

The manager's field guide to the four working styles

How to communicate with, give feedback to, and get the best from every kind of mind on your team — in plain language, grounded in the Big Five.

BEFORE YOU START

Styles are a language, not a verdict

The four working styles below are a plain-English way of talking about patterns that personality science measures on continuous scales. Two things to hold onto while you read:

- **Everyone is a mix.** A style is a person's centre of gravity, not their cage. Most people lead with one style and borrow from the others.
- **Intensity matters more than the label.** Two "Warm" colleagues can need genuinely different handling — one strongly warm in every room, one mildly warm and highly situational. When in doubt, watch the person, not the box.

A useful test: if a piece of advice about a colleague would read equally well with any other name swapped in, it isn't really about them. The guidance in this pack is a starting point — the person in front of you is the data that matters.

● **Bold — direct · decisive**

Fast-moving and results-focused. Bold colleagues want the headline first and get impatient with wind-ups. They decide quickly, speak plainly, and read hesitation as indecision.

● **Warm — open · relational**

Relationship-led and generous. Warm colleagues do their best work when they feel the team is with them. They are often the connective tissue of a team — and often the most sensitive to criticism.

● **Curious — animated · exploratory**

Drawn to ideas and possibility. Curious colleagues bring energy and lateral thinking, especially early, while things are still taking shape. Detail and follow-through are rarely their favourite part.

● **Calm — considered · steady**

Deliberate and precise. Calm colleagues think before they speak, want complete information before acting, and rarely fight for airtime — which means their best input is easy to lose in a fast room.

Communicating with each style

STYLE	DO	AVOID
Bold	Lead with the bottom line. Few, clear points. Bring options and a recommendation.	Long wind-ups, hedging, meetings that could have been a sentence.
Warm	Open personally before getting to business. Talk it through live — they think out loud.	Cold, purely transactional messages; leaving them out of the loop (isolation stings).
Curious	Bring them in early, at the ideas stage. Give the vision before the task list.	Handing over fully-baked plans with no room to shape; burying them in fine print.
Calm	Send the agenda in advance. Ask, then wait through the silence — the good answer is coming.	Springing decisions live; repeatedly moving their one-to-one; reading quiet as agreement.

Meetings: the one structural fix

Fast styles (Bold, Curious, strongly Warm) reach verbal consensus quickly. Deliberate styles contribute late, refined and quietly — or not at all if the pace never slows. If your team skews fast, two mechanisms protect you:

- **Written pre-reads before decisions** — so deliberate thinkers contribute at full quality, before the room's momentum forms.
- **Explicit, by-name invitations** — "You've seen this before — what's your read?" Silence from a deliberate colleague in an unfamiliar room is normal; it is not a vote.

Written follow-up: not optional for fast styles

Enthusiastic verbal agreement is not a commitment device. For fast-moving styles, confirm anything binding — numbers, owners, deadlines — in a short bulleted message afterwards. Frame it as capturing the momentum, not as distrust.

Feedback and motivation, by style

The skeleton that works for everyone

- Always private. One behaviour per conversation — specific, recent, evidenced.
- Open with genuine, specific appreciation (a real one, not a hollow sandwich).
- Invite their view — then handle it per style, below.
- Agree one change; confirm it in writing, framed as support.
- Close on confidence, and follow up in the way that style recovers.

BOLD

Feedback: direct and factual works; on the merits, never in public. Expect pushback — that's engagement, not rejection. Concede valid points explicitly.

Motivate with: ownership, visible results, being trusted with the hard thing.

WARM

Feedback: the relationship is the stakes. Reassure, name the one behaviour, end on explicit confidence — then reconnect socially within a day or two. Distance afterwards is what festers.

Motivate with: appreciation, team belonging, public credit (they'll rarely claim it themselves).

CURIOUS

Feedback: frame around the idea and the impact, not the person. Raise detail slips positively — they know it's their blind spot; rubbing it in just demoralises.

Motivate with: new problems, variety, an audience for their thinking, early involvement.

CALM

Feedback: pre-announce it, keep it factual and unhurried, and don't force a live response — offer to continue tomorrow, and treat that conversation as the real one. Their composure is not consent; invite their view explicitly.

Motivate with: protected time, clear requirements, their expertise being championed (with their consent on how).

The blanket rule: assume no one is thick-skinned. Criticism-sensitivity and conflict-avoidance are close to universal — the styles just fail differently: some argue, some appease, some go quiet. Design for that, and you'll rarely be badly wrong.

ZOOMING OUT

Read the team, not just the people

Individual styles matter, but a team's *composition* predicts its behaviour better than any single profile. Three patterns worth checking for on your own team:

- **The monoculture.** Four fast starters and one careful finisher means fast launches, glossed details — and all the checking work silently piling onto one person. Watch that person's load; they will not complain first.
- **The missing voice.** If nobody on the team is temperamentally built to say "this is going wrong" in week two, build a mechanism that says it instead: structured retros, written pre-mortems, anonymous input.
- **The pace mismatch.** Every mixed-pace pair needs one explicit agreement: when do we decide fast, and when do we deliberately slow down? Naming it removes the moral judgement from both speeds.

Where Throughline picks this up

This guide gives you the style-level layer — useful, but generic by design. Throughline measures your actual team with a validated Big Five assessment, records how strongly each pattern shows for each person, maps every working pair, and then delivers exactly this kind of guidance — tuned to the two people involved — inside the AI assistant you already use, at the moment you need it.

See it live: book a twenty-minute demo and bring your trickiest working relationship. If Throughline can't answer better than a PDF, don't buy it. → [throughline](#) — [book a demo](#)