

Understanding DISC



The biggest problem

in human relations is difference. One person may be disorganised and talkative, while another is methodical and reserved. If they bump into each other casually they might annoy each other, but that's no big deal.

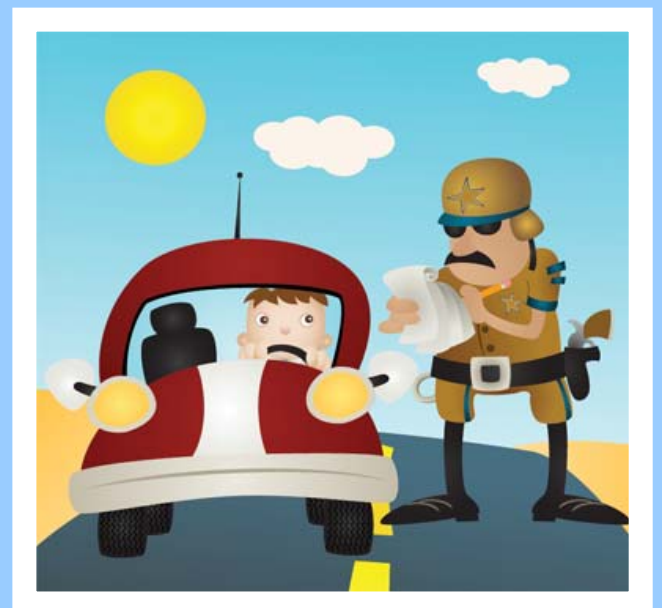
It's easy to avoid people you don't like. But if they work together they will be in contact every day. And personal differences can start to interfere with the efficiency of their work team. That's when it becomes a problem for their manager.

This article is about a tool which will help managers to solve problems like this. It's called DISC. Let me tell you a story that shows how it works.

I've been to the United States many times. During a visit about fifteen years ago I was in a car that was pulled over for speeding. The driver apologised and explained that he was trying to get a friend to the airport to catch a plane back to Australia, and it was important that his friend catch the flight because he had personal problems at home. The policeman listened carefully. He then gave the driver a brief but strongly stated reprimand. And he let him off with a caution.

I was surprised. I thought American cops made you get out of the car and lean against the bonnet with your legs spread while they frisked you for concealed weapons. This policeman must have watched different shows on television.

Several years after this I was in the States again. I was being driven by a friendly and pleasant young man called Nick. He likes to smile and tell jokes. He likes people and he likes talking to people. He also likes fast cars and he drives them hard.



Anyway, suddenly there was a patrol car behind us gaining Nick's attention with a brief flash of lights and a whirr of the siren. Nick didn't seem too concerned. He pulled over and waited for the policeman to approach the car.

The policeman leant down and spoke to Nick through the window, his face serious and his voice sombre.

"We've just measured your speed as being 30 over the limit sir," he said.

"Didn't you see the restriction signs?"

Well my young friend thought he'd lighten the situation a bit. Humanise the contact. Make a friendly contact.

"No," he said, with a bright, friendly smile. "I was going too fast."

I think the fine was \$350. It might have been more. I'm certain that he got the maximum that the law allowed. Because he'd failed to read the other person. He'd responded to the policeman as he might to a friend at a party. And the results weren't what he wanted or anticipated.

All right. Let's apply the DISC system to the story. DISC is based on research that shows that there are four aspects to each person's way of doing things: Dominance, Influencing, Steadiness and Compliance.

Influencing



(Yellow) is seen in the ways we try to influence and persuade people.

By contrast a person **high in influence** (Yellow) is likely to be optimistic, animated, enthusiastic and persuasive. He/She is a team player who places a high value on personal relationships. He/She is a creative problem solver and is able to use powers of persuasion to resolve conflict and move people towards a common goal. If there is a choice to be made between people and task, this type goes for people every time.



Steadiness

(Green) is seen in the ways we respond to change.

A person **high in steadiness** (Green) is likely to be patient, methodical and predictable. He/She will be upset if it is not possible to finish what has been started. They adapt to circumstances because they place a high value on stability and good relationships. He/She is a good team member who is loyal and always willing to lend a hand so that the job can be done. Relationships and people are important to such a person.



Dominance

(Red) is seen in the ways we deal with problems and challenges.

A person **high in dominance** (Red) will be demanding, aggressive and competitive. He/She will be direct and independent. He/She will place a high value on efficiency and is likely to be not only creative but tenacious in getting the job done because winning is everything. People matter less than getting the job done.

Compliance

(Blue) is seen in the ways we respond to rules and regulations.



A person **high in compliance** (Blue) doesn't like making errors. He/She is systematic, accurate, conservative and conventional. They look for order and stability in their lives so they like to follow procedures. For people like this there is always a right way and a wrong way to do anything. His/Her decisions are made on the basis of detailed

information, not intuition or emotion. He/She is committed to maintaining high standards in everything. Because of this they are likely to be hard on themselves and critical of other people.

It seems to me that Nick was high in the influencing dimension. He is a people person who likes to talk and tell jokes. He wants to be liked.

The policeman, on the other hand was almost certainly high in compliance. The type of person who likes to follow rules and regulations. Someone who is well disciplined and neat. They must get a lot of those in the police service.

When you look at it this way you can see why Nick blew it. It wasn't just that it was a person in authority who he was talking to. He just misjudged the policeman's behavioural style completely. If he had been aware of the DISC system he might have realised that he should try to blend his style with the policeman's. Match the mood. Instead of smiling broadly Nick might have done better with a serious face and an admission of error. And he should have toned down his extrovert personality. No jokes. No attempt at personal contact.

In this situation his powers of persuasion are wasted. The policeman could impose his style on the situation because he held the power. Nick should have stayed focused on the problem and treated it seriously. His best chance with a person like this would have been to provide a detailed, reasonable explanation of his action. That might have got him somewhere.

The manager who isn't able to identify behavioural styles is likely to have the same problem. If he isn't able to adapt his own behavioural style to blend with style of each individual he manages, he's in danger of alienating people. Of annoying them. Or making them feel he doesn't care about them as individuals.

If people like you, they will work hard for you. They will do their best to work with you towards common goals. DISC will help you become a better manager in two

ways. First it will permit you to identify your own behavioural style. Next it will give you a way of assessing other people's behavioural style. Once you can do those two things you're in a position to change your style to suit the person you're dealing with. You will be able to get the best out of people. The people in your team will warm to your efforts to respond to them in their own terms. They're more likely to like and respect you. And if they like and respect you, they'll work hard for you.

Learning to use the DISC system will take a little effort, but the benefits in improved relationships and team efficiency will make it worth the trouble. So get involved in a DISC workshop now.

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