person	We're in the room, but not much is happening	We're working in partnership	We're working against each other
1			
2			
3			
4			

Person	I let the session go wherever they take it	I draw out their own views on change	I present the reasons for change
1			
2			
3			
4			
Total marks			

Column 1 leans toward following, column 2 toward guiding, column 3 toward directing.

Conversation style continuum

	Following 1 · 2 · 3	Guiding 4 · 5 · 6	Directing 7 · 8 · 9
Influence	Little or no influence on the session.	Steady influence, often invited by the person.	Frequent influence, often uninvited, up to dominating.
Topic	Mostly in the person's hands. Can wander far.	Stays on the target behavior. Wandering gets gently redirected.	Stays on target, and can veer into blaming, shaming or arguing.
Helper's tools	Listening, simple reflections, exploring values.	OARS, simple and complex reflections, highlighting change talk, next steps.	Questions, problem solving, selling, explaining, educating, consequences.
Who talks	The person talks; the helper mostly listens.	The person talks; the helper guides, more or less often.	Equal talk, then the helper talks more than the person.
How it feels	Like therapy, sometimes one-sided.	Natural.	Some disagreement, maybe a power struggle. The person may shut down.

Next steps

● If you lean toward following

Highlight change talk
 Double-sided reflections
 More complex reflections
 Change rulers
 Menu of options
 Gentle redirection

● If you lean toward directing

Fewer questions, more reflections
 Ask permission
 Explore the person's values
 Listen and explore
 Validate sustain talk

Adapted from the MITI (2010) and from Shawn Smith, MINT.