

IT'S ALL ABOUT COMMUNICATION

Communication forms the basis of all of our interactions with people. Even though you are a new sales manager, you have already likely worked on improving your communication skills in order to work better with your managers, colleagues, and customers. This chapter will look at communication from all the core perspectives as it relates to your new role in management giving you many more techniques to incorporate in your daily interactions. This chapter will also help you in understanding your style of communicating, as well as that of others, in order to improve your working relationships. This involves how you communicate up, down, and across the organization, as well as with outside business associates. It is also especially important when you look at interviewing, delegating, motivation, training, coaching, counseling, and so many other facets of your interpersonal relationships with others. In fact, communication ties directly in to just about every aspect of your job and is an indispensable tool that will greatly increase your chances of success in your new career.

LISTENING SKILLS

Before delving too far into types of communicating styles and their usefulness, it is important to briefly look at what people so often

neglect in skill building and personal development—the art of listening. In fact, to the novice, listening isn't even associated with communicating. In many respects, we are trained to believe that communicating involves some kind of talking, when in reality, some of the best communicators are also the best listeners.

When you look back, we are all taught as children to read, write, and speak, but how often are we taught to listen? This is interesting when we think about how the best salespeople need to be great listeners when making a sales call (e.g., when trying to identify a customer's concern or conducting a needs analysis). In fact, for you as a manager, it is critical as well. How else can you truly understand and help to improve your team without the act of listening? Yet time and time again, we forget to make a conscious effort to listen. The following are some common examples of inattentive listening habits.

- Trying to finish someone else's thoughts
- Interrupting
- Talking too much without pausing or waiting for a response
- Losing your own train of thought
- Lack of eye contact
- Slouching
- Crossed arms

You will notice that many of the above examples deal with the listener actually talking (often a sign that there is a lack of listening) or other things that can cause difficulty for active listening to occur. Now look at some examples of what the attentive listener does.

- Utilizes supportive or empathetic words (“go on,” “I understand,” “really,” etc.).
- Has an inviting posture and hand positioning (depending on the circumstance).
- Maintains solid eye contact (not staring, though).
- Smiles with regularity.

As a new manager, this is your time to shine. To show your team that you are supportive of them, the first step is to be a good listener. It is only then that you can even begin to understand how you and others communicate and how to improve working rela-

tionships. In the early goings, you need to be disciplined in order to be an attentive listener. Like any other skill, it is something that you need to work on. Some other ways to condition yourself to be a better listener include the following:

- Ask questions (open- and/or closed-ended).
- Don't rush the speaker.
- Verify or paraphrase in order to make sure you fully understand what is being said.
- Don't prejudge a person or situation.
- Limit distractions.
- Listen with your eyes and your ears.
- Try not to finish someone else's thought(s).
- Come to the table ready to listen.

The last example is more or less a mind-set. Reminding yourself that you want to be a more active listener goes a long way.

THE THEORY BEHIND COMMUNICATION STYLES

In life, people play many roles: manager, parent, psychologist, teacher, student, friend. Each role requires behavior unique to it. At the same time, as individuals, everyone comes to their role in life with a different set of values, traits, and characteristics that have been shaped over the years, both hereditary and environmental through society.

Interestingly, psychologists have discovered that people who change as circumstances require feel their behavior is consistent, no matter what role they play. However, research has shown observable changes in behavior as the person moves from one role to the other—for example, from work to home life. Taking this idea one step further, people change not only as roles change but also as situations and circumstances change within a role. It has been evidenced that, in many cases, changes people make are done on a subconscious rather than conscious level.

You as a new sales manager will have to keep up constant communication with many different stakeholders. This will include communicating with any or all of these:

- Your sales team
- Other sales managers
- Customers
- Your manager(s)
- Senior management
- Other department personnel (finance, human resources, product managers, marketers, public relations, engineers, etc.)

Sometimes the interactions will seem effortless, and sometimes conversations will be a real challenge. The information and tools in this chapter are designed to increase your odds for successful communication with all types of people and stakeholders. In fact, while this book is meant to be a business resource, solid communication skills could of course benefit you in all areas of your life.

THE ORIGINS OF DISC THEORY

In 1928, the psychologist Dr. William M. Marston wrote a book called *Emotions of Normal People*. The title creates an immediate question: What is “normal”? According to Marston, “normal” did not refer to typical psychological processes, societal norms, or mores. Instead, “normal” referred to an individual’s own environment. For example, if you are in your ordinary or typical environment for a particular situation, Marston considers you to be “normal.” In his book he identified what he called “primary emotions,” of which he highlighted four and he talked about their associated behaviors.

DISC theory got its start from some of Marston’s work. The theory contends that four patterns in people emerge due to a combination of various factors. People tend to be either task-oriented or people-oriented as well as prone to either changing or accepting their environment. Today it focuses to a great extent on how people of different communication or personal styles (which we’ll look at in a moment) react under different circumstances. Two of the key questions it strives to answer and improve upon are (1) How do you react in your most comfortable (friendly) environment? and (2) How do you react when out of your favorable environment (antagonistic)?

Today there are many companies using different variations of

DISC instruments to gauge personal styles as well as other types of measurement instruments for personal development, including listening skills, time management skills, and persuasion skills. Another important instrument used to understand and enhance communications is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator MBTI™. Although the intended outcomes of DISC and MBTI™ overlap to some degree, they are based on a different set of principles.

Due to the proliferation of so many products and services in this area, it is difficult to try to cover everything. Here the focus will be on DISC related profile instruments and the four words chosen to identify the categories of personal styles—Directing, Influencing, Supportive, and Contemplative—as taken from *The AMA DISC Survey*™.★

Keep in mind that your company may choose to use any one of the many communication instruments with different words to describe the type of test. This ranges from Personal Style Test to Behavioral Profile to Communication Styles Indicator or some other instrument. Once an instrument style is chosen, what is critical to realize is that whatever category or categories of DISC you fall into, there is no good and no bad style or combination of styles. This model is meant to be a nonjudgmental way of looking at behaviors and communication styles. So while they are often called tests, there is no passing, failing, or grading system. They are meant to provide guidance and focus.

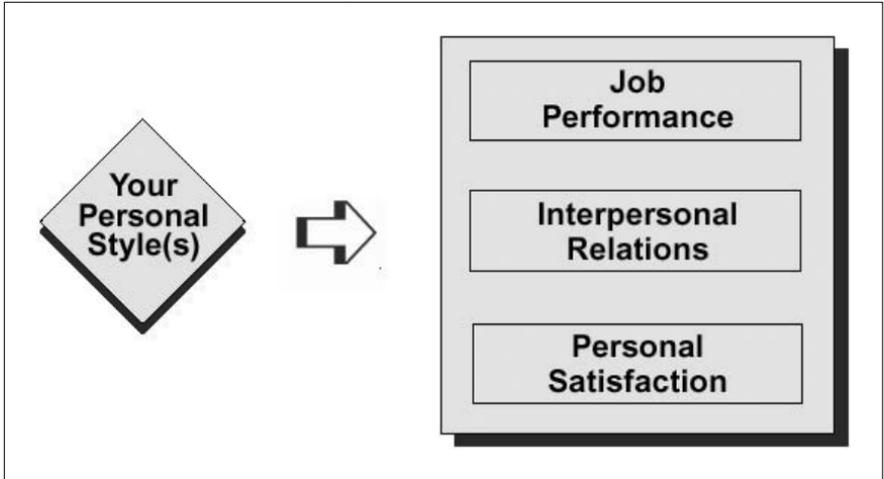
Also, while the tests, when taken properly, provide you with your corresponding style(s), they are not meant to delve too deeply into your internal psyche. They are intended to give you a better understanding of certain recognizable characteristics of yourself and others rather than core traits that would require a much deeper knowledge and understanding.

DISC profiles have been around for decades. Millions of people across many professions have used them. It is important that you as a sales manager utilize such an instrument, as it will aid you in three main categories (as depicted in Figure 2-1): job performance, interpersonal relations, and personal satisfaction.

Breaking these categories down even further, the DISC Profile can help you in the following ways:

★Robert A. Cooke, *The AMA DISC Survey* and *The AMA DISC Survey Debriefing Guide*, New York: The American Management Association, 2000. Copyright © by Human Synergistics/Center for Applied Research. Reproduced by permission.

Figure 2-1. Effects of the DISC styles.

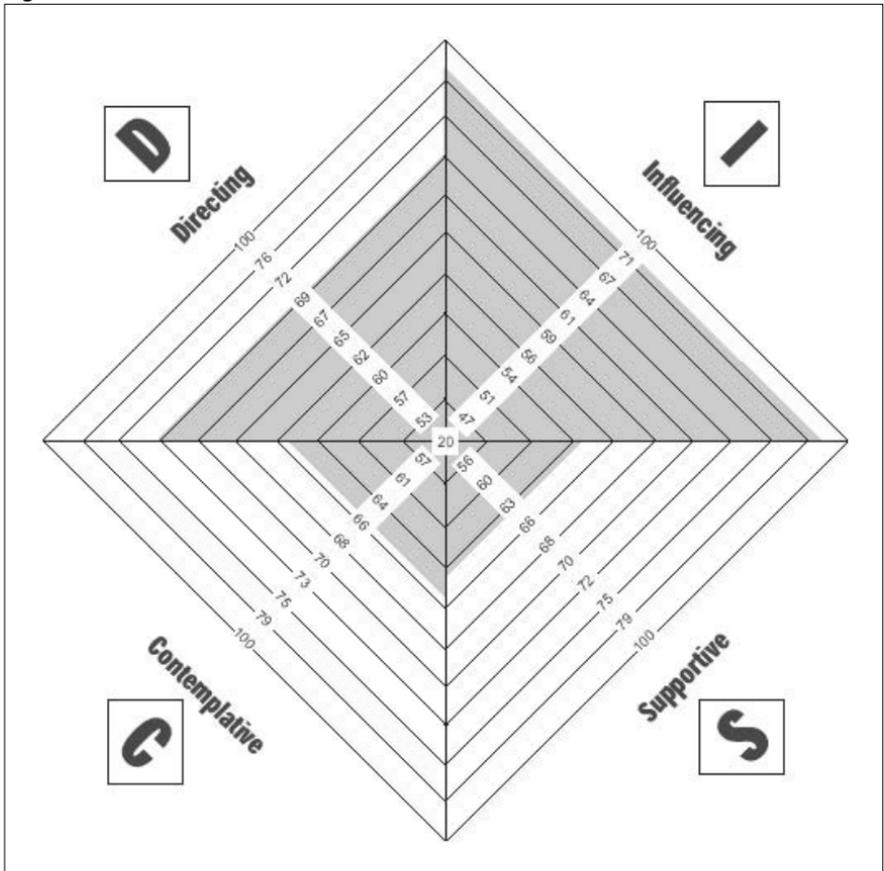


- Determining some of your own strengths and weaknesses
- Determining certain strengths and weaknesses of team members
- Improving your communication skills (which include listening skills, as previously discussed)
- Improving the communication skills of your sales team members
- Improving team morale and respect for one another
- Enhancing customer relationships
- Reducing stress and conflict
- Working more effectively with your manager(s)
- Hiring new sales staff
- Increasing your self-awareness
- Demonstrating tolerance
- Promoting diversity
- Embracing change

A DISC profile can be taken in about thirty minutes. Through a series of forced-choice questions you then plot your results onto a four-quadrant chart, as shown in Figure 2-2.

With certain DISC instruments you are able to self-assess as well as be assessed by the company or a company certified by or affiliated with the instrument's developer. Furthermore, there are often addi-

Figure 2-2. The DISC Profile.



tional training resources (books, online resources, and so on) that go along with the instruments to further increase their usefulness.

THE FOUR-QUADRANT SYSTEM

As shown above, each quadrant is defined by one of the four factors—D, I, S, or C. Remember that depending on the instrument used, the four letters can be associated with slightly different words and have other subtle differences. An example would be the word *dominant* in place of *directing*, or *conscientious* in place of *contemplative*. Notwithstanding, whether or not these four words vary, certain general themes hold true across DISC instruments; for example:

Directing: Someone oriented toward changing his task environment.

Influencing: Someone oriented toward changing other people.

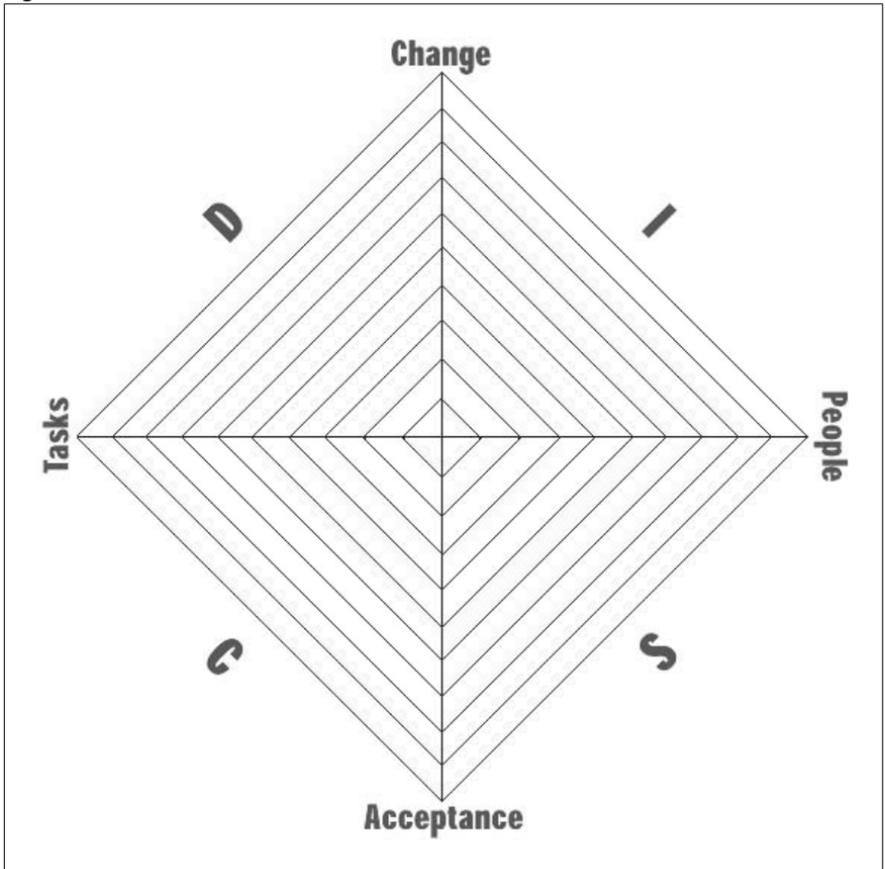
Supportive: Someone oriented toward understanding and accepting other people.

Contemplative: Someone oriented toward understanding and accepting her task environment.

Figure 2-3 relates these four DISC quadrants to the dimensions of tasks, people, change, and acceptance.

Also be aware that the above descriptions of each of the DISC quadrants are based on substantial characteristics in each. For exam-

Figure 2-3. DISC dimensions.



ple, a very high “D” would possess almost all the characteristics of the D, and this would be without regard or influence by another style. The level of scores and where you plot on the grids suggest the intensity of certain characteristics, a higher score equating to stronger characteristics. Combinations, of which there can be many, will be discussed later.

The following are some typical characteristics of each pattern—D, I, S, and C. Again, keep in mind that these are not attributable to all those who fall into a certain category and that everyone possesses at least a partial amount of the characteristics associated with each quadrant. These examples are simply a reference point; when you and your staff complete a profile (assuming you have not done so already), you’ll have a better understanding and a basis for learning and future development of both you and your staff. Also, since you will never be able to precisely know where many other people you come in contact with will plot on the DISC survey, this will give you some insights into their more likely styles and how to work best with them.

Directing or High D Overview

Anyone who scores high in the D quadrant is oriented toward changing their task environment. They exhibit these characteristics:

- They attack the task at hand.
- They are goal- and solution-oriented.
- They make things happen and move swiftly.
- The greater the challenge, the more active they become.
- They often work best independently.
- They thrive on competition.

Strengths

The Directing personalities show these strengths:

- They are assertive, efficient, and focused on results.
- Under the right circumstances, they can take direction well.
- They will exhibit strong organizational ability and operational skills in reacting to chaos.

They are self-starters.

They push others to succeed with the same rigor as they possess.

They tend to be pioneering and adventurous.

They are rather self-sufficient.

Achieving one goal will encourage them to go after the next one.

Weaknesses

“Directing” people can also exhibit some less desirable traits.

They can come across as dictatorial.

Their focus is on getting results, not on how people feel in the process.

They can be viewed as impatient, arrogant, or overly demanding.

They can be perceived as cold.

They tend to have a low tolerance for negative feelings, bad attitudes, and ineffectiveness.

They can be hasty and blunt as well as critical of others.

High D Wants

A Directing style wants challenge and productivity. They want to move forward constantly and make a decision. It does not really matter to them if the decision is not exactly right, because fixing a mistake is just a matter of making another decision.

A person with this style wants the freedom and authority to move toward personal growth. She does not mind being tested or measured, as long as there is some associated result or reward.

High D Needs

These people need to have controls. Their multitasking can create mental and physical disorganization. Moderation and a balance of challenges will help relieve the continual stress. A Directing style needs to learn patience and relaxation. Empathetic listening can help him to be a more tactful communicator. “Ready, fire, aim” is generally his motto. A person of this style needs to be more cautious and prudent in his approach to issues. Many times he will solve one problem but create two in the process.

Communication Style

Because of their orientation toward changing their task environment, Directing personalities communicate assertively, with the goal of getting things done.

- *Verbal Communication.* Abundant verbal communication is common for the Directing style. These people tend to tell more than they ask or talk more than listen. They are usually rather blunt and get directly to the point.

- *Tonality (Tone of Voice).* The Directing style will tend to use a forceful tone. The volume may be high and the speech pattern fast. Directings use a variety of intonations.

- *Body Language.* They move with authority. They generally are fast-paced and walk with purpose. The Directing style will gesture while talking. They can also readily display boredom or impatience.

Writing Style

Their writing style is abbreviated and to the point. They often leave the details for later discussion.

Influencing or High I Overview

These personalities are oriented toward changing other people. Here are some of their common traits:

They see themselves in the role of persuader and motivator.

They tend to be enthusiastic, outgoing, and interested in getting things started.

They are people-oriented and are comfortable in both one-on-one situations and big gatherings.

They can be very outgoing and personable.

Social recognition and influence are key drivers.

Their optimism can be evident since they are often very expressive.

Strengths

These characteristics make an Influencing personality a success:

They are charismatic and inspiring.

When projects involve others, they are enthusiastic and participative.

They are idea people and get others interested in their innovations.

They can be entertainers with a natural warmth and likability.

They are spontaneous with others.

They can easily multitask.

They can adeptly manage several people at the same time by juggling priorities as needed.

Once comfortable with the people involved, they can bring them together to achieve a goal.

Weaknesses

Possibly less successful traits include the following:

They can sometimes come across as self-promoting or superficial.

Because of their need to persuade, they can be seen as somewhat manipulative.

They can get excited, which leads to observable impatience or potentially inappropriate behavior for the circumstances.

At times they are perceived as overly optimistic and overly confident.

They generally have a lower concern for facts.

They also tend to have an opinion on most topics.

High I Wants

An Influencing style wants involvement. They enjoy people contact and interaction. They often like “friendly” debate. They do not like to argue, but would rather express and hear opinions on a variety of subjects. They also want to be recognized. They want feedback about their accomplishments or progress toward a goal. Certificates, awards, trophies, and pins are a few ways that the Influencing style might display their successes. Also, they often want to be surrounded by optimistic people.

High I Needs

The Influencing style often needs to become better at time management. They need to control their impulsiveness and focus on the

task at hand. More time needs to be spent on checking, verifying, and general diligence. At the same time, they often need to develop a sense of urgency. The Influencing style needs to be more objective in managing different situations. They must learn not to take things personally. They can have a tendency to say things without regard for the impact their words have on others. Similarly, they need to realize that others' criticism of them is not necessarily a personal attack, but could be something constructive.

Communication Style

The Influencing style models enthusiasm and openness with people at all levels.

- *Verbal Communication.* They often make their points through stories and anecdotes. They enjoy sharing experiences. Some Influencing styles like to match and then “one-up” another’s triumph. They might ask, “How was your vacation?” so they can proceed to tell you about theirs.

- *Tonality (Tone of Voice).* The Influencing style speech pattern is fast. They use a wide variance of inflection and pitch. At times, tonality is dramatic and volume is higher than normal. Their vocal style reflects their desire for active participation by others.

- *Body Language.* They are usually open and easy to read. Their facial expressions are animated. Hand and body movement is lively and, at times, exaggerated. Impromptu actions are also common.

Writing Style

Their writing style is theatrical. Many adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases are often used. Similar to the Directing style, the details are often left for later discussion.

Supportive or High S Overview

Those oriented toward understanding and accepting others are considered Supportives. This is what they’re like:

Their major role is to be supportive and cooperative.

They are team players.

They can often be easygoing, relaxed, and amiable.

They utilize systematic approaches to manage goals.
They keep things in check by controlling the system.
Team recognition and appreciation for a job well done are key drivers for them.
They don't need public recognition for their efforts
"Stay the course" would be an appropriate motto for them.
There is security in tradition.

Strengths

Supportives exhibit several strong points:

They are predictable and dependable.
Often they are even-tempered.
They are easily able to get assistance from others because of their balance.
They can be very loyal and tend to build long-term relationships.
They are excellent listeners and are good at concealing their own emotions while conversing with others.
They can often be very patient.
They are dedicated to task completion.
They systematically finish one task before moving to the next.

Weaknesses

The following may hamper the Supportive's success:

They tend to procrastinate.
They are slow at making decisions, especially if they fear that those decisions will be unpopular.
When under stress or duress, they may withdraw and try and "let the dust settle."
Although plodding toward project completion is considered to be a strength, they have difficulty establishing goals.
They are slow starters, especially when the project is a directional change or lacks a systematic approach.

High S Wants

The Supportive style wants acceptance. They enjoy belonging and group interaction. Group interaction, however, must stay on track. They want to follow the system, complete the project, and then discuss it. High S people want friendly relationships. They prefer avoiding conflict. If they disagree with an idea or decision, they will not openly debate or criticize. They will instead slow things down and gain control of the environment. The Supportive style wants to stabilize the environment. They also want to specialize. They tend to stay focused on a project from start to finish. They also like to work on repetitive projects at their own pace.

High S Needs

The Supportive style needs to learn to say no. They often want to help and sometimes take on more than they can handle. They can be oversensitive to the needs of others to the detriment of their own position. Some High S people need to express themselves more openly. They not only control their possessions and their knowledge, they also control their emotions. It is often best for them to not hold on to or internalize comments made by others but rather to express their feelings, getting things off their chest.

Communication Style

The Supportive style is generally calm and self-controlled.

- *Verbal Communication.* Verbal communication is limited for the High S. They tend to ask more than they tell. They listen much better than they express their opinions. Because they want to keep the environment friendly, they thoughtfully choose and pace their words.

- *Tonality (Tone of Voice).* They typically demonstrate consistent or monotone delivery of a message. The volume itself is low, and the pace is slow.

- *Body Language.* The Supportive style exhibits their calmness through nonexpressive body language. Eye contact will vary. Their eye contact may be direct when listening, which demonstrates empathy or sympathy for what is being said. When talking, however, their eye contact could tend to wander.

Writing Style

Their writing style is friendly. Complimenting other team members for their work and support would be readily intertwined in the message.

Contemplative or High C Overview

Those oriented toward understanding and accepting their task environment are considered Contemplatives. Here are some of their characteristics:

They tend to be more analytical, reserved, and focused on getting things done right.

They attempt to avoid antagonism.

They are accurate, precise, and attempt to remove risk from a decision.

They are conservative and disciplined in their approach to any task.

They do not typically need public recognition for their efforts.

They do seek reassurance that the job is being done correctly.

“Do it right the first time” would be a good motto for them.

Strengths

Contemplatives exhibit certain strong points:

They are agreeably compliant.

They are not argumentative.

When their decision is made, however, they can be strong advocates for a position.

Their strength comes from research, analysis, and detailed knowledge of their subject.

Being logical, they look to eliminate emotion in a debate.

They also tend to be good listeners and can therefore adapt their own behavior to the circumstances as they analyze conversations with others.

They are patient when dealing with facts and tasks.

They are dedicated to task completion.

They finish one task accurately and within the appropriate parameters before moving to the next.

Weaknesses

These traits may balance the Contemplative's strengths:

They can become irritated with inefficiency and errors.

Although normally diplomatic, they can be critical without enough regard to personal feelings.

Because of their desire for accuracy, they can be seen as nit-pickers.

Their focus is on avoiding unnecessary risk, which leads others to believe that they are more interested in the method of reaching the goal than in the goal itself.

While nonconfrontational, they can be rather critical.

If they have a strong opinion, they are reluctant to back down, even when that might be in the best interest of the team.

High C Wants

They want assurances. They want to know that a project is being done properly and in the most efficient manner. They want others to recognize their precision. Public recognition is not as important as a long-standing reputation for thoroughness. They often opt to do something themselves, finding it the best way to get a task done right. Before jumping into a project, however, the Contemplative style wants the time to think through the process for goal achievement. They want facts, not opinions. They want specific methods, not vague ones. They want to proceed cautiously being able to check and cross-check before moving to the next phase of the project.

High C Needs

The Contemplative style needs to learn how to show sincere appreciation for others' efforts. No one can attain the high standards for accuracy that they set for themselves. They need to understand

and recognize that others may be trying their best. The High C needs to be more willing to accept change. At times change includes temporary disorganization. They need to initiate solutions instead of questioning procedure.

They must learn that guidelines are not laws. Compromise and win-win negotiations need to become a more significant part of their behavior.

Communication Style

The Contemplative style is very tactful, diplomatic, and thorough.

- *Verbal Communication.* Verbal communication is more limited to logic and facts. They express their opinions with limited emotions. Because they want to avoid antagonism, they thoughtfully plan their words, taking a formal and proper approach to communication. Their questions can sometimes seem like more of an interrogation instead of conversation because of their drive for detail.

- *Tonality (Tone of Voice).* The Contemplative style uses a more monotone delivery with less inflection. The volume itself is low, and the pace is slow. There is determination in their tone.

- *Body Language.* They disguise their emotions and limit exposure of their thoughts. Therefore, they use less facial expressions or impulsive gestures. Eye contact will vary. Their eye contact may be direct when focus is needed to analyze a situation. When interest wanes, however, their eye contact may wander, demonstrating their desire to move on.

Writing Style

Their writing style is detailed. The Contemplative style wants to make sure the message, logic behind the message, and backup detail are included.

HOW ROLES AND SITUATIONS AFFECT YOUR STYLE

As we mentioned earlier, you play different roles, and your style may vary depending on that. Furthermore, in a given role, the situation might change from anywhere from very amicable to very threatening. While we all know that we change in these situations, it is important to understand how we change and to work on ways

to improve any negative signals or reactions that could be detrimental to us. For example, under pressure a Directing style might rush to judgment or become overly demanding, whereas a Contemplative style might become more defensive and, instead of making a decision, become trapped in overanalysis.

WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT STYLES

There are two key strategies that you can use when interacting with others—adapting and complementing.

Adapting (or flexing) to other people's styles means that you are mirroring or imitating their styles. Adapting strategies are more appropriate when people are performing effectively or when you are trying to motivate or influence them. As discussed, your style or combination of styles as well as the style(s) around you each have their own more typical strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, not only is it important to recognize the types of situations and people that possess styles best suited to yours, but you must learn to flex your style in order to work with the myriad of other styles and combinations with which you will constantly come into contact.

Complementing other people's styles means that you are exhibiting contrasting behaviors or trying to balance or enhance their style with your own behavior. Complementing strategies should be implemented when the styles of other people are either inadequate or need additional efforts to achieve the desired results. Many people already possess either similar or different styles that work together well. If that is the case, they are already in solid communication with those other styles, but if that is not the case, then being self-aware will allow you to consciously try to enhance the relationship.

Everyone Possesses Some of All Four

As previously mentioned, everyone has characteristics in all four quadrants. It is how a person is inclined to prioritize the DISC factors that will determine her personal style pattern. Furthermore, it is when all factors are considered together that a substantial pattern of characteristics is formed, giving you a more pure style. Since a pure style is not realistic, the resulting combination of styles will be many. Upon completing a DISC analysis and practicing you will become more adept at working in (adapting and complementing) all the combinations of styles.

For example, the combination of a High D and High I would typically be a very matter-of-fact person with the ability to engage others. He is astute in his ability to pick out what motivates others quickly. He might then use that insight to inspire others to move in the direction that he has decided is correct.

As another example, the combination of a High S and High C is someone who is patiently analytical. She takes the time to investigate situations to determine the best direction. She forms cooperative teams that can attack the technical problems and is tenacious in moving toward task completion. Conversely, each of these two dual combination patterns has distinct potential weaknesses that, if not properly understood and compensated for, could hinder communication under certain conditions and with certain other styles and combination styles.

Intensity of Styles

Since some people possess a high degree of one, two, or even all four styles, and others possess a low degree of anywhere from one to all four, it is the intensity in a style or styles that would likely strengthen a strength and/or accentuate any weakness when particular conditions exist. In fact, it is usually easiest to identify someone that is very high in only one category and thus understand and hopefully modify behaviors as needed to enhance your working relationships.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS

You should try to think of specific members of your sales team, your manager(s), colleagues in other departments, and your customers, with an emphasis on those with whom you would really like to better your interpersonal effectiveness.

You can then separate each of them into various categories and look at the most likely DISC pattern(s) for each individual. For example:

- When resurrecting a tense yet important working relationship with another manager:
If he were a High S, you could ask him about his staff and how things are going with his team.

- When selling to a customer who you previously clashed with but who still has enormous potential:
If she were a High D, you would get right to the point, emphasizing direct results and outcomes if she were to implement your products and services.
- Deciding how to encourage a new salesperson who lacks confidence in closing the big deal:
If she were a High I you might publicly praise her first closed deal in order to help build up her ego.
- Convincing your manager that it is time to move on from trying to land Account X because it is affecting your other major accounts:
If he were a High C, you could use detailed analysis and reports to summarize your case as well, having specific answers to counter further challenges.

By now you are probably thinking that some of these strategies are taking you out of your own comfort zone. The reality is that in order to communicate effectively with others, you will need to stretch yourself.

Changing Profiles

Another consideration in developing your knowledge and understanding of personal style is the fact that profiles change. Because these are surface characteristics, a style can change over time. Again, these changes are neither negative nor positive—all the more reason why you should repeat the test if you have not taken it in some time. It can only benefit you to look at where you plot today. While the difference is unlikely to be dramatic, depending on the amount of time that has lapsed and the circumstances in your life, some minor changes are likely.

Differences Among People

There are many differences among people, some subtle and others very blatant. Attempting to use DISC Theory alone to analyze people would be saying that they can be grouped in a purely scientific sense around these styles, when in fact there are too many other factors to understand in order for that to be possible. Although in-

numerable areas could be considered, a few more directly help determine and shape someone's behavior. These include a combination of influences from early childhood through today, including:

- Career path
- Culture and traditions
- Education
- Financial stability
- Health
- Intelligence
- Parents and other family members
- Spouse or significant other
- Values

How all of the people, events, and environments relate to your personal style is a more complicated subject, but it's helpful to know that although each of our personalities seem so very complicated and different, tools such as DISC profiles can be utilized to simplify and enhance our work relationships, job performance, and personal satisfaction.

As a sales manager, you will come into contact with all types of communicators exhibiting a wide range of behaviors. Now, more than ever, you will need to communicate with many individuals and groups within your organization, as well as with business professionals and customers outside of your organization. You are also now charged with being a coach, mentor, mediator, motivator, and team leader. In order to excel at all of these and other management responsibilities, you will need to apply your skills in various environments and settings, and an understanding of yourself as well as the communication of others is a solid beginning.

Also, as you know, the three major settings where you will find yourself communicating will be in person, by phone, and in written communication (e-mail, letters, etc.). Whatever your preferred style and communication vehicle, you will need to understand your audience (individual and/or group) and communicate accordingly. Keep in mind that all three ways of communicating will be necessary, at least to some extent. When feasible, the means of communication should be determined by you with the following in mind:

- Your preferred style
- The style of the recipient of the information
- The specific circumstances

How you communicate best is the starting point. For example, you might have been an English language major and feel you can write a very elaborate sales proposal (possibly a High C). However, the recipient of the information might find your style too verbose, and would prefer just a short, succinct proposal highlighting the key points (possibly a High D). To further complicate this, what if your audience was several people?

This is where you would look to try to have something for everyone: a synopsis covering all the highlights at the beginning and/or the end, and a great deal of supporting documentation in the body of the proposal addressing all of the possible questions and scenarios.

The same thinking would hold for face-to-face and phone communications. It is obviously important to know yourself and your preferred style, but it is as important to know your audience.

Now that you have a solid grounding in communication styles and the theory behind it, there are two more complex settings in which both individual and group dynamics pose a challenge for many new as well as seasoned managers.

RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

Gone are the days of “just because” or Monday morning mandatory meeting. People are too busy, and not only can it be a poor use of your time as well as your staff’s, but it can also be demotivating to your team.

If you do choose to have Monday morning meetings, or a weekly scheduled meeting at other times, make sure it is for good reason. Historically, weekly meetings were a time for updates. A manager would provide information on what they got from meeting with his manager, and the employees would share progress reports on their side. However, if a series of e-mails or one-off conversations can cover the information too; then the meeting is pointless—not to mention the fact that organizing a meeting is very difficult, with many salespeople either working remotely or on the road making a sales call.

It is prudent to hold a meeting when the following criteria exist:

- People seem confused as to their roles and responsibilities.
- A major change is occurring that will affect your team members—in a positive or negative way.
- Rumors are circulating that need to be addressed.
- Input is needed from the group on important business decisions.
- You need to discuss major policy changes or sensitive subjects that affect the entire group (absenteeism, business ethics, new hours of operation, etc.).

Once you have determined that a meeting is necessary, it is then incumbent upon you to make it productive.

Follow these tried-and-true rules when planning meetings in order to make them a good use of everyone's time:

- Keep it on time (beginning and end time). There is nothing worse than stating a time and people feel they can show up later or that the meeting will run past the scheduled time.
- When possible, rotate the meeting facilitator—people like to get involved, and since a meeting is really for the benefit of everyone at the table, let others run the meeting or at least certain parts of the meeting.
- Have an agenda in advance—no one likes to go to a meeting and always wonder, what's next? Every meeting should be defined. Even if it is just for brainstorming ideas in a roundtable setting, you should specify that in advance.
- Make the environment as comfortable as possible. While you might not have abundant space for meetings, be sure that everyone is accounted for with proper seating, lighting, and a comfortable room temperature.
- Include remote team members. Today there are a myriad of ways to get remote staff involved, including phone conference calls as well as Web and video conferencing. Depending on the objectives of the meeting and the regularity, it might be well worth your time to have a process in place for remote staff to access meetings on an ongoing basis.
- Invite the key stakeholders—make sure you include those who do or will play a part in subject matter being addressed

in the meeting. It can be very unproductive to discuss plans that would need the time and resources of another department and not include them in the meeting. At the same time, limit the meeting to only those necessary so as not to misuse the time of nonessential participants.

- Always provide next steps. Whether it is an idea generation meeting or a more formal planning session, summarize the meeting at the end as well as provide next steps both there and in writing afterwards. This could then set the stage for any possible follow-up meetings.

When leading a meeting, you should do the following:

- Keep an outline of the meeting, marking topics off as they are discussed or addressed.
- Use flipcharts, PowerPoint, white boards, and other resources as necessary—using various forms of communication keeps people engaged. Also, if there are numerous details that need to be either seen or captured, you might wish to appoint a scribe or someone to flipchart the key discussion points, and have someone type them up afterwards.
- Avoid wordsmithing and being too detailed. There is no point in getting caught up in semantics and minutiae when everyone is pressed for time. Stick to the key points and topics of the meeting, and parking-lot other subjects that can be addressed at a later date.
- Be inclusive. Some people tend to participate more than others. The atmosphere should be cooperative, where everyone has her share of input. In fact, the quiet ones could have some of the best ideas.
- Confirm the conclusions. Make sure everyone really is on board with any conclusions or next steps that are determined. While you might be charged with running the meeting, you are really acting more as a facilitator, keeping everything on track and conversations productive. In certain circumstances you might need to play arbiter or the deciding vote, but when at all possible let the team decide.
- Practice your listening skills and then paraphrase or repeat what is said so that the points others make are clear to the

group. You can then weed out nonrelated information and help to keep discussions on target.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

It is common knowledge that making a presentation is one of Americans' (and likely that of many others around the globe as well) biggest fears. It has its roots in the fact that, growing up, we are not necessarily taught to present to a large audience. Sure, there are exceptions, especially those who grew up involved in the performing arts, but for the most part it is an uncultivated skill.

At the same time, as your career progresses, you will find the ability to give a solid presentation more and more critical. Whether it is leading a meeting or presenting to a large audience, by having sound presentation skills you can stand out from the pack. In fact, many have found that it has opened new doors for them, as a good presenter commands respect and recognition from others.

Clearly, certain areas and tips will help you to become a more confident presenter. Some of the basics include:

- *Maintain good eye contact.* Pick some friendly faces in the audience until you get more versed at this.
- *Keep a nice even pace.* Remember, human nature is to speed up when nervous. When presenting, err on the side of a little too slow, and you will find that it is just right for the audience.
- *Avoid distracting the audience.* Hand gestures or fidgeting with papers tends to focus the audience's eyes on these areas and away from the message you are trying to convey.
- *Use different tones, inflections, and pauses to accentuate key points.* Nothing will tune out an audience faster than a monotone presenter. Remember, no matter what the topic of your presentation, no one wants to be bored.
- *Dress appropriately.* This usually means being a bit more formal than the audience. The only exception is when you are trying to really fit in with the group and want to therefore dress just like them.
- *Know your topic, objective, and audience.* Before making any presentation, make sure you are up to speed with what it is you are trying to convey; only then can you develop a presentation

to match this. You also need to tie it into the knowledge level of your audience, and then speak to their interests.

- *Don't worry about seeming a little nervous.* Those who are too comfortable presenting often come across as arrogant.
- *Prepare.* Probably the best piece of advice for a novice presenter is to practice. Until you get more versed at presenting, this could initially mean starting off with an outline, then fully writing out a first draft and then turning that back into an outline. Keep in mind that you're probably not delivering a speech, so avoid trying to read something word for word. You can also practice with a colleague or by yourself in front of the mirror. By actually hearing yourself, you can get more and more comfortable with everything.
- *Don't apologize.* If you show signs of being nervous, you don't have to tell everyone. The audience understands and really wants you to succeed. They will understand if you lose track somewhere or accidentally skip a point.
- *Less is more.* Don't try and convey every thought. This is a common mistake of inexperienced presenters, trying to tell the audience everything. Remember, they don't know what you have left out. Stick to the pertinent facts and not all of the minor details.
- *Engage with audiovisuals.* Audiovisuals are meant to stimulate the audience, not to overwhelm or confuse them. Try to mix things up to keep them involved, but always keeping in mind your message and objective. You can also use the visuals in place of your notes; they can be your guide in and of themselves.
- *Stay on time—here again is where preparation is key.* Only by practicing will you know how long your presentation should take. In fact, the pressure of running out of time can compound itself, further increasing your nerves. Plan to end a little early rather than going the full time allotted.

Most important, develop your own style. Remember, there is not one perfect way to present. Learn from others, but in the end your personality plays a good part in what your style is, and this should come across in your presentation.

Keep in mind that often Q&A is an integral part of a presenta-

tion. In fact, it can make a good presentation great or turn a solid performance sour. Some tips for handling the Q&A period are:

- Solicit questions from the audience. Far too often, the inexperienced presenter forgets to even ask.
- Think of all the possibilities of questions that might come from the audience and prepare for them.
- Paraphrase or restate the question to be sure that you, as well as the rest of the audience, has heard it properly.
- After you have responded, always verify with the person that you have answered the question at hand.
- If you do not know the answer, say you are not sure and that you will get back to them, and be sure to do so.
- Finally, not only should you expect questions, but you should look forward to fielding them. It means your audience is engaged, and it allows you to clarify points made.

Remember, almost everyone fears making presentations, so you are far from alone. That said, if you practice, practice, and then practice some more, you will be one step ahead of your peers.

The only way that people really are able to judge and work productively with one another is by the way they communicate. By recognizing your likely areas of weakness, you at the minimum have the ability to compensate for them, and hopefully turn them into a strength. If you are able to grasp the fundamentals of communication styles, realize that we are all very complex, and accept that there is no “silver bullet” that works under every circumstance, nor with the same person all the time, you will be that much further along to being a well-respected sales manager by your sales team, peers, managers, and customers. As we progress through this book, it is important to be aware that your personal style and how you communicate becomes key in just about every aspect of your job. Also, realize that while awareness is a good beginning, practice is what will improve you as a person as well as help to advance you in your career. As you delve into the next chapter on planning, you will continue to see how key that solid communication skills are to all of us.