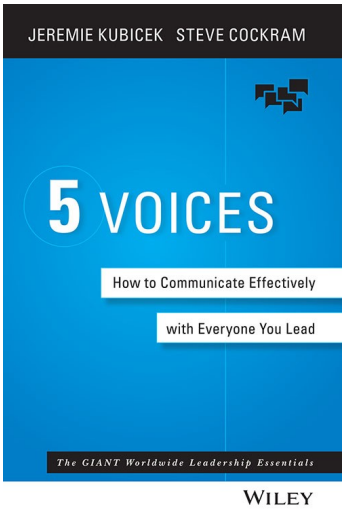
Review: 5 Voices – How to Communicate Effectively with Everyone You Lead

Personality type inventories and leadership style analyses are a common tool in leadership and management circles. I'm sure this is the case in the business sector. It is certainly the case when it comes to churches and non-profits, with our high volunteer basis, and our emphasis on vocation and personal engagement.



Over the years I have become familiar with Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), DiSC, Personality Plus, and even some of the more esoteric ones such as Enneagram and Motivational Gifts. I have recently come across Colour Energies which appears to be a condensed version of MBTI and is apparently growing in popularity in management circles. Each has a different focus on nature or nurture, or things such as innate personality and context. All have a fundamental grounding in an understanding of the human psyche as individuals and as a team or system. All have something useful to contribute, but some more than others.

And now, on a recommendation, I have picked up a book on the 5 Voices. The focus is a link between personality types with communication in a team dynamic. There's a clear application built into the premise (the subtitle says it all) and this is useful. The authors continually point out the benefit of their readers knowing "what it is like to be on the other side of them" (p17).

The Five Voices are, in order of “loudness:”

NURTURER – “Nurturers are champions of people and work to take care of everyone around them… They are always concerned about the relational health and harmony of the group… They are completely committed to protecting values and principles… They innately understand how certain actions, behaviours, or initiatives will affect people.” (p31)

CREATIVE – “Creatives are champions of innovation and future ideas. They are conceptual architects and are able to see how all the pieces fit together… Creatives are never satisfied with the status quo; they always believe it can be better… They are like an ‘early warning radar system’ and can see the opportunities and dangers of the future before everyone else.” (pp33-34)

GUARDIAN – “Guardians are champions of responsibility and stewardship… They respect and value logic, systems, order, procedure, and process… They have a selfless capacity to deliver the vision once it has been agreed… Guardians guard what is already working.” (pp35-36)

CONNECTOR – “Connectors are champions of relationships and strategic partnerships… They rally people around causes and things they believe in… Connectors believe in a world where everyone can play and get excited about future opportunities… and they work to make it happen… They are usually persuasive and inspirational communicators.” (p39)

PIONEER – “Pioneers are champions of aligning people with resources to win or achieve the objective… They approach life with an ‘Anything is possible!’ attitude… Pioneers believe visioning a new future is always the highest priority… Pioneers brings strategic military-like thinking to achieve the agreed objective.” (p41)

As a simple personality inventory, this system is **somewhat lacking.** Unlike MBTI and DiSC, for instance, where the categories *derive* from a fundamental framework (the psychology of processing information in MBTI, the interplay of task-or-person focus and empowerment in DiSC) the five voice categories seem a little *arbitrary*.

Author Steve Crockram talks about his desire to "repackage" the 16 MBTI personalities (page x), but this is not that. How do you condensed 16 into 5 in a way that maintains the integrity of its derivation? And besides, that work has been done: there is so much material on, for instance, how NF's interact with ST's. It is telling that in some of their subsequent analysis they feel the need to *split* the Creative voice into Creative-Feeler and Creative-Thinker (p115). Similarly, at other times, they need to *combine* the Nurturer and Guardian voices into a single entity. There isn't a consistent framework, a derivation to look back to in order to justify their conclusions, or reach forward to new ones. The voices are presented as simply "what is", a product to buy into, or otherwise.

The spiritually minded could perhaps attempt a mapping from APEST/Pentagon/Fivefold terminology: Apostle = Pioneer, Prophet = Creative, Evangelist = Connector, Shepherd/Pastor = Nurturer, Teacher = Guardian. But this is tenuous.

I think this is why I found myself pushing back at some of the over-simplifications. For instance, the Nurturer voice could easily be caricatured as maternalistic, always ready with the empathy. But Nurturers (as an expression of their *nurturing*) also know how to exhibit "tough love", avoid mollycoddling, and to break symbiosis or transference. They can be *champions*, not just wetnurses. Similarly Pioneers are caricatured as militaristic generals, ready to roll over the top of other people for the sake of the goal. But Pioneers (as an expression of their *pioneering*) also know that bringing the people with them is not just part of the goal, but

integral to it. Creative voices can be quiet, but not always so!

Nevertheless, the **benefit of the book is significant** and it lies, as mentioned, in the area of communication and team dynamics.

The first benefit is that of self-awareness, not only of yourself, but of others in your team. The descriptions of each voice throughout ask questions such as "What do they bring at their best? What questions are they really asking inside?" and considerations of likely negative impacts. They also encourage you to not only work out your *foundational voice* (and so understand your weaknesses and limitations) but also your *nemesis* voice that you will often fail to hear, and often fail to reach.

They suggest "Rules of Engagement" for staff meetings and the like, because there's "no such thing as accidental synergy" (p128). Having a speaking order of Nurturers, Creatives, Guardians, Connectors, and Pioneers makes internal sense to their system, as well as the assurances and challenges that are put before each voice.

I'm not entirely convinced; for instance, it's not just about ensuring that the louder voices wait their turn, it's also about a dynamic in which the quieter voices are willing to step up, in which case something like Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team might be a better place to start. Nevertheless, they fully acknowledge that their Rules of Engagement might (initially) feel a little contrived. The unpacking of the sort of "weapon" each voice brings to a dysfunctional table is useful as a description.

> *All the weapons deployed every day in any environment where human beings interact. Usually, teams simply accept friendly fire and allow the Nurturers to care fro the wounded without analyzing what's really happening. But where the use of*

> *weapons remains unchallenged, teams function at far below their true potential. Where team members understand the impact of their weapons system and become intentional in how they deploy it, team culture and productivity will change immediately for the better. (p108)*

Similarly helpful is the role of each voice in vision casting and change management. The gap between Creative/Pioneer and Nurturer/Guardian is stark, and the alignment of each with progressives and conservatives respectively is well-made. The role of the Connector voice in keeping the two ends together is no mere "piggy in the middle" here, but a crucial part of the dynamic.

> *In a perfect world, Pioneers and Creatives would be out on the front lines, focused on and exploring the future possibilities. Connectors would be trying to message the opportunity, getting everybody on the same page and fully aligned. Nurturers and Guardians are connected and engaged but invariably towards the back because they want to make sure it's safe and that the people, money, and resources are being taken care of. (p169)*

All of this can help the reader to analyse their team health, be self-aware of their own voice, and the voice of others, and to avoid being an unnecessary contributor to dysfunction. What it doesn't do is give you a real way forward in how to deal with dysfunction.

This could have been explored. For instance: How do you deal with a disconnect, when all have retreated to their castles? How do you deal with an other-voice leaning team, when you're well outside of your energising 70/30 principle situation in which you are using your natural voice 70% of the time (p155)? How do you go about motivating team health from an empowered position, a disempowered position, an oversight position, or a "leading-up" position?

To the extent that the 5 voices can provide a common vocabulary, and be a catalyst for personal and interpersonal reflection, it remains a useful resource. Despite its weaknesses, it’s a worthy addition to the menagerie of leadership style products. Add it to the mix, and use it when it’s useful.