

Socially Smart & Savvy

Top experts share their secrets for success

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Savvy Interaction

by Katrina Van Dopp, MAS, CHBC, AICI FLC

EVERYONE has heard the old saying *you have 30 seconds to make a good impression*—that applies to your physical image, what you are wearing, how your hair looks and, if female, how you are wearing your makeup.

What first impression does your verbal image make? How does your personality come out in your communications with others? In other words, who are you on the inside?

There are many books on how to increase your “savviness quotient” when it comes to your physical image. Why not explore the other portion of your image? Often, words can make or break a situation, compel people to pay attention or chase away potential business.

“Your words have incredible power. The words you say can change and save lives, but they can also destroy them.”

—Kevin Baker, PhD, American pastor Oakdale Emory United Methodist Church

Have you ever thought, *Why can't everyone just be more like me and then it would be easy to function on a daily basis?* Yet, think how boring that would be!

The reason people act differently is that people have different personality styles. You can say the same thing to several people and each person will hear something different. Once you understand how to relate to others and speak their language, it will be easier to meet the needs of other people.

I first discovered the human behavioral model in this chapter in the 1990s at a conference I was attending. It was like being handed a universal translator! What I learned and have expanded on since has opened up an entirely new world to me. I began to understand who I was, why I acted the way I did, and why I related to my family, friends and colleagues in a certain way. I began to understand others, too. I became comfortable with myself, which has led me to be more successful interacting with and meeting the needs of others on a personal and a professional level and in a variety of settings. I have increased my verbal savvy quotient.

My “Aha!” Moment

You must be clear about your own identity, your purpose and your passions to inspire others. Learning about your personality style will teach you how you communicate and why you relate, think and act the way you do. Knowing your unique personality style will also give you a strategy for how to address the needs of others based on how your personality interacts with theirs.

Betsy was a client in search of her identity. A physician assistant, she was not respected by her non-medical manager. After updating her wardrobe to a more current professional style, we talked about how to gain this respect. Betsy’s personality was supportive or people oriented while her manager was domineering and questioning or task oriented. By recognizing these patterns and adapting a strategy tailored to specifics and bottom line results, Betsy began to gain her manager’s respect because she was meeting his needs in his personality style.

One of the biggest benefits of learning this simple group of patterns is they boost your self-confidence in understanding yourself and others. A number of years ago, I was the wallflower at the party. I would hide in a corner until someone sought me out. I also was the country girl, educated in brain, but not in people. Four years at an exclusive woman's college had given me a great education and no social skills. Yet, to be socially savvy is crucial to daily life.

I had my “aha!” moment a few years ago when I suddenly realized upon discovering my personality style that there was a reason I reacted to others and spoke the way I did. This increased my self-esteem greatly. I did not have attention deficit disorder, nor was I unfocused. My personality made me jump from one project to another before it was finished. Now I have a relaxed relationship with time and get excited about new ideas. I was the inspiring, connecting and supporting one in my circle. Gaining self-confidence in who I am and who others are has made all the difference. *It became easier to work with other people.*

Had I known then what I know now it would have been a very different situation. Fast forward to the present—I recently attended the Bat Mitzvah of my daughter's friend. I knew the parents of the girl and one other couple there. Yet I conversed and intermingled with the other attendees quite comfortably. The wallflower was still around and now was controlled by my new skills. Suddenly, strangers were interested in talking to me and finding out what I did. I had become socially savvy.

First, let me give you a brief overview of DISC and how it is used in a wide range of situations from school bus drivers to senior attorneys. Then, I will give you examples of how you can use this information on a daily basis in your life.

“If I understand you, and you understand me, then doesn't it stand to reason that we will be in a position to have a better relationship?”

—Robert A. Rohm, Ph.D., American behavior specialist

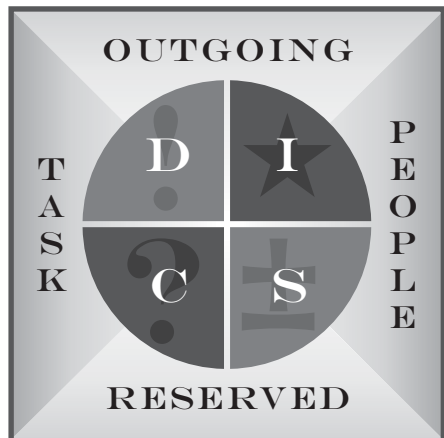
A Bit of History

About 2,400 years ago, scientists and philosophers, such as Hippocrates, began to recognize that behavior differences seemed to follow patterns. Many explored these patterns over the years. In the book, *The Emotions of Normal People*, published in 1928 by Harcourt, Brace and Company, author William Marston, PhD, theorized that people are motivated by four intrinsic drives that direct behavioral patterns. He used letters and characteristics to describe a person's tendencies. The DISC theory was born. His theory was focused on the positive, being objective and descriptive, rather than subjective and judgmental.

Model of Human Behavior

Later refinements of this theory divided people into two groups. This model ascertains that everyone is either 1) outgoing or reserved and 2) task oriented or people oriented. The DISC model helps us start to understand others and ourselves. This is not to be used as a label or to highlight weaknesses but rather emphasizes strengths while addressing blind spots. Both are done in a positive fashion. Unlike other models used in the past, DISC allows you to understand yourself and to understand others in a brief amount of time. One is not better than the other is, just different.

- **D** stands for the Dominant style—outgoing and task oriented.
- **I** stands for the Inspiring style—outgoing and people-oriented.
- **S** stands for the Supportive style—reserved and people-oriented.
- **C** stands for the Cautious style—reserved and task oriented.



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The “D” style is someone who tends to be described as dominant, doer, driven, decisive and so on. This person will focus on getting things done, accomplishing tasks, getting to the bottom as quickly as possible. Keywords when working with this individual are “respect” and “results.”

The “I” style is someone who tends to be described as inspiring, influencing, interactive and so on. They love to interact, socialize and have fun. This person will focus on what others may think of him or her. Keywords when interacting with this personality are “admiration” and “recognition.”

The “S” style is someone who tends to be described as supportive, stable, sweet, shy and so on. They will enjoy relationships, helping or supporting other people and working together as a team. Keywords when interacting with this personality are “friendliness” and “sincere appreciation.”

The “C” style is often described as cautious, calculating, conscientious and competent. They will seek value, consistency and quality information. This person focuses on being correct and accurate. Keywords when working with this personality are “trust” and “integrity.”

How do you see yourself based on the above information? Becoming a bit savvier about the inner you is only the first step. The second step is to understand others and how they communicate and interact with you.

How Does This Information Apply?

You can learn to adapt your communication style to the people you are working with when you understand their tendencies under the DISC system. This information can be applied in a wide variety of situations from working with school bus drivers to attorneys. We are all human

and no one is better than anyone else, just different. This is paramount in team building. Whether working with business clients or your family the tendencies hold true.

You may be wondering how this could apply to a group of school bus drivers. Their manager asked me to speak to them about how to use human behavior with the students because they wanted to relate to the diverse students on their buses every day. After I introduced them to the simple DISC model and showed them how to recognize style tendencies, they gained a means of understanding their students and could talk to them to achieve a degree of harmony while on the bus.

Recently, I spoke to the staff of a large church explaining the patterns and tendencies to them. A church staff is like any other business with a variety of team members. They do not always work and play well together. After teaching them the model, they understood why the pastor always had 100 ideas a day, went from project to project and could take charge, when necessary. I could hear the wheels turning on how to work better together.

Family and Personal Relationships

You can also use the model in interactions with your family. Understanding their personalities better will make a huge positive difference. We all know that when we first meet our life mate, we are head over heels in love. Over time, what first attracted us to him or her sometimes begins to drive us crazy. There is a saying, “First you attract and then you attack!” Knowing the personality of the people you live with can help you handle the stress of everyday life. I am a blend of “I” and “S” with a “D” husband and daughter. I have had to learn to constantly adapt my style to maintain family harmony while teaching them to adapt theirs to mine.

Business and Negotiations

John was an attorney who retained my services to update and enhance his image. He had just transitioned from working in a large, high-powered corporate firm to a college and contacted me to review his wardrobe and suggest changes. As I analyzed his wardrobe, I discussed his reasons for updating his wardrobe and what he hoped to accomplish. This new job was a complete change—from a structured business environment to a relaxed, laid-back college campus.

While working with him, I realized he had been using the model of human behavior to figure out his strategy in the courtroom without realizing it. What were his client's strengths and weaknesses, what were the jury's strengths and so on. As we worked together and I explained the four tendencies to him, he saw how he could use the information to help him work with his new staff and students to facilitate success. He had all the tools and skills to carry out the job, and he just needed to have a systematic approach for doing so. I followed up with him recently, and he has become more relaxed and relational, has lowered his guard and is successful in his new job.

Knowing another's strengths and weaknesses can assist you in every business. For many years, I conducted negotiations of federal contracts. Business is all about predicting what people will do, and contracts are the written tools to express what is expected of people and products with deadlines and expectations. Contracts are not the most stimulating topics. However, negotiations can be fun. This is where each party tries to convince the other that they know what they are talking about and can do the best job for the price proposed. During negotiations, I started looking at the traits of the people sitting around the table and realized that they represented the four styles. There was the one in charge, usually a "D," trying to convince me he was right. The numbers person was typically a "C," the business development was customarily an "I," and the program manager usually an "S."

Marketing and Interviews

Think of the last commercial you saw. A good commercial will try to appeal to a wide range of people. A car commercial, for example, will often orient to more than one driver that the car is sporty and safe. While marketers may not put what they do in these exact terms, they are experts at using the model of human behavior to their advantage.

What about the most important form of personal marketing? Your resume has passed the screening test, and you have been called in for an interview. How best to approach it? You have learned your own style, so use that when speaking with the interview team.

For example, those in the human resource field are often people-oriented and can be outgoing or reserved. They are the gatekeepers whose job is keeping you away from the person who is the hiring authority. The more you focus on the following set of clues, the better you will understand what is important to him or her. Remember, you want to build trust with the gatekeeper. This will get you to the person you need to speak with.

Clues to watch for:

- Is the person friendly and talkative?
- Is he or she task oriented and interested in getting things done?
- Does the person ask a lot of questions?
- Is he or she quiet?

Team Building

Developing an action plan to implement what you have learned about DISC into your business and personal life will benefit everyone. This is especially true at work.

The most important asset an organization has is its people. Yet, so often, they do not learn to work well together. Embrace the differences of your team—the outgoing tendencies and the reserved tendencies. Learning another person’s perspective will go a long way toward reaching the goal of focusing on meeting his or her needs.

At one workplace where I consulted, the team leader was a dominant woman—a “D”—driven to get the task accomplished correctly. Her team disliked her and tried to work around her or ignored her direction. I explained to the staff how to approach her by giving her the details she preferred, showing her how the task is being accomplished, letting her be in charge while knowing you will accomplish your work your way and to her satisfaction. It worked. While it was never a truly cohesive team, staff turnover ceased and deadlines were met.

One Last Word

Communication is a two way street and listening is just as important as speaking. One of our most powerful needs as human beings is to be understood. Learning to observe human behavior strengths will increase your listening and your verbal communications skills. Soon people you interact with will think you are the most brilliant communicator! They will want to be around you because they believe you understand them. Because you take the time to understand them, they believe you care. This is the first step in marketing—the client needs to know you care.

The personality style you project will leave a lasting impression greater than your physical image will. People will remember you as a good listener, a brilliant conversationalist and a person they want to know. It only takes three small steps:

1. Know yourself.
2. Know others.
3. Apply what you learn and focus on the other people's needs and what is important to them.

Start today to apply the three steps to ensure your success both personally and professionally!



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As a successful woman executive in a highly competitive environment, Katrina is committed to teaching others to be successful in their endeavors. Her unique expertise has led many of her clients to increase their success rate. She instills the philosophy that "What you think of yourself on the inside is directly reflected on the outside." She builds confidence and inspires forward thinking, so her clients can be successful and savvy.

Katrina has earned the credentials of AICI FLC from the Association of Image Consultants International® and certified human behavior consultant from Personality Insights®. She holds a master of administrative science from Johns Hopkins University, a bachelor of arts in history from Randolph-Macon Woman's College and a bachelor of science in biology from the University of Connecticut.