



DISC: An Introduction to Behavioral Analysis

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Part 1 of 2

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The assessment of the behavioral and communication patterns of ourselves and our team members can significantly help to build a more functional team. DISC (Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Compliance) behavioral analysis can accomplish this. However, there are literally hundreds of different DISC profiles available today. While we have spent considerable time researching these, this article will focus on one such instrument, the MFS Employee-Manager Version.

Communication and language can be learned in a few short months by most cognitive persons – learned, yes, but by no means mastered. It is the art of mastering interpersonal communication that takes a lifetime of effort and work. Like any other art form, without the right tools and training, things never turn out the way you intended. Enter DISC profiling. DISC is a profound light in the otherwise darkened world of interpersonal communication. Learn the DISC language, and you will shed light on those vital relationships through the skill of enhanced communication. Now, this is all well and good, but what exactly is DISC?

DISC analysis is a means for assessing personal behavior and communication patterns and identifying the various traits and other components that are associated with these patterns. The patterns, or styles, are represented in the acronym DISC: **D**ominance, **I**nflu-

ence, **S**teadiness, and **C**ompliance. In most cases, an online profile is completed, and the results are measured for the respondent in each of the four style categories. The four categories are each measured on a scale of 0-100%. These percentages have distinct meaning, both in the individual styles, i.e. 80% Influence, and in relation to the other categories as well.

It is important to note, then, that DISC results are not just measured as independent categories. In other words, we don't simply take the highest scoring category (Dominance as shown above) and stop with just that. Someone who measures at 95% Dominance and 27% Compliance is going to behave differently from someone who measures at 95% Dominance and 65% Compliance. We should never pigeon-hole somebody based on the highest or lowest traits. Much like most credit reports, there are three scores given, but the highest and lowest aren't usually the focus of the underwriter. It is each score taken in the context of the others that tells the complete story.

Often times I find that, in order to discover what something is, we must first find out what it is not. I've found this method to be useful in explaining the ins and outs of DISC behavioral analysis, especially as compared to other personal profiles. Since we have an idea of what DISC is, we can now see by comparison what it is not. DISC, for example, is not a personality

profile. There are many profiles that are designed to uncover the inner workings of an individual through a series of psychologically based statements. Many of these, such as the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), are highly effective and useful. The end result, however, is markedly different from that of DISC.

DISC should not be confused with a test, either. Tests are designed to measure a person's aptitude through a series of intellectual batteries. There are no right or wrong answers, no grading, and certainly no passing or failing with DISC. Again, while testing can produce marvelous results and give insights into the mind of an individual, most are not designed to measure someone's behavior or communication patterns. When seeking to discover the ways in which a person most often behaves and communicates (whether behaving naturally or adapting), I have found DISC to do the job most accurately.

Why use DISC in place of a personality profile or an aptitude test? The reason why the Coaches at Building Champions, along with thousands of our clients, have chosen this route is simple. The way in which a person behaves and communicates seems to be much more relevant to the workplace than personality or even intellectual aptitude. Ultimately, it is about your desired end result. For our part, we have discovered that it is more valuable

to measure behavior and communication first because these patterns can tell us a number of other things in the end, such as the following: How do they behave under pressure? How do they prefer to be spoken to? What do they need in a manager? What kind of manager are they? And so forth.

More specifically, the four styles of DISC are intended to measure how a person responds to Problems (D style), to People (I Style), to Pace (S style) and to Procedures (C style). These categories are most relevant to the workplace as these are most often seen in the workplace. If we can measure how a person responds to stimuli normally found in the workplace, we can then make a more accurate assessment of their overall value to the team.

Now that we have a glimpse of how the categories are measured, let's talk about what each category means. I mentioned a moment ago that the four DISC styles are used to gauge how a person reacts to Problems, to People, to Pace and to Procedures. Let me further explain. This past summer two Coaches and I were in Atlanta for Todd Duncan's High Trust Sales Academy for Mortgage Professionals. As some of our Coaches were bringing the Academy to a close on Saturday morning, the subject of DISC came up, and one of our long-time clients asked us a very interesting question. He asked, "Can you give us some famous examples of each DISC type?" Little did he know the depth of insight his question posed. If we can begin to associate styles with some well-known figures in our culture, it will help us to further understand what each of the four styles represents.

So, let's start with the **D style**. Remember, the D stands for Dominance. Dominant people love to tackle

problems head on. Who are some famous High Ds? How about General George S. Patton, Michael Jordan, or Rush Limbaugh? Take note of some of the common descriptors of the D style and see if you don't agree. High D's are Daring, Forceful, Innovative, Competitive, Strong-willed, Bold, and Blunt. These are people who will stop at nothing to win, and one of their highest values is to say what they mean and to mean what they say. In the corporate world, you will often see D styles at the head of companies and departments. In the sports world, you will often see them as Coaches or Team Captains.

What is to be said about the **I style**? The first love of the high I is people. If you remember that I is for Influence, then you might think of such famous examples as Robin Williams or Bill Clinton. What do you think of when these two people come to mind? How about Enthusiasm, Charm, Self-assuredness, Boisterousness and even Impulsivity? These people are always the absolute life of the party and the center of attention! The best phrase that I have heard to describe the I style is that, to them, "Strangers are friends they just haven't met yet." Often times you will see a High I in the role of a performer, public speaker, or sales professional.

Next is the **S Style**. This style functions well when life works at an even pace. Who are the well known S types? Who are the Steady people of our society? How about Sheriff Andy Griffith or the former First Lady Barbara Bush? You see, people who score high on the S Factor are Passive, Amiable, Relaxed, Patient and Understanding. Those of you who remember watching the Andy Griffith show or Mayberry RFD know that, regardless of how ruffled

and shaken poor Barney Fife became, there was Andy. He was always ready with a good word, ready to listen, and ready to diffuse the situation before it got out of hand. That is probably one of the most notable characteristics of the High S. While the storm is raging all around, the S Style takes a step back and is the first one to remind us that the sun will shine again soon.

And finally for the **C Style**. If you are a high C, then you are all about procedure, procedure, procedure. You may remember that C is for Compliance. I must admit my own personal fondness for this style because it's mine. Now I certainly don't pretend to be famous; most of you have probably never met me. So who are some famous High C characters? Consider Jack Lemmon as Felix Unger in the Odd Couple or former Vice President Al Gore. Yes, we are the people who worry over the little details. We are Neat, Tidy, Clean and Meticulous. We are methodical in our fact-finding and typically slow in our decision making. We love to be the experts in one field and one field only. (I'm still working on that one.) And whatever you do, DO NOT UPSET OUR DAILY ROUTINES! If you do, then you are likely to encounter Dustin Hoffman as the Rainman when Wapner is on at 3:30 and he can't get to a TV. Often times you will see a High C in the role of company controller, human resource personnel, or even as disaster relief coordinators.

Finally, I'd like to talk about one of the most amazing things the DISC Profile (MFS Employee-Manager Version) has to offer—Natural and Adapted Styles reporting. As I was going through these examples and descriptors of each style just now, I was referring to the Natural Style. A person's Natural DISC Style is just exactly

that: it is his/her natural preference for behavior when most comfortable and at ease. It requires very little effort and often even no effort at all to exhibit your Natural behavior characteristics.

Adapted Style, on the other hand, reflects the degree to which you are changing your Natural Style to fit in with your current work environment. In short, your Natural Style is who you are, and your Adapted Style is who you feel you need to become. So the hope is that, for any given job role, your Natural and your Adapted Styles will not be significantly different. You see, the more difference there is between your Natural and Adapted Styles, the more effort you will have to put forth to succeed in that role.

It is also very important to note that Natural and Adapted Styles are not a matter of Can vs. Can't. W.M. Marston, one of the founding fathers of modern DISC language, said, "**All** people can exhibit all four behavioral factors in varying degrees of intensity." In other words, simply because I score highest in the C category and lowest in the D category does not mean, nor even imply, that I am unable to exhibit any of the characteristics of the D style. It simply means that it is more natural for me to behave and communicate like a high C and that Dominance is something that requires more energy for me to exhibit. The same can be said for the other DISC categories as well.

Hopefully, you can see that DISC is a highly effective tool for measuring behavior and communication in others. If not, it's probably because you're a High D, and you were too busy skimming to actually pay attention. (I'm only kidding, of course!) Anyway, DISC can and should be used not only to identify these prominent traits, but, more importantly, to gain insight into which

traits you and your associates will most likely display (Natural Style) and which traits they feel they are being asked to display (Adapted Style).

As I mentioned initially, the ultimate goal of DISC is improved communication. It starts with knowing ourselves, but it doesn't end there. As the eastern philosopher Lao Tse says, "He who knows himself is learned. He who knows others is wise." Let me encourage you to take action. Exercise wisdom and utilize DISC. Here's to successful communication!

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