

DEMYSTIFYING DISC COMPATIBILITY

By Tony Alessandra

Compatibility, or the lack of it, is not such a mystery. Both rapport and tension are rather predictable, once you know what to look for. Here's the basic principle: In social situations, like behavioral styles attract. People with similar interests and habits are drawn to one another as friends and acquaintances. There's a sense of satisfaction in knowing you're among people who prize what you prize, enjoy what you enjoy, play by roughly the same rules as you do.

If you're a Steadiness Style or Cautious Style, you're a more structured person who's not fond of surprises. Thus, you find stable, predictable relationships more satisfying. You get your needs met by being around those who won't embarrass you by, say, showing up in a magenta sports coat, or asking deeply personal questions upon first meeting you.

Or maybe you're a faster-paced, more outgoing person, a Dominance Style or Interactive Style who thinks life's too short to worry about whether your tires are properly inflated, or your socks match your tie. Who the heck's going to know or care 100 years from now, right?

The Big Ten--And How They Perform Socially

So what happens when these sometimes-contradictory types get together? Well, the four basic behavioral styles mix and match into ten combinations. Behavioral science research shows clearly which combinations--prior to use of The Platinum Rule--mesh or clash naturally. (Please see highlighted box for definition of The Platinum Rule.)

For starters, people with similar tendencies are most compatible with one another socially. That's because those with common interests, habits, and approaches help reinforce each other's self-esteem.

So it won't surprise you to learn that the most naturally compatible combinations in social situations are:

Cautious Style-Cautious Style
Steadiness Style-Steadiness Style
Interactive Style-Interactive Style

Where, you ask, are the Dominance Styles? Well, they also tend to flock to one another--at least for a while. But they possess such a strong competitiveness that even the Dominance Style-Dominance Style relationship isn't quite as naturally harmonious as the others.

That pairing does, however, show up under the moderately compatible category:

Dominance Style-Dominance Style
Steadiness Style-Cautious Style

Dominance Style-Interactive Style
Interactive Style-Steadiness Style

Compatibility doesn't come quite as naturally in these cases. But with effort, progress is possible and, in fact, success in working with less compatible individuals can be an esteem builder in each case.

Dominance Styles and Interactive Styles share an outward focus and often-similar interests. Steadiness Styles and Cautious Styles, on the other hand, are both inward-oriented and may like the same kinds of activities.

Both Interactive Styles and Steadiness Styles aspire to be in a supportive relationship. Usually, though, it's the Steadiness Style who's in the giving role and the Interactive Style who's the receiver.

Meanwhile, the fast-paced, extroverted Dominance Styles and Interactive Styles commonly find it hard to develop rapport with the easygoing, quieter Steadiness Styles and Cautious Styles, who are less decisive and enthusiastic. And the Steadiness Styles and Cautious Styles, in turn, find the Dominance Styles less desirable because they're too pushy, too loud, and often demand too much of them.

Therefore, of all ten combinations, these three pairs are often the least naturally compatible socially:

Dominance Style-Steadiness Style
Interactive Style-Cautious Style
Dominance Style-Cautious Style

To the Dominance Style, who just wants to get things done, and to the Interactive Style, who just wants to have fun, the Cautious Style and Steadiness Styles can be drags. While Steadiness Styles often resign themselves to tolerate the forwardness of Dominance Styles and Interactive Styles, the Cautious Style frequently just prefers to be alone.

What's more, even when relaxing, the Cautious Style wants to do all things right. Whether it's just grilling hot dogs, chatting about politics, or setting up the croquet wickets, the Cautious Style sets standards and judges himself and others by how they meet them. The Cautious Style, in the eyes of the Dominance Style or Interactive Style, is not living as much as he is just serving time. By and large, never the twain shall meet--at least unless and until The Platinum Rule is practiced.

On the positive side, though, there is a fascination factor in these three pairings, and bridges can be built. Given positive energy, the natural differences can fuel attraction, particularly when one style sees what it can learn from another. A Dominance Style, for example, may see how he can become more patient and responsive to others by taking a cue from a Steadiness Style. A Steadiness Style, meanwhile, may be able to draw on the Dominance Style's strengths for taking charge and accepting risk.

Similarly, a sensitive Interactive Style can see how she can learn discretion from the Cautious Style, and the Cautious Style perceives that she can become more relaxed and sociable by being around the Interactive Style.

Perhaps the most difficult hurdles socially are posed by the Dominance Style-Cautious Style relationship. For it to work, both must yield their personal control needs, with the Dominance Style deciding to give the type of space the Cautious Style needs, and the Cautious Style learning to be much more direct and open about his concerns with the Dominance Style.

It's Different Task-Wise

When it comes to tasks--whether it's doing a project at work, purchasing a family car, or just balancing the checkbook--the dynamics differ dramatically. Here, the "likes" who are drawn to one another socially don't necessarily attract as much as they compete or even conflict.

Now their similarities can get in the way because they have the same needs. After all, to complete a task, one must have resources, rewards, time, space, and attention. But there are only so many of those to go around.

So when those needs aren't met, tension and conflict can result. When one partner feels a need to "win," for instance, the other one may sense he or she's been shortchanged. The frequent outcome: resentment.

But, before getting into which pairs clash, let's look at the most naturally compatible combinations task wise:

Cautious Style-Steadiness Style
Dominance Style-Steadiness Style
Interactive Style-Steadiness Style

See a pattern here? You bet! The Steadiness Style gets along with everybody in a task situation. He or she's the universal antidote for disharmony. It's the Steadiness Styles' most distinctive trait. They're supportive workers who exert a calming, stabilizing influence. Naturally interested in others and in making a contribution, they enjoy being productive partners. No wonder they're everybody's favorite.

The moderately compatible combinations, as far as working on tasks together, are:

Cautious Style-Cautious Style
Steadiness Style-Steadiness Style
Interactive Style-Cautious Style

Cautious Styles loom large in this second grouping. While not as easygoing as Steadiness Styles, they are sensitive to others' feelings and have a passion for excellence that others usually recognize.

Interestingly, Cautious Styles figure in many of the least compatible combinations socially, but among the highest in tasks. This suggests that others appreciate the quality and thoroughness of their work, even if the Cautious Styles aren't always viewed as being a lot of laughs.

Last come those combinations that are least compatible because they tend to see one another as competitors:

Dominance Style-Dominance Style
Dominance Style-Cautious Style
Dominance Style-Interactive Style
Interactive Style-Interactive Style

Dominance Style-Dominance Style combinations work fairly well socially but when it comes to tasks, a Dominance Style's competitive nature and need for control can stymie cooperation, especially with like-minded Dominance Styles.

As for the Dominance Style-Cautious Style, there's a fundamental clash in the Dominance Style's need for speed and control versus the Cautious Style's penchant for being slower paced and systematic.

Notice that while the Interactive Style-Interactive Style pair was ranked as among the most socially compatible, now they are likely to be the least productive as far as working together on tasks. That's because neither is motivated to deal with task details.

Similarly, Dominance Styles and Interactive Styles also have moderately high social rapport but plummet to the lowest rungs of compatibility when tasks are involved. That's because they both tend to want to delegate.

But don't give up yet on those whose personal style may not be a perfect fit with the situation. With some effort at understanding and applying The Platinum Rule, you can adapt your compatibility so that you can work successfully with anyone.