The fourth way to make a connection is to stop looking for similarities and start appreciating differences. Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Having a healthy understanding and a value of the differences is really a non-negotiable characteristic of a really effective small-group leader. Think of teams you’ve been part of. Probably no matter what team you’ve been on, what you’ve noticed is that they’re made up of people that are very different. So there you have it: the greatest strength of the team and the greatest liability of the team is one and the same, and that is that we are different. Unfortunately, one of the things that we typically do is we get very frustrated by those differences. We get frustrated that in a group setting you have people, some people who will ramble and others who are timid. There’s some who are impatient and begin to interrupt, and there are those who like to interject humor and others who are very serious. Some show emotion, and others just want to deal in fact. So we are quite different. Think of it like a kaleidoscope, in terms of your role as a leader. In a kaleidoscope, you’ll see very small unique pieces, different colors, different shapes, all unique in and of themselves. But when they’re put together under the lens and focused and moved according to a leader’s direction, well, then they begin to make this beautiful pattern, this gorgeous picture. So it’s our responsibility as small-group leaders to appeal to the varied personality styles of the people in our group.

Have you heard the term EQ? Well, Goman uses science to substantiate something that common sense has said to us all along, and that is if you put two people with equal IQ together, why is it that one person will outperform another? And it’s related to their degree of emotional intelligence, that in fact there is a whole other level of smarts that is just as important if not more so than IQ. And that is the ability to understand the differences in others, to have empathy toward those differences, to understand yourself in reaction to others, and all of that together makes up
EQ. The Peter Principle applied to groups would suggest that if a person is to rise any higher in their responsibilities and level of performance, they’re going to have to solicit help from others. They’re going to have to persuade and listen and exercise restraint and patience. They’re going to have to have sympathy, feel empathy, and they’re going to have to get over some of the emotional assaults that might be common to group give and take. All of that makes up emotion intelligence. Knowing when to lighten a situation, when to inject a little humor when it’s needed, when to really see behind a message to the feelings that a person might have and be able to talk through that with them. Those are all levels of smarts related to emotional intelligence that is critical for a small-group leader.

There are a lot of behavior styles that are around today for us to understand personality differences. The one that I want to look at today was developed by Merrill-Reid in the 1960s. It’s one that I find very easy to remember and, in dealing with other people, to quickly be able to assess what their behavior orientation might be. And a lot of the description I’ll use is from HDI Consulting, where I’ve worked for many years. Merrill-Reid’s model is held together by two components, and one is a person’s level of assertiveness. The other is a vertical line speaking to a person’s level of responsiveness. Now think of this as a continuum; that you’re not always assertive or always not assertive but somewhere along this range, maybe 80 percent of the time you are assertive and 20 percent you’re not, or 60 percent you’re assertive and 40 percent you’re not. On this end is the high assertive, and those are the people who are talkative and make direct eye contact. Some of the other characteristics of someone high in assertiveness is they’re decisive, they’re a risk taker. They frequently state their opinion. They’re directive. Many times they bring energy into the room. Very talkative and can be impatient. Now those who are low in assertiveness on this end of the continuum are people who are very accommodating. They tend to be calm, and they’re great listeners, cooperative, quiet. They make decisions cautiously. They usually ask a lot of questions, and they tend to avoid leadership roles. So if you were to think of yourself right now, where do you see yourself? Are you typically on the higher end of assertiveness or on the lower end of assertiveness?

Now once you’ve determined that, look at responsiveness. Responsiveness is either more responsive to people or more responsive to tasks. Now if you are more responsive to people, you’re going to be a little less aware of time then someone who is
not always there on time. You rely on the intuition that you have before acting. So your gut opinion really does matter in making decisions. You tend to be less serious; you show a lot of humor. You show emotion when speaking; you’re animated. You’re an animated speaker. You usually have a wide variety of vocabulary words that you’ll use in explaining things and sometimes can be a little bit disorganized.

Now if you’re more task-focused, what you’ll find is that task-focused people are very aware of timing. They rarely show emotion and are usually more serious, a little less variation in tone of voice. Infrequent body gestures might be something that you would see as well and more task-oriented. So when you put these four together, these two together, you create a quadrant of four behavior styles. So someone who is high in assertiveness and also more task-focused is a driver.

Now a driver is characterized by someone who is very time conscious. Someone who’s impatient with delays, very goal-oriented. They’re quick decision makers. They like facts. They like proof. They like schedules and structure. They’re power-oriented. You typically find them in leadership roles. They’re risk takers. They like to hear summaries, not a great deal of detail, when you’re speaking with them. They make strong eye contact, and sometimes they are considered rather serious. Now if you are a driver or you know of a driver on your team, one of the assets, as far as the team goes with regard to the driver, is that they’re productive. They’re very decisive; they make things happen. A driver is disciplined. They’re competitive. So, if you’re on the team of a driver, you’re likely to win or come in close; and they tend to be very goal-oriented. Now on the liability side, as far as the team goes, drivers can come across a little bit harsh, somewhat pushy at times. They’re severe in their language at times in terms of exact cut and dry, black and white, not a lot of gray. They can be demanding and rather domineering at times, and those can be some of the liabilities you might be faced with, with a driver on your team.

Now if you are someone or who have someone on your team that is high in assertiveness but more people-related in terms of their responsiveness, then you have an expressive. Now an expressive is the fun-loving, creative type. They don’t like a lot of detail. They talk very openly about their feelings, very transparent. You know definitely when an expressive has something on their mind. It’s hard for them to mask it. They act on feelings; they’re
energetic, friendly, animated. They tend to be the dreamers. But also expressives do tend to get bored easily, and they stray from the subject a little bit. You’ll find a great deal of enthusiasm and generally a warm disposition. They make eye contact and are quite friendly to be around. As it applies to teams, you’ll find them to be open. You’ll find them to be creative and friendly and very quick to interject ideas and get the group moving in a positive direction—energizing to be around. On the other hand, from a liability standpoint, if you have expressives in your group, you can find them distracted quite easily. They’re rather impulsive. They can be a little bit disorganized and sometimes opportunistic, not really seeing exactly the pros or cons of how an idea might work or where it might not fit well with the team. And if they are not happy with the direction it’s going, they can get a little bit explosive at times as well.

Now if you are or you know someone who is low in their assertiveness and also more people-oriented in their responsiveness, then you have an amiable. Now an amiable is a very supportive team player. They make great team players. They are the peacemakers. They have an extensive network of friends because they are very good about taking time for other people. They’re calming to be around. They ask a lot of questions, good listeners, very loyal, and they stress personal relationships—that’s really critical to them, how an idea might come across, how others might perceive it, how it might affect them. That would be something that they would be focused on. They don’t take as many risks, and they are very warm in their gesturing. Now an asset, or several of the assets of having amiables on your team, is that they are very helpful, they’re easy to get along with, they are reliable, very reliable. They’re good listeners, and they tend to be very loyal to you as a leader. Now on the liability front, you’ll find they may be overly conforming because they are such peacemakers. They’re permissive. They tend to have a very difficult time saying “no” and oftentimes will get overweighted with things because they are unable to say “no.” So they commit, but they really can’t comply when it comes down to it. They just have too much on their plate. They tend to be emotional, and that’s something you might have to deal with, with an amiable.

Now if you have someone or if you yourself are low in assertiveness and high in your task orientation, then you have an analytical. Now an analytical is logical. They’re very organized. They value accuracy. They rarely take a stand though, because they like to take a lot of time to take it in. So you might find an issue of
analysis paralysis going on with an analytical. They’re structured. They can sometimes come across a little bit impersonal. They’re much more comfortable dealing in facts then dealing with people. They’re careful decision makers, very process oriented. They are not easily pushed in a certain direction. They in fact resent power being used over them in terms of a leader. They prefer to ask questions rather than making statements, and they don’t want to be asked to make a decision quickly. They like to process it for a period of time. Now assets of having them on your team are that they are very precise. They’re logical, objective, and very well organized. So that you’re going to really see through the detail of what you’re going to be doing in terms of action items toward a particular task that would be well laid out and everything will have been thought through if an analytical is heading that up. Liability wise, they are reluctant to make decisions, and they’re very nitpicky, detached, and at times somewhat judgmental. These are the four characteristics of the Merrill-Reid model: the driver, the expressive, the amiable, the analytical.

Now another way that you might be able to indicate which particular module a person fits in is their reaction to stress. I do want to be sure that you don’t see these as boxes to be boxed into because certainly, depending on the situation or a particular position towards something or in something or maybe a life experience, we can move from one quadrant to another. But, for the most part, you would think of one as kind of the home base for you. Under stress is when it’s really easy to tell. A driver under stress—now, remember, they’re someone who is very strong and opinionated—they become a dictator. They will typically take over the project. “Here let me have it; I’ll do it myself. I’m the only one who can do it right.” They can be a little aggressive in their gesturing at times and just very black and white about the direction we need to go.

Now an expressive under stress, now they are the ones who have a lot of creative, animated words. They become name callers. They’re typically ones who will quickly point to who might have caused that stress, what actually happened, what situation happened, what person let them down or put up a road block and caused them to be under stress. They jump to conclusions; they make hasty decisions regarding it. You might find an expressive rather loud in stress; if they’re upset, they might be yelling, slamming a door, that sort of a thing.

The amiable under stress—remember they’re the ones who want
Now an amiable under stress, they tend to be withdrawn and these again are the people who likely to process through things thoroughly. And they want to take a minute to understand what their thinking is about this stressful situation, and so you’ll find that they’ll either be withdrawn in conversation or may even physically get up and leave the situation for a period of time. One of the easy ways to look at it is when you heard in school about the flight-or-fight syndrome. Well, those in high assertiveness categories, these, too, are the ones who will fight. The low assertiveness categories are the ones who will flight.

So we have to give people room to be different in their reaction, what’s comfortable for them in a stressful situation among other situations. The key to this is to maintain your own comfort zone, but at the same time give others the ability to do the same. It isn’t enough to know these four quadrants. What’s important is that you flex your behavior in such a way that you allow each of these styles of communicating and interacting with other people to have room to be different.

So when you think about working with a driver, for instance, some of the things you might be mindful of or that you want to be: make very efficient use of your time. You want to start your meetings on time and end them on time. You want to state your purpose up front and be very clear in exactly why they should be spending time there with you and what kinds of things you’ll be covering, what your intent is so that it looks very direct and focused. You’ll need to establish your credibility upfront as the leader of the group to get the buy-in of a driver. You’ll want to ask a lot of good questions and give them an opportunity to share their insights and their answers, and what you’ll want to avoid in terms of hot buttons are any sort of disorganization and indecisiveness on your part.

Now when working with an expressive, some of the things you’ll want to be mindful of is you’ll want to be informal and friendly. You’ll want to take the time or build in time within your group setting to allow for them to be a little bit social, because they’ll
need to do that, and if you don’t allow for it, well they’ll take
group time to meet that need. You want to give recognition and
feedback. Expressives love personal testimonial stories, word
pictures, analogies, things that bring a visual to their mind. You
want to keep moving forward toward goals and support their
intuition and feelings. They’ll be sharing a lot of things based on
intuition and feeling, and you’ll want to support that. Some hot
buttons that you’ll want to be careful of when dealing with the
expressive are negativity and a slow pace. Remember, expressives
get easily bored, and you’ll want to be sure that you’re giving
them a good pace, a good clip at which to work. If you are rather
nonexpressive, or you have someone in the group who’s very
monotone in their tone of voice, that will be a really difficult thing
for an expressive to deal with.

Now when you are looking at the analytical and . . . well, let’s look
at the amiable first. When you’re looking at the amiable and trying
to think of ways that you can adopt and flex to meet their needs,
you’ll want to be very open and honest and build repertoire with
an amiable. Ask about their family and the kinds of things that may
be going on in their life. You’ll want to also offer assurances. This
is a type of personality trait that tends to have buyer’s remorse. So
if they have done something or contributed in some way, they’ll
want to hear the feedback that, yes, in fact that was really good,
or you made a real value there. Now, hot buttons that you’ll want
to avoid with an amiable are: they really do not respond well to
very pushy people or people who are perceived as not very caring,
and you’ll want to be careful not to push them to make decisions
too fast or to allow them to overcommit themselves. They have a
very difficult time, as we talked about earlier, saying “no,” because
they want to accommodate and really help the team and support
the team in the best way they can.

Now, an analytical: you’re dealing with an analytical, some of
the things that you’ll want to be mindful of is that they like to
see things ahead of time. So, for instance, if you’re in a group
setting where there might be . . . first time that you’re meeting,
you may want to send out ahead of time, either by e-mail or mail
or whatever way that you’d like to, an idea of what’s going to be
coming. They like to know what’s going to be happening when
they get there. You’ll want to have ample time for them to think
about questions ahead. So if it’s a group discussion, we’re going
to be doing a lot of discussing together as a group and you have
questions you’ll be going over, you may want to print those out
ahead of time so that the analytical will have a chance to look
at them and digest them and process what they’re thinking; and they’ll be much more apt to be involved that way. You’ll want to give an opportunity for them to share and to ask questions of them. You’ll want to avoid these hot buttons with an analytical: irrational behavior that’s very feelings-based, for instance any kind of inaccuracy or unpredictability—throwing out quotes and statistics without some foundation as to substantiate those and offer credibility—and definitely tardiness. Tardiness is one thing, along with the driver, that they do not respond well to.

Now when you think of all these different personality styles, it is so much easier at times to deal with someone who is similar or a diametric opposite to you, a driver with an amiable, an analytical with an expressive. But they all are so important and add so much value when their strengths are pulled together on behalf of the team. Think of it like this: I have two twenty-dollar bills here. Now one is a little bit tattered, kind of worn through some rough experiences possibly in exchange from one person to another. This one is very nice and crisp and new. And my question to you is: Which one is of more value? Which one provides a higher currency? It’s the same in a team. You may have someone who’s crisp and articulate and eloquent in the way that they speak, and they are tuned in with a strong emotional intelligence as they’re dealing with other people, and they make it very easy for you to lead the group. And you may have those who are a little tattered and worn and past experiences have roughened them up a bit. Neither is more important or valuable to the team or to the Lord. Stop looking for similarities and start appreciating differences.