

## 1.7: Your Principles of Management Survivor's Guide

### Learning Objectives

1. Know your learning style.
2. Know how to match your style to the circumstances.
3. Use the gauge-discover-reflect framework.

Principles of management courses typically combine knowledge about skills and the development and application of those skills themselves. For these reasons, it is helpful for you to develop your own strategy for learning about and developing management skills. The first part of this strategy should be based on your own disposition toward learning. The second part of this strategy should follow some form of the gauge-discover-reflect process that we outline at the end of this section.

### Assess Your Learning Style

You can assess your learning style in a number of ways. At a very general level, you can assess your style intuitively (see “What Is Your Intuition about Your Learning Style?”); however, we suggest that you use a survey instrument like the Learning Style Index (LSI), the output from which you can then readily compare with your intuition. In this section, we discuss the dimensions of the LSI that you can complete easily and quickly online. The survey will reveal whether your learning style is active or reflective, sensory or intuitive, visual or verbal, and sequential or global. This section is based heavily on the work of Richard K. Felder and Linda K. Silverman. In addition to their research, there is an online instrument used to assess preferences on four dimensions (active or reflective, sensing or intuitive, visual or verbal, and sequential or global) of a learning style model formulated by Felder and Soloman of North Carolina State University. The Learning Styles Index (LSI) may be used at no cost for noncommercial purposes by individuals who wish to determine their own learning style profile and by educators who wish to use it for teaching, advising, or research.

### What Is Your Intuition About Your Learning Style?

Your learning style may be defined in large part by the answers to four questions:

1. How do you prefer to process information: actively—through engagement in physical activity or discussion? Or reflectively—through introspection?
2. What type of information do you preferentially perceive: sensory (external)—sights, sounds, physical sensations? Or intuitive (internal)—possibilities, insights, hunches?
3. Through which sensory channel is external information most effectively perceived: visual—pictures, diagrams, graphs, demonstrations? Or verbal—words, sounds? (Other sensory channels like touch, taste, and smell are relatively untapped in most educational environments, and are not considered here.)
4. How do you progress toward understanding: sequentially—in continual steps? Or globally—in large jumps, holistically?

TRY IT OUT HERE: <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>

### Active and Reflective Learners

Everybody is active sometimes and reflective sometimes. Your preference for one category or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. A balance of the two is desirable. If you always act before reflecting, you can jump into things prematurely and get into trouble, while if you spend too much time reflecting, you may never get anything done.

“Let’s try it out and see how it works” is an active learner’s phrase; “Let’s think it through first” is the reflective learner’s response. If you are an active learner, you tend to retain and understand information best by doing something active with it—discussing it, applying it, or explaining it to others. Reflective learners prefer to think about it quietly first.

Sitting through lectures without getting to do anything physical but take notes is hard for both learning types but particularly hard for active learners. Active learners tend to enjoy group work more than reflective learners, who prefer working alone.

### Sensing and Intuitive Learners

Everybody is sensing sometimes and intuitive sometimes. Here too, your preference for one or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. To be effective as a learner and problem solver, you need to be able to function both ways. If you overemphasize intuition, you may miss important details or make careless mistakes in calculations or hands-on work; if you overemphasize sensing, you may rely too much on memorization and familiar methods and not concentrate enough on understanding and innovative thinking.

Even if you need both, which one best reflects you? Sensors often like solving problems by well-established methods and dislike complications and surprises; intuitors like innovation and dislike repetition. Sensors are more likely than intuitors to resent being tested on material that has not been explicitly covered in class. Sensing learners tend to like learning facts; intuitive learners often prefer discovering possibilities and relationships.

Sensors tend to be patient with details and good at memorizing facts and doing hands-on (laboratory) work; intuitors may be better at grasping new concepts and are often more comfortable than sensors with abstractions and mathematical formulations. Sensors tend to be more practical and careful than intuitors; intuitors tend to work faster and to be more innovative than sensors.

Sensors don't like courses that have no apparent connection to the real world (so if you are sensor, you should love principles of management!); intuitors don't like "plug-and-chug" courses that involve a lot of memorization and routine calculations.

## Visual and Verbal Learners

In most college classes, very little visual information is presented: students mainly listen to lectures and read material written on whiteboards, in textbooks, and on handouts. Unfortunately, most of us are visual learners, which means that we typically do not absorb nearly as much information as we would if more visual presentation were used in class. Effective learners are capable of processing information presented either visually or verbally.

Visual learners remember best what they see—pictures, diagrams, flowcharts, time lines, films, and demonstrations. Verbal learners get more out of words—written and spoken explanations. Everyone learns more when information is presented both visually and verbally.

## Sequential and Global Learners

Sequential learners tend to follow logical, stepwise paths in finding solutions; global learners may be able to solve complex problems quickly or put things together in novel ways once they have grasped the big picture, but they may have difficulty explaining how they did it. Sequential learners tend to gain understanding in linear steps, with each step following logically from the previous one. Global learners tend to learn in large jumps, absorbing material almost randomly without seeing connections, and then suddenly "getting it."

Many people who read this description may conclude incorrectly that they are global since everyone has experienced bewilderment followed by a sudden flash of understanding. What makes you global or not is what happens before the light bulb goes on. Sequential learners may not fully understand the material, but they can nevertheless do something with it (like solve the homework problems or pass the test) since the pieces they have absorbed are logically connected. Strongly global learners who lack good sequential thinking abilities, however, may have serious difficulties until they have the big picture. Even after they have it, they may be fuzzy about the details of the subject, while sequential learners may know a lot about specific aspects of a subject but may have trouble relating them to different aspects of the same subject or to different subjects.

## Adapt Your Style

OK, so you've assessed your learning style. What should you do now? You can apply this valuable and important information about yourself to how you approach your principles of management course and the larger P-O-L-C framework.

## Active Learners

If you act before you think, you are apt to make hasty and potentially ill-informed judgments. You need to concentrate on summarizing situations and taking time to sit by yourself to digest information you have been given before jumping in and discussing it with others.

If you are an active learner in a class that allows little or no class time for discussion or problem-solving activities, you should try to compensate for these lacks when you study. Study in a group in which the members take turns explaining different topics to one another. Work with others to guess what you will be asked on the next test, and figure out how you will answer. You will always retain information better if you find ways to do something with it.

## Reflective Learners

If you think too much, you risk doing nothing—ever. There comes a time when a decision has to be made or an action taken. Involve yourself in group decision making whenever possible, and try to apply the information you have in as practical a manner as possible.

If you are a reflective learner in a class that allows little or no class time for thinking about new information, you should try to compensate for this lack when you study. Don't simply read or memorize the material; stop periodically to review what you have read and to think of possible questions or applications. You might find it helpful to write short summaries of readings or class notes in your own words. Doing so may take extra time but will enable you to retain the material more effectively.

## Sensory Learners

If you rely too much on sensing, you tend to prefer what is familiar and concentrate on facts you know instead of being innovative and adapting to new situations. Seek out opportunities to learn theoretical information and then bring in facts to support or negate these theories.

Sensors remember and understand information best if they can see how it connects to the real world. If you are in a class where most of the material is abstract and theoretical, you may have difficulty. Ask your instructor for specific examples of concepts and procedures, and find out how the concepts apply in practice. If the teacher does not provide enough specifics, try to find some in your course text or other references or by brainstorming with friends or classmates.

## Intuitive Learners

If you rely too much on intuition, you risk missing important details, which can lead to poor decision making and problem solving. Force yourself to learn facts or memorize data that will help you defend or criticize a theory or procedure you are working with. You may need to slow down and look at detail you would otherwise typically skim.

Many college lecture classes are aimed at intuitors. However, if you are an intuitor and you happen to be in a class that deals primarily with memorization and rote substitution in formulas, you may have trouble with boredom. Ask your instructor for interpretations or theories that link the facts, or try to find the connections yourself. You may also be prone to careless mistakes on tests because you are impatient with details and don't like repetition (as in checking your completed solutions). Take time to read the entire question before you start answering, and be sure to check your results.

## Visual Learners

If you concentrate more on pictorial or graphical information than on words, you put yourself at a distinct disadvantage because verbal and written information is still the main preferred choice for delivery of information. Practice your note taking, and seek out opportunities to explain information to others using words.

If you are a visual learner, try to find diagrams, sketches, schematics, photographs, flowcharts, or any other visual representation of course material that is predominantly verbal. Ask your instructor, consult reference books, and see whether any videotapes or CD-ROM displays of the course material are available. Prepare a concept map by listing key points, enclosing them in boxes or circles, and drawing lines with arrows between concepts to show connections. Color-code your notes with a highlighter so that everything relating to one topic is the same color.

## Verbal Learners

As with visual learners, look for opportunities to learn through audiovisual presentations (such as CD-ROM and Webcasts). When making notes, group information according to concepts, and then create visual links with arrows going to and from them. Take every opportunity you can to create charts, tables, and diagrams.

Write summaries or outlines of course material in your own words. Working in groups can be particularly effective: you gain understanding of material by hearing classmates' explanations, and you learn even more when you do the explaining.

## Sequential Learners

When you break things down into small components you are often able to dive right into problem solving. This seems to be advantageous but can often be unproductive. Force yourself to slow down and understand why you are doing something and how it is connected to the overall purpose or objective. Ask yourself how your actions are going to help you in the long run. If you can't think of a practical application for what you are doing, then stop and do some more "big picture" thinking.

Most college courses are taught in a sequential manner. However, if you are a sequential learner and you have an instructor who jumps around from topic to topic or skips steps, you may have difficulty following and remembering. Ask the instructor to fill in the skipped steps, or fill them in yourself by consulting references. When you are studying, take the time to outline the lecture material for yourself in logical order. In the long run, doing so will save you time. You might also try to strengthen your global-

thinking skills by relating each new topic you study to things you already know. The more you can do so, the deeper your understanding of the topic is likely to be.

## Global Learners

If grasping the big picture is easy for you, then you can be at risk of wanting to run before you can walk. You see what is needed but may not take the time to learn how best to accomplish it. Take the time to ask for explanations, and force yourself to complete all problem-solving steps before coming to a conclusion or making a decision. If you can't explain what you have done and why, then you may have missed critical details.

If you are a global learner, it can be helpful for you to realize that you need the big picture of a subject before you can master details. If your instructor plunges directly into new topics without bothering to explain how they relate to what you already know, it can cause problems for you. Fortunately, there are steps you can take that may help you get the big picture more rapidly. Before you begin to study the first section of a chapter in a text, skim through the entire chapter to get an overview. Doing so may be time consuming initially, but it may save you from going over and over individual parts later. Instead of spending a short time on every subject every night, you might find it more productive to immerse yourself in individual subjects for large blocks. Try to relate the subject to things you already know, either by asking the instructor to help you see connections or by consulting references. Above all, don't lose faith in yourself; you will eventually understand the new material, and understanding how it connects to other topics and disciplines may enable you to apply it in ways that most sequential thinkers would never dream of.

## Gauge-Discover-Reflect

You have already begun to apply the spirit of what we recommend in this third part of the development of your principles of management survival kit, by gauging your learning style. The three essential components are (1) gauge—take stock of your knowledge and capabilities about a topic; (2) discover—learn enough about a topic so that you can set specific development goals on which you can apply and practice, and later gauge again your progress toward your set goals; and (3) reflect—step back and look at the ways you have achieved your goals, take the opportunity to set new ones, and chronicle this experience and thought process in a daily journal.

### Gauge

It is always good to start any self-development process by getting some sense of where you are. That is why we commence with the *gauge* stage. For learning and developing in the area of principles of management, such knowledge is essential. By analogy, let's say you want to take a road trip out of town. Even if you have a map and a compass, it still is pretty important to know exactly where you are starting on the map!

Your instructor will likely introduce you to a number of different types of management assessment tools, and you should experiment with them to see how they work and the degree to which results resonate with your intuition. A word of caution here—just because some assessment results may clash with your intuition or self-image, do not immediately assume that they are wrong. Instead, use them as an opportunity and motivation for further probing (this can fuel your work in the discovery and reflect stages).

The obvious value of commencing your learning process with some form of assessment is that you have a clear starting point, in terms of knowledge. This also means that you now have a basis for comparing your achievement to any relevant specific goals that you set. Less obvious perhaps is the experience you will gain with principles of management skill assessments in general. More and more organizations use some form of assessment in the recruiting, human resources development, and yes, even promotion processes. Your experience with these different surveys will give you the confidence to take other surveys and the knowledge needed to show organizations that you are aware of your areas of strength and development opportunities.

### Discover

The *discovery* stage of your principles of management survival kit has four related facets: (1) learn, (2) set goals, (3) apply, and (4) practice. Let us look at each one in turn.

### Learn

You have probably learned a little about a certain subject just by virtue of gauging your depth in it. In some cases, you might even have read up on the subject a lot to accurately gauge where you were strong or weak. There is not an existing survey for every subject, and it is beneficial to learn how you might gauge this or that area of interest.

The learning facet essentially asks that you build your knowledge base about a particular topic. As you know, learning has multiple facets, from simply mastering facts and definitions, to developing knowledge of how you might apply that knowledge. You will typically want to start with some mastery over facts and definitions and then build your knowledge base to a more strategic level—that is, be able to understand when, where, and how you might use those definitions and facts in principles of management.

## Set SMART Goals

The combination of gauging and learning about a topic should permit you to set some goals related to your focal topic. For example, you want to develop better team communication skills or better understand change management. While your goals should reflect the intersection of your own needs and the subject, we do know that effective goals satisfy certain characteristics. These characteristics—specific, measurable, aggressive, realistic, and time bound—yield the acronym SMART. In his seminal 1954 work, *The Practice of Management* (New York: Collins), Peter Drucker coined the usage of the acronym for SMART objectives while discussing objective-based management. Here is how to tell if your goals are SMART goals.

### Specific

Specific goals are more likely to be achieved than a general goal. To set a specific goal, you must answer the six “W” questions:

- Who: Who is involved?
- What: What do I want to accomplish?
- Where: At what location?
- When: In what time frame?
- Which: What are the requirements and constraints?
- Why: What specific reasons, purpose, or benefits are there to the accomplishment of the goal?

<http://www.topachievement.com/smart.html> (accessed October 15, 2008).

EXAMPLE: A general goal would be, “Get a job as a retail store manager.” But a specific goal would say, “Identify my development needs in the next three weeks to become a retail store manager.” “Are You Ready to Be a Great Retail Store Manager?” provides you with an introductory list of survey questions that might help you accelerate your progress on this particular goal set.

### Are You Ready to Be a Great Retail Store Manager?

The service sector employs more than 80% of the U.S. workforce, and the position of retail store manager is in increasing demand. Have you already developed the skills to be a great store manager? Score yourself on each of these 10 people skills. How close did you get to 100? Identify two areas to develop, and then move on to two more areas once that goal is achieved.

1. “I challenge employees to set new performance goals.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
2. “I coach employees to resolve performance problems.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
3. “I encourage employees to contribute new ideas.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
4. “I take an interest in my employees’ personal lives.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
5. “I delegate well.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
6. “I communicate my priorities and directions clearly.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
7. “I resolve conflicts in a productive way.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
8. “I behave in a professional way at work.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
9. “I inspire my employees with a dynamic personality.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10
10. “I am a good listener.”Never: 1 Seldom: 3 Often: 5 Regularly: 10

### Measurable

When goals are specific, performance tends to be higher. Why? If goals are not specific and measurable, how would you know whether you have reached the goal? Any performance level becomes acceptable. For the same reason, telling someone, “Do your best” is not an effective goal because it is not measurable and does not give the person a specific target.

### Aggressive

This may sound counterintuitive, but effective goals are difficult, not easy. Aggressive goals are also called stretch goals. Why are effective goals aggressive? Easy goals do not provide a challenge. When goals are aggressive and when they require people to work harder or smarter, performance tends to be dramatically higher.

### Realistic

While goals should be difficult, they should also be based in reality. In other words, if a goal is viewed as impossible to reach, it does not have any motivational value. Only you can decide which goal is realistic and which is impossible to achieve; just be sure that the goal you set, while it is aggressive, remains grounded in reality.

Timely

The goal should contain a statement regarding when the proposed performance level will be reached. This way, it provides the person with a sense of urgency.

## Apply and Practice

Your knowledge of the subject, plus your SMART goals, give you an opportunity to apply and test your knowledge. Going back to our road-trip analogy, gauging gives you a starting point, learning gives you a road map and compass, and goals give you a target destination. Practice, in turn, simply means some repetition of the application process. Your objective here should be to apply and practice a subject long enough that, when you gauge it again, you are likely to see some change or progress.

## Reflect

This final stage has two parts: (1) gauge again and (2) record.

## Gauge Again

As suggested under “Apply and Practice,” you will want to gauge your progress. Have you become more innovative? Do you better communicate in teams? Do you have a better understanding of other key principles of management?

## Record

Many people might stop at the gauge again point, but they would be missing out on an incredibly valuable opportunity. Specifically, look at what you have learned and achieved regarding your goals, and chronicle your progress in some form of a journal. A journal may be a required component of a principles of management course, so there may be extrinsic as well as intrinsic motives for starting to keep a journal.

There are also various exercises that you can partake in through your journaling. These allow you to challenge yourself and think more creatively and deeply. An effective journal entry should be written with clear images and feelings. You should aim to include your reactions along with the facts or events related to your developmental goals. The experience of certain experiments may not necessarily be what you thought it would be, and this is what is important to capture. You are bound to feel turmoil in various moments, and these feelings are excellent fodder for journaling. Journaling allows you to vent and understand emotions. These types of entries can be effective at giving yourself a more rounded perspective on past events.

In addition to the goals you are evaluating, there are numerous things to write about in a journal. You can reflect on the day, the week, or even the year. You can reflect on events that you have been a part of or people you have met. Look for conclusions that you may have made or any conflicts that you faced. Most important, write about how you felt. This will allow you to examine your own emotional responses. You may find that you need to make a personal action or response to those conflicts. The conclusions that you make from your journal entries are the ingredients to self-growth. Facing those conflicts may also change your life for the better, as you are able to grow as a person.

You should also always go back and review what you have written. Think about each journal entry you have made and what it means. This is the true aspect of self-growth through journaling. It is easy to recognize changes in yourself through your journaling. You may find that you had a disturbing idea one day, but the next your attitude was much better. You may also find that your attitude grows and improves day by day. This is what makes journaling a true self-growth tool.

Journaling may be inexpensive, but it does require time and commitment. The time factor itself can be small, only about 10 minutes a day or maybe 30 minutes a week, depending on how you would like to summarize your life. You do, however, have to be motivated to write on a regular basis. Even if you do not have a lot of time to write, you will still be able to enjoy the large amount of personal growth that is available through journaling. Perhaps this suggests that your first goal set relates to time set aside for journaling.

## Key Takeaway

You have seen how different individuals approach the learning process and that an understanding of these differences can help you with your objectives related to principles of management. Beyond this general understanding of your own learning style, you also

have an opportunity to put together your own survival kit for this course. Your kit will have answers and resources based on the gauge-discover-reflect framework. The development of SMART goals are particularly important in the successful application of the framework.

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