

If You Want to Get Along Better with People ...

Try the DISC Approach!

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Ever notice how much of your work involves dealing with people? Have you noticed, too, that they don't necessarily follow the script you have written for them? And, when they don't, it can be fun, interesting, disappointing, frustrating and even downright painful depending on the situation.

Sometimes, people aren't trying to disagree with you; they are just behaving naturally. However, their natural way of achieving the result you seek can be 180 degrees different from the way you would have approached the solution.

There's hope. Welcome to DISC, a common language to understand and discuss interpersonal concerns. It's a relatively simple model that helps us better comprehend the complexity of human behavior.

The four major behavior patterns are Dominance (Dauntless), Influence (Indefatigable), Steadiness (Supportive) and Conscientiousness (Careful). These are the four types of responses people have to their environment (which is everything other than yourself), and the assessment tool measures individual's perceptions. The words in parenthesis are the names I have given the styles when I adapted them to people's natural networking styles in *Breakthrough Networking: Building Relationships That Last*.

Dominant and Influencing styles are assertive, fast-paced and bold. They are comfortable trying to change their environment and make it more suitable for themselves. Dominant styles try to change it by facing issues directly and overcoming opposition. They use an authoritative, even steam roller, approach when necessary. People with Influencing styles try to shape the environment through their natural charisma. They can sell bridges without water.

People with Steadiness and Conscientious tendencies are more moderate-paced and careful and can be comfortable yielding to the environment. Steadiness styles think if they cooperate with others within existing circumstances all will work out. They are the ultimate team player. Conscientious styles like to work cautiously within existing circumstances to ensure quality. They are precise and like to follow the rules.

People with Dominant and Conscientious tendencies tend to be more skeptical and are likely to question and challenge what is happening in their environment.

Those with Influencing and Steadiness tendencies perceive the environment as more positive; they are more accepting and agreeable. ("It's great to be alive. I can't wait to attend that networking breakfast. I'll meet so many prospects. Oh, and dinner and the theatre tonight will be a wonderful end to the day!").

Each of you is a combination of all four styles; however, you usually show a preference for one or more of the styles because you find it more comfort to behave that way. Once you better understand what makes you and other act and react the way you do, you will improve your people-reading skills and be able to modify and adapt your behavior in different situations. People like to be interacted with in their style, not yours. Yes, you may have to stretch; however, it will help you improve customer

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service, make the sale, manage better, reduce conflict, improve communication and build stronger relationships.

Dominant styles are easy to detect. Some people nickname them, “The Intimidator.” They sport a strong handshake, steady eye contact, self-confidence and an aura that may cause less powerful people to quiver and shake. They prosper by solving challenges, forgetting often they are a challenge for others. They don’t get ulcers; however, they are carriers.

They thrive as presidents, managers and supervisors. Problems may arise when employees who also sport this style have to work for someone who is a high “D.” Suggestion: Give the employee responsibility, and the authority, to get the job done. Don’t look over his/her shoulders. Stick with the due date you gave.

In general, Dominant styles are risk takers and like bottom-line results. Give them brief, direct answers. Don’t tell them how you arrived at the answer ... just give them the facts. Value them for their “big picture” approach and the visionaries they are and hire others to carry out the details.

Provide them with an environment that includes many new and varied activities (they like to multi task), prestige and power and opportunities for individual accomplishments.

Influencers are truly “people” people. Hell for them is a locked room with no one else in it. They simply need to talk. And talk and talk. Most people talk at 160 words a minute. High “Is” comfortably speak at 400 words a minutes, with gusts up to 700 words a minutes. They thrive in public relations and sales ... and can become even more effective when they improve listening skills and learn to focus and strategize more.

They are incredibly persuasive and are the chosen ones to promote events, policies or whatever else you want to “sell.” They can think on their feet and turn on a dime. Use them as your cheerleaders for new projects and products and anytime you want to energize the troops.

They definitely need help with time management and organizational skills. They file on the floor and probably have not seen the top of their desk since they first sat down behind it.

To energize them, provide a favorable, friendly environment. You may have to apply the brakes to their small talk else you may never get off the phone ... or get back to your office. They can be like the bunny that just keeps going!

Give them their opportunity in the spotlight, and they will be eternally grateful. They were born to talk in front of groups. Just make sure they have an agenda, else they may never get to the point. They start networking in the parking lot and may be late for the event inside even if they arrived early!

Steadiness styles are just as their moniker indicates: Amicable, calm, harmonious, pleasant, sincere and soothing. They are like a sedative on feet! They prefer an environment in which everyone gets along. They dislike conflict and become turtle-like when it occurs. Their hope is that when stick their neck back out, the disagreements will have been resolved. They need help in resolving conflict ... especially with Dominant styles that want to settle differences head on.

People with the Steadiness tendencies are by far the best listeners, and are often cornered by the Influencers who find them such a willing audience. In fact, the Steady people often have to interrupt to signal they are ready to move on ... after an hour of being so polite!

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Job loss or divorce is particularly hard for people with this style. It disrupts the security that is so important to them.

To make these people most comfortable, provide a sincere, personal and agreeable environment. Be patient in word and action. Draw them out by asking open-ended questions, being careful not to thrust them into the spotlight ... where they are not comfortable. Show them through your actions that you are trustworthy. If you are a Dominant or Influencing style, slow down and let them catch up. You can wear them out just by being you! Greet them with a smile ...and support their causes.

People with **Conscientiousness** tendencies are analytical, quality control people who make sure things are done right. Usually, they think they can do it “most right” and prefer doing things themselves and working alone. As managers, they have sticky fingers and micro-manage. (At home, their checkbooks have to balance to the penny. There’s trouble ahead when they share an account with an Influencing person who is happy if his/hers is within \$20 of what the bank shows!)

They seem to have computers in their heads that are processing around the clock. Conscientious styles like to compare what is said to their internal database. If it fits, they keep it; if not, they discard it. They spent a lot of time evaluating, processing and deciding and, therefore, they are the least verbal of all the styles ... even stoic, at times. They like to make sure they have considered every angle before they present an answer.

Prepare your case in advance and logically present pros and cons and as much data as you can find (they actually read all of it!). Don’t try to schmooze them; they think logically, not emotionally, and are often turned off by the mere thought of networking ... and even conversation, at times. Become comfortable with pauses when you do engage them in conversation; they need to analyze. If you interrupt them, they will need to start the analysis over ... from the beginning. Concentrate on their body language since they try hardest to conceal their feelings. On the phone, give them time to respond. Don’t ask if they are still there!

Here are exaggerated (or maybe not!) examples of the four different styles doing the same activity:

Listening skills

- “D” – About the only time they really listen is when what you are saying fits their agenda. Also, they like you to get to the bottom line *quickly*.
- “I” – It’s hard for them to listen or even sit or stand still for long. They have so much to say and so much energy that they prefer to be talking most of the time.
- “S” – They try to understand what you are saying and pay attention even if they are not that interested. They don’t want to hurt their feelings.
- “C” – They assess what is being said and listen for consistency. They respond only after they have carefully formulated an answer.

You can tell if you are showing too much of your style when you:

- D – arrive at work at 8 am and by 8:05 no one is talking to you.
- I – organize a “victory party” before you get the project, when you get it, four times during the project, and after it is finished
- S – alphabetize and color code your own and your co-workers file ... without being asked

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- C – form a quality control group to make sure everyone gets the same size piece of lasagna in the company cafeteria

Remember the Platinum Rule in your dealings with customers and cohorts: Treat others as they want to be treated, not necessarily how *you* think they should be treated. Try to see the situation through their eyes, and it will help you understand and respect why they are behaving as they are. When they do the same for you, you will reduce conflict and improve communication and together positively impact the bottom line!

Historically, behavior has been grouped into four styles or temperaments. According to legend, Zeus empowered four gods to make man more god-like. Around 450 BC, Greek physicians Hippocrates and Galen wrote about four temperaments that were determined by the type of “humor” or body fluid that dominated a person’s internal composition.

This theory remained popular throughout the Middle Ages. The temperaments were considered mutually exclusive, i.e., an individual possessed only one of them. Psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, recognized as the founder of experimental psychology, theorized around the mid-19th century that people possess degrees of two characteristics: quickness/slowness and strength/weakness. He abandoned the earlier exclusivity theory by saying it was possible to have both in varying degrees.

When William Marston published *The Emotions of Normal People* in 1928, he was the first to identify the four behavioral styles as dynamic and situational. In his introduction to the condensed version of Marston’s book, Dr. John Geier says that: “. . . one individual could possess many traits and that the intensity of traits within the person might indicate a difference in behavior.”

It was Geier who created an assessment tool by adapting the list of adjectives Marston had used to describe the different styles. He created what is commonly referred to as the DISC model of behavior.

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