

Written Transcript:

The D Style

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26:32

So, all of you are familiar with the four basic DiSC styles, and for a lot of you, very familiar. And so what I wanted to do at this point in the session is to dig a little deeper, alright, to kind of look under the hood at what's driving some of these more observable behaviors that we see.

And the context that I want to use to discuss this is this idea of self-worth. You know, we all have these fundamental drives. One of them, for instance, is the drive to survive. We share that with pretty much all of the animal kingdom. Another drive that's almost as fundamental that we have—and in some respects uniquely human—is this drive to feel valuable, to feel worthwhile, to feel that we have some worth in the world. And so, what we do is when we're very, very young, we make these very unconscious, very unspoken decisions about how the world works. And, more to our point today is what makes us valuable. And the interesting thing is, different people make wildly different judgments, alright, again as kids, about what makes a person valuable. What's going to make them valuable? For some people, I'm valuable if I achieve. Other people, I'm valuable if people pay attention to me. Um, I'm valuable if everybody likes me. I'm valuable if I'm competent. Alright, and so, I want to talk about some of those issues of self-worth and how that governs the behaviors that we see in DiSC.

So let's start, let's just jump right in and talk about the D style, right, the dominant style. We've got this very direct, results-oriented, sometimes very forceful style. But what's going on beneath the surface? What's driving the behavior that we see?

So I worked as a counselor for a number of years, and when working with people who have a D style, when you start to dig beneath the surface, one of the things that becomes clear pretty quickly is this very strong belief that I have to be strong. I'm valuable if I'm strong. I'm valuable if I have no vulnerabilities. And the downside of that or the flip-side of that is I become less valuable if I'm weak or if I have vulnerabilities. And so in order to reinforce that belief of being strong, consequently being valuable, we see a number of manifestations of that in their behavior.

And so probably the first thing we see is this self-confidence. They develop a very strong belief in their own opinions and ideas—sometimes to the point where they don't recognize the value of other people's ideas. They project confidence that a lot of people take comfort in. You know, and they actually do believe in their ideas, but this is also serving a purpose. Right, because to the degree that they could have certainty, that is necessary to maintain belief that they are in fact strong. What goes along with that is this idea of no vulnerabilities, particularly vulnerabilities in themselves that's almost a sense of despising the vulnerabilities that they see in themselves. To admit weakness to themselves is really, really profoundly disturbing to a lot of these folks. So, when insecurities start to bubble up, from the unconscious into something that they're aware of, the first reaction is really to mask those insecurities with a strength.

And what we also see is a rejection of tenderness, and particularly the more tender emotions. So, things like fear or anxiety or sadness, or maybe on the more positive side things like compassion or empathy or affection. If you try to get a compliment from a D, it's oftentimes very difficult for these people because it feels very mushy. It feels very sappy to them, it's really a reflection of some sort of weakness or tenderness or vulnerability. Now, there are certainly emotions that are left: passion for a goal, a very acceptable emotion. It's a show of strength. Oftentimes anger, anger is left as an emotion that's acceptable because it can be seen as a projection of strength.

When I, um, how many of you have seen *The Sopranos*? Alright, so, most of you have seen *The Sopranos* or are at least familiar with it, right? So, we've got this culture of men, it's about a mob family. And we've got this culture of men who are almost entirely all D. It's a very high D culture. And if you're in a, we can all imagine—we don't have to be in the mob, we can all imagine or maybe even worked in a high dominance culture where if you show yourself to be weak, you show yourself to be hesitant, you're really not going to get anything done. You're going to be dismissed. Your ideas aren't going to be listened to. You've really got to be aggressive, strength is what's respected.

One of the fascinating things about that show is that the main character, Tony, is having these—you know, he's this archetypical D character, manifests all the typical D characteristics that we talked about—and he's suffering from these panic attacks, and so he's forced to go to a therapist. And in the process of going to a therapist, he's forced to make himself vulnerable. And so, throughout the series, it's really interesting to watch how difficult it is for someone with these high D characteristics to make himself vulnerable, how much of a struggle it is, this balance between would I rather have the panic attacks or go through this extremely painful process that violates my values of making myself vulnerable. So you can see him lashing out at the therapist. You can see how stressful it is for him.

One of the other characteristics, similar characteristics that we see of high D people is this, this real—I don't want to call it a fear, but—disdaining of the idea of being manipulated, that someone else is playing you. Folks here in this D quadrant are much less likely to take people's words at face value. Effusive compliments or gushing praise is really going to be looked at skeptically. If you're going to give me a reward, give me something concrete, give me money, give me a promotion, because I know you can't fake those, right? If you give me those, you mean it. If it's just words, I have no use for that.

A lot of this is based on a belief system that is not necessarily true, but I've found is often true to some extent or another of that the world is more or less is kind of a hostile place. You really kind of have to look out for your own interests or you're going to be taken advantage of. And so there's this core, unconscious belief that the world is a cold place. And in some respects, the strong really are the only ones that survive. And for some people, it's this belief that the strong are the only ones that should survive.

And there's this secret assumption that most people see the world this way. And those people who don't see it this way are either gullible or suckers or they have kind of a naïve view of the world. And so, people with this D style really pride themselves as being realists. They don't see themselves as being skeptical, they're just being pragmatic.

And another consequence that we see of this strong belief that I have to be strong, is a really pronounced desire for independence and self-reliance. I have to be able to rely on myself to solve problems, because if I have to rely on someone else, I don't have complete security. One of the reasons why with people who have this strong D style there's a strong desire for control, to be in power. And this desire for independence is backed up by a couple of reasons. More on the surface is this sense that they really have this strong vision of what quote-unquote *should* happen. And they don't want interference from others. They want to have the power to make that vision come to life. A second, maybe less conscious, motivator for this is that beneath the surface, another person's control over you is really an insult to your strength. For another person to have power over you is in some respects humiliating. And so they're really willing to ruffle some feathers in order to reinforce their independence.

But at their best, this self-assurance can really be infectious. So if you have someone in your group who is really projecting this confidence in the direction you're going, it can really be infectious, help people believe in the bold plans that you have or the group has. Similarly, it really contributes to a very admirable level of determination and

persistence to push through the obstacles no matter how bad things get. Alright, so that's this idea that I have to be strong.

Another really core assumption that's tied to the self-worth, is a belief, from pretty early on, is that I'm only valuable if I'm the best, if I'm the top dog, if I have the power, if I'm in control. Sometimes this leads to the much more competitive spirit that we see in these folks, a strong desire to win. And this is really building on that belief that I must be strong. It's taking it to the next level because the need to be strong in a hostile world quickly kind of cements itself in the ego as the belief that they're not only strong, but they're superior. They must be superior. Otherwise, what's the point? And for sure this is not true of every single person with the D style. It's particularly true of people who are D and very immature, don't have a lot of self-awareness. As people with the D style learn to mature, learn to value themselves more just on who they are, fundamentally having value in and of themselves, they need to rely less on the need to be strong or be superior. But there are still, we encounter a lot of people who maybe all in the immature range of D and do have this strong, I wouldn't even say just drive, but a need to feel like they're the best, to feel like they're superior.

And so we have this sense of wanting to be in charge, and it's not only because they feel like they're in the best position to be in charge, that they're the most competent or they have the clearest vision, but the authority in and of itself is rewarding. It reminds them that they are in fact on top, that they are respected. And it's easy to look at this and feel some sort of resentment towards that, but if we can step back and be objective and we can just see this as a manifestation of a belief system, it's a little easier to deal with.

There's also the frequent observation that people with this D style really, really dislike having their authority questioned, especially if it's by someone that they don't regard as a superior. One of the factors that I routinely see, especially when doing counseling with

these folks, is a distortion of reality. We all distort reality in one way or another to support our belief system, to support the belief that we are valuable. And so, with the high D style, we often end up with, for example, the situation a number of us have been in when we have, let's say an executive, and maybe say a very immature executive who has this high D style. And maybe he fashions himself as a tell-it-like-it-is, blunt, matter-of-fact person, but is completely unwilling or really unable in some respects to hear feedback from other people. And the information that he gets in is distorted through that filter. And it's in order to protect this belief that I am strong and that I know better. It's a very basic defense mechanism. And these folks are, especially in those types of situations, are a lot more likely to see aggression than other people would in the same situation. Their ego, or pride, is much more likely to feel like it's been assaulted or offended than it is for other people in the exact same situation.

And we have research that shows that people who demonstrate these more dominant characteristics actually don't deal as well with being frustrated as other people do. They show a much more elevated heart rate, these autonomic symptoms, whereas other people when their goals aren't being reached, when their goals get frustrated in some way, don't show as strong of a response.

Another consequence that we see of this strong, again not only desire, but really psychological need to be the best, to feel like one's the best, is the more forceful nature. And we look at the adjectives that correlate with the D style, the number one most correlated is the word dominant, but the second most correlated is the word forceful, this willingness to push through their ideas or push through their solutions no matter what the resistance is, almost in spite of the resistance, sometimes looking like a bully. And so, we often talk about folks with the D style, particularly more immature people, really creating these win-lose scenarios. There's the cliché about the win-win scenario, the ideal scenario. But when you look at it through this perspective, of when someone else is challenging me, they're really not only challenging my idea, they're challenging

my value because they're challenging the notion that I'm best, that I am superior. And so, oftentimes, really compromise feels like losing, and they can get so wrapped up in their anger in the moment, the desire to put the other person in their place, that the intensity of the emotion, the anger that they're feeling would be frankly difficult for any of us to deal with.

And then the final thing that I'll mention under this topic is about the sense of rights. Often we find that people with this D style have an inflated sense of what their rights are relative to the rights of others. Unlike someone with the S style who has the opposite problem, really diminishes their rights relative to other people. And so, they're much more likely to overstep their boundaries, seeing it as their right, oftentimes trying to come in and single-handedly save the situation.

Now I've been discussing some of the more negative consequences of this behavior that I need to be the best, I need to be on top, but there are some positive consequences. Most notably is this real sense of stepping up to provide leadership or to provide guidance or to be in charge, particularly when that's lacking.

Alright, and then there's one final area that I want to talk about in terms of the D. We've been talking about this idea of self-worth and what gives me value. So there's value in the sense that I am valuable if I'm strong, I'm valuable if I'm the best. Then there's also this sense that really develops early on that is this belief that I'm valuable if I achieve, I'm valuable if I accomplish. And so when we talk to someone or we look at someone who is strong in D, what we see is this very intense sense of drive, setting very high standards for themselves and other people, often described as very ambitious, attracted to new opportunities. When they get an idea, they want to start executing immediately, as soon as the decision is made. They would rather rush into something a little too quickly and sort out the details later than to waste time deliberating. And that's because there's this internal pressure really to accomplish.

We'd often describe people with the D style as very goal-oriented, they care about progress. There's always this nagging pressure to keep moving. The word restless comes to mind. Oftentimes in talking to people with this D style, they'll describe when they're in a situation when there's quiet, their brain keeps telling them you're wasting time if you're not accomplishing something, you gotta keep moving, you gotta keep moving. And they may actually not realize that this is, in some respects, really, really unique, that other people don't share this constant sense of pressure. It's like the fish that doesn't realize that he's surrounded by water because that's all he knows. And so, we have someone who is very expedient, and in a lot of respects, very practical and pragmatic. They want to get things done. They want to get the results, so they're willing to take short-cuts. They're willing to charge into a new task even if they don't necessarily have the knowledge or the skills, and they may actually believe they have the skills and knowledge when in fact they don't (because we have that sense of confidence).

And so, this really, in many instances, creates a sense of unpredictability and particularly a sense of unpredictability on an emotional level. With these folks, it's often difficult to predict when their frustration is going to shine through. And people who are sensitive to these cues really have a difficult time with this. It's very stressful for them to be around people with this emotionally unpredictable nature.

We also find that, people with this D style really, really respect competence. They really respect people who can get things done. They'd much rather work with someone who is competent than someone who is friendly.

And also one of the hallmarks of the D style is this impatience. Again if you think of someone with this internal drive to just go, go, go, gotta get things done, gotta get things done, they can come across as very impatient with other people. They want the direct answers. They're restless with people who are incompetent, wasting their time.

And so, here we've got someone who is very determined. It's often a matter of personal pride to beat this obstacle. I'm not going to let "it" win, and so the person is very persistent in pursuing their vision, in pushing and pushing.

One of the other traits that is really commonly associated with the D style is this candor. And the flip side of that is insensitivity towards others. And in talking to people with the D style, in many instances it's just that they don't really want to spend the time or expend the emotional energy that's necessary to choose their words. It's going to slow them down. It's not an efficient way to do things. At least in the short-term, it doesn't appear to be an efficient way to do things. I'm just gonna tell it like it is, I'm just gonna let loose with what I'm thinking and you should—right, should underlined—you should be strong enough to hear the truth. And if you're not, you need to get out of the way. The very idea that I have to curtail my opinions for the sake of someone else's feelings is an insult to me. They should be able to handle it.

Now, there are other times, and I really should say there are for other people, particularly for people with this D style who are less healthy or less emotionally mature, where really if we look beneath the surface, we can see an undercurrent of hostility or vindictiveness. And so, this candor, this direct, this bluntness, this quote-unquote honesty, is really a cover, kind of an excuse to manifest this general urge of vindictiveness or hostility, to put another person in their place. The tendency to use insults can be a play for power or an expression of this internal anger. And again I want to be clear that this isn't true of everyone with the D style, certainly far from it. But there are a subset of people with this style who do have an undercurrent of vindictiveness, which they would label as justice or honesty. And this bluntness is really indulging.

There's a really interesting line of research that's getting some more attention, and it's looking at emotions, and particularly these emotions that, in some respects, we would regard as very negative emotions, like anxiety or sadness or anger. But indulging, at certain times, indulging in those emotions actually activates the pleasure center of the brain as well and so we would feel anger and pleasure at the same time, or disgust and pleasure at the same time, this idea of self-righteousness. And so, for some people with the D style, tapping into that anger can really be, in a sense, fulfilling or pleasurable. Now of course, this pleasure is usually outside of the person's awareness, and the conscious motive is of course to be honest or tell-it-like-it-is, but we often find that these folks, these more unhealthy folks are selectively honest. They're not necessarily honest about their own limitations or flaws in their own ideas, but honest about where they see flaws in other people's ideas. But they certainly don't try to hide their annoyance.

Alright, so we've been talking about the less healthy end of the continuum, right? And of course, there is the other end of the continuum, the healthy end. And this drive to achieve and to accomplish (and most of us can think of plenty of examples of this of people who are high D in our organizations) leads to the strong drive and this ability to get things out the door, to motivate people to push themselves beyond what they thought was possible. They can really be fantastic executors.

The drive to accomplish really does lead to some truly impressive accomplishments that probably would not have taken place otherwise. When we have this confidence, this sense of strength, this drive to be the best, and the drive to accomplish, when the person is able to abandon the *need* to do those things, they begin to value themselves on who they are intrinsically. But we still have the remaining drive to keep moving and to keep pushing oneself. And we're able to mix this confidence and drive with maturity and flexibility to use other styles when the situation calls for it. We end up with

someone who is just a tremendous asset to the organization, and has the potential to just be an amazing leader.