

Written Transcript:

# The C Style

MyEverythingDiSC.com Audio Series

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Alright, so the final style that we're going to talk about is the C style. And throughout this series, what we've been doing is we've been really digging beneath the surface to find out what drives the behaviors that we see with these styles. So, with the C style for instance, it's pretty observable that these folks tend to be pretty private. They tend to be pretty cautious or systematic, analytical. But what's going on emotionally and cognitively that's driving them to act that way. And so that's what we're trying to get at today.

So the C style is the last one we're going to talk about. And we've been using a particular framework. And that framework assumes that we have a really innate drive to feel valuable. From the time we're very, very young, we're just driven to feel like we're worthwhile, like we have some meaning or some value in the world. And we make different decisions about what's going to make us valuable. And so we talked about for the D, I'm valuable if I achieve. Or for the i, I'm valuable if people pay attention to me. Or the S, I'm valuable if I help people out. And so for the C, we have other assumptions that have been made about, perhaps very, very early in life, about what's going to make me valuable as a person. And so that's what we're going to talk about today and that's the framework we're going to use.

And one of the first assumptions, one of the really core assumptions you see time and time again when you talk to people with the C style and you dig beneath the surface is this assumption that I'm valuable if I'm right. And you can almost, it's almost more accurate to turn that around and say, I'm invaluable or lose my worth if I'm wrong. I

must avoid being wrong. I cannot make mistakes. Now to be clear, this is not a matter of arrogance. It's not, I must be more right than you, I have to be the one on top. You know, it might evolve into that and that might be true for some people with the C style, but at the most basic root level it reflects a core belief that I *should not* be wrong. And the word should is underscored there. Should is a moral imperative. It's almost as if it's sinful or unethical to be wrong. If I produce something, it absolutely must be of high quality. If I make a statement, it must be true, preferably with information to back it up.

Now, that's definitely not true of all of us. You know, for a lot of us, we can make a flippant comment, make a statement maybe exaggerate a little to make a point. If we're shown to be wrong it rolls off our back. We're okay being corrected.

People with the C style though, this is completely unacceptable. And it's not only a threat to their worth as I said before, though. It's almost as if it's a moral imperative. And so for a lot of people with the C style, everything that they put their effort into must be unassailable and refined. They won't allow flaws in things that they've poured themselves into.

Now, when I hear people describe the C style, they often talk about them as very detail-oriented. And while that's true of a number of people with the C style, in the research we've done—and we've done this at a couple of different times—we asked people to describe how detail-oriented they are. It's not always true that these people describe themselves as being detail-oriented. And I think what's going on here is we confuse the need for accuracy with the need for details. And so if we have someone who is high C and they're very concrete, yes, accuracy does mean getting the details right, getting the specifics right. On the other hand, if we have someone who is very abstract thinking, the details are less relevant. Accuracy is more in terms of the big picture.

And so there's this classic concept of the absent-minded professor. We can all get this image in our minds. And that person is not particularly interested in the details, you know, that's where we get the absent-minded. But where this person is precise, is in terms of his theories or his models. So just a little bit of caution about describing people with the C style as universally detail-oriented. I know some very conceptual abstract-thinking C's who aren't very detail-oriented at all. On the other hand, I know some people who are very high in i who actually are very detail-oriented.

The focus, then, is on accuracy. And the focus is really on avoiding making mistakes. And so, when they're confronted with a mistake, if it's a situation where it's an undeniable mistake, there's irrefutable proof that it's a mistake, they really do show a lot of embarrassment and almost some shame. But anything shy of that, what I often see happening—and this isn't always the case—but a lot of times what I see happening is, instead of admitting the mistake, the person will reframe the parameters of the situation rather than admit they were wrong.

And so, you know, we've all been in a meeting with someone who is a high C, and they don't speak up a lot, do they? And one of the things that is going on is that people who are high C are not going to speak up, are not going to put their opinion out there or going to put it on the line unless they're certain of it. And so particularly if you have a meeting with some very fast-talking, fast-thinking people where the conversation is constantly evolving, the person with the C style is kind of struggling to catch up to gain that level of certainty that they need to speak up, whereas other people don't need that level of certainty to speak up. Somewhat similar to what you see in S's, but usually a lot more pronounced.

And so, this caution that they show in their tasks—with this assumption that I must be right, I must not make a mistake, they tend to be very careful—is just as applicable in the social arena. And so most people—and I would say and this is pretty generalizable of

people with the C style—is that they tend not to like mingling with strangers, going into a situation where they don't know a lot of people. And the reason for that is social situations tend to be unpredictable. The social rules are really difficult to get your head around. If I'm doing a task, if I'm doing a job, I can get my head around the rules for the task, the parameters for the task. But in social situations, the conversations can go anywhere. There's no amount of preparation that I can do to ensure how I'm going to come across in a social situation, and so I try to avoid them.

Usually, most of the effort is put into coming across as appropriate, coming across as socially appropriate, whereas someone else's effort is on coming across as the center of attention or maybe just getting to know other people, having fun. The C is really processing what's appropriate. Now this isn't necessarily true of all C's, but it is frequently the case, particularly if they're surrounded by a number of people that they don't really know well.

Unconsciously, there's a real feeling of a threat any time a conversation is initiated with someone they don't know really well, and the emotional, the level of the emotional threat really varies with how well they do know the person, even if it's not apparent to them. They've got this really strong filter when they're speaking to make sure they're being accurate, or in this case maybe the better word is appropriate, which can be just exhausting, and they may not realize how much work they're doing behind the scenes. And so when someone with the C style imagines going in to one of those situations or they come out of it at the end of the day and they're exhausted at how much work they did, really it was this mental work of processing the information behind the scenes.

And oftentimes, they'll report worrying about running out of things to say. You can cope with this in a lot of different ways, but oftentimes it's just retreating and allowing the awkward silences, not feeling very good about them, but allowing them. It's not always the case. You know, those of you who remember, I think it was 1980's show Cheers.

There was the character Cliff Clavin. He was a pretty consummate C character who was pretty vocal, though, with hiding behind this range of facts that he's throwing out. Or I can think of other instances of someone who is very clearly C trying to give off these more extraverted i behaviors and trying to force it. It oftentimes does come across as very awkward.

And so, as with the case with social situations, we often see a dislike of having to improvise. When they're given a project and there's not much time to prepare and wrap their head around it, it's pretty stressful. Having time to plan means that you can ensure that you're going to get things right. So, we want a lot of time to gather the information we need to make a decision, oftentimes wanting sort of an unrealistic level of certainty before making a decision, which can lead to the old cliché analysis paralysis.

And so one of the things that C's are often, that are attributed to C's, is this real emphasis on logic. And so not only does this seem like the best way to reach an accurate conclusion in their minds, but logic is really, is knowable, is really predictable. That's not to say that logic in their minds is just a defense mechanism or is just a way of protecting their rightness. Most people that I know with a high C style do see a real beauty in logic. Their desire for accuracy and logic isn't all defensive. The elegance they see in logical arguments is really satisfying on an emotional level for them. Problem solving can be particularly enjoyable. Particularly when there's a right answer that you can arrive at. And so, at their best, when we have someone who's really spent a lifetime trying to observe and to understand, all of this practice, all of this information that they've developed, really contributes to a great deal, potentially a great deal of wisdom.

Okay, so that's the belief that I'm valuable if I'm right, or I'm valuable if I avoid being wrong. A second assumption that I often see with people who have a strong C style is this belief that I'm valuable if I'm self-sufficient, or I must be self-sufficient, I must have no vulnerabilities. I shouldn't have to depend on anyone else. And so, they're really

reluctant to ask for help, and they'll really work on figuring it out, you know if there's a problem, they'll work on figuring it out for themselves. And there's a bunch of different reasons for this, I think all equally valid. One, they really want to gain the expertise of having figured it out. Two, they don't want to bother other people. Another reason is they don't want to admit they have a need for help, right, going back to this self-sufficiency. And fourth, they really have a need to master challenges or master a problem that they've been trying to solve. And we'll get into that idea of mastery in a little bit.

And this need for self-sufficiency, or this ideal of self-sufficiency, is most easily preserved if you have, if you insulate yourself, if you have a bit of a protective bubble around yourself. And so it really requires effort on their part to dissolve this bubble and to let other people have access to their space. They've got this kind of protective perimeter around themselves oftentimes. Obviously we're talking metaphorically here, and usually it's on an unconscious level, but it's kind of like a comfort zone. And so when someone with a strong C style has to allow another person into that perimeter, there's a sense, again even if it's unconscious, there's a sense of an intrusion or discomfort, even if they're not aware of it. And so, they really have to gear up their energy to deal with this outsider. Unlike if we contrast this with a really strong i person who welcomes the outsider and they generally don't require any internal preparation at all. They're usually more than ready for this external stimulation. It's a lot easier to startle the high C person because they're not prepared for this emotionally.

And so, likewise, when this high C person has to go outside of her comfort zone, she often feels the need to put on sort of a mask, to bump up her energy level, to act a little more friendly because there's a sense that her normal, quiet, reflective self isn't really appropriate. And so maybe she can do it for a short period of time, but it really is draining of her energy doing this. Again, whereas the i person, it's no drain at all. There's no energy going on in the background preparing and processing. And so they're really

looking, oftentimes, to return to the safety of their protective perimeter as soon as possible. And here I'm talking about more socially aware, maybe someone who has a strong C style is very socially aware of the fact that you're supposed to make small talk, you're supposed to avoid awkward silences. But then there are certainly other people with a strong C style who aren't as socially aware, or at least the pressure of being socially appropriate is not as strong as their need or their desire to remain silent. And so there's still, in that case, even though they're not doing the small talk, they're not showing the energy outwardly, there still is internally a lot of stress, a lot of pressure going on beneath the surface. And so, overall we're left with someone who, for the most part, tends to be pretty private, not quick to share personal information with other people, certainly not revealing much about themselves until they know someone really well. And even then they're often more likely to share objective facts because they're not used to processing their experiences, their emotions externally. They do all that internally. And so, it's not a conscious withholding of their experiences, it's just that's how they process things—internally.

And we can actually dig a little further down into the motives that drive this desire for self-sufficiency. There's a number of psychoanalysts. I'm thinking about a woman named Karen Horney right now (or Horn-eye—either way it's probably an unfortunate name), but she writes about, and I've seen this in other places as well, is this belief that, you know this early-on developed belief that I need to detach myself from needs. So I shouldn't have strong needs. There's a policy of restriction, particularly a restriction of wishes. Nothing should be so important to me that I can't do without it. So I'm willing to settle for a life that's free of pain and friction, which is maybe the positive side, but it's also a life that's free of zest. They remove themselves from that inner battlefield.

And what she writes about some patients that she's worked with is that they almost feel like an onlooker at themselves and their lives. And they have all of these observations about themselves. And this creates a person who is rather astute, and develops a

picture of themselves that's really filled with a wealth of candid observations about how things work. Sometimes to the sense that they, you know as I mentioned before, these observations and this wisdom they develop a strong sense of aesthetics, or rather to say a strong appreciation for aesthetics, even though it's a more detached appreciation than a strong, emotional—at least consciously emotional—appreciation that we might see in some other people.

Now of course we're speculating at a much deeper level here and I don't think there are any psychoanalysts in the room, but I think we can definitely agree that most people with this high C style have a strong desire for self-control and this belief that I can't necessarily control the situation, but I can control myself. And like I said before, they put a really strong emphasis on being appropriate. So they don't show a lot of emotion, part of its self-control. And usually when you talk to folks and you ask them what's going on and why is it difficult for you to do this is that this self-control is almost impossible for them and it's been so practiced and so developed that it's difficult or impossible for them to drop even if they wanted to.

And so, when they observe, for instance, someone else exhibiting strong emotion, they really feel embarrassed for that other person. And so the person with the i style might just think them crying or getting upset really is a showing of how open they are. Or the person with the strong D style who gets in a rage might feel it's a show of strength or power. But the person, the observer with the C style is more looking at that and feeling embarrassed for that person as they've given up the one thing they truly have control over, which is themselves. And they've made themselves vulnerable, which is embarrassing.

And almost as interesting is how this need for self-sufficiency drives their desire for autonomy. And people with the C style we often see have a real preference for working alone. And there's a variety of different reasons for this. You know, one of them is that it



allows them to control the quality of their work. You know they take pride in the quality of their work and ensure that things get done the way they should get done. But it also gives them freedom from the control of another person. You know, certainly usually have little interest in controlling other people, but they definitely don't want to be controlled by another person. And it's almost humiliating to have that sense that another person is controlling you—similar for the D style, unlike the S style who doesn't find it nearly as humiliating or the i style which is a little more open to it. We often find that they're almost hypersensitive to influence or any sort of coercion. Their immediate instinct is to resist any sort of pressure.

And so, this ties back to their strong desire to have their space that they control. And oftentimes it's a space where they can get absorbed in a project, free of other people and have time to analyze and really dig into something in-depth and really focus on that internal world without interference from the outside. And many times I'll find some pretty conscientious C folks who will put off tasks that involve—that mean involving other people, like making a phone call, particularly to someone they don't know very well. And so, they'd much rather spend their time getting absorbed in that task, you know, enjoy the process of problem-solving. And they may enjoy having other people around, but just not necessarily that constant contact. They like having that space that they can control.

Now, this more detached nature doesn't mean they're indifferent to other people's needs or they're callous. In fact, oftentimes when I'll ask someone with the C style, they consider themselves to be very considerate. And so, whereas for someone else the idea of being considerate involves being thoughtful, empathizing with someone, or giving someone a compliment, or going out of your way to help them out or include them in a situation. For the person with the C, they consider themselves to be helpful if they stay out of the other person's way, if they do their best to help another person avoid problems, and particularly if they respect another person's rights. They go out of their

way really to be fair and respectful to other people and are really conscious about bothering other people. And even though they might not be as diplomatic as someone with the S style, they tend to be pretty diplomatic to avoid tension. So they may actually cave in on what they know to be true, what they feel strongly, in order to keep the peace.

So we have these conflicting motives of accuracy on the one hand and stability on the other. But the chaos or the reason for that conflict is because stability—or even though accuracy is a really strong priority for them, the chaos of conflict is really unsettling. Seeing other people showing these unbridled emotions, even if it's not directed toward them, creates a sense of discomfort, or as I talked about before, embarrassment for the other person. And if it is directed towards them, the unpredictability of this tension or anger that's directed towards them is so unsettling that they're oftentimes likely to just retreat from the situation.

Now I will say as a little bit of a caveat here, that's not always the case. You know, conflict is somewhat predictable by DiSC, but conflict I think touches a pretty unique place in our past, in our history, in our emotional composition. You know there are some people I know with the C style that get pretty aggressive when they're challenged or negativity or anger is directed towards them; but as a rule, most of the time it's this tendency, this drive to withdraw from the situation.

And after they've withdrawn from the situation, you know you often find that in their heads, they'll go through their arguments in a logical fashion, protecting their own interests of course, in a way that we all do. And if there's no safe opportunity for getting their needs met in the conflict, they may appear to cave but oftentimes will resort to a more passive-aggressive methods of getting their way or at least feeling like they haven't been coerced, haven't been dominated. And so the pocket veto or dragging their feet or overwhelming other people with facts or withholding information—any

method they can do to frustrate the other person and to feel like at least they have some semblance of power or control over themselves in that experience.

Now of course this is absolutely more true of someone who is a strong C and who is also very immature. Someone who is a strong C and is personally developed and very mature is a lot less likely to do these things, is a lot more likely to handle conflict in an appropriate way.

And so returning to the big picture—the idea that I must be self-sufficient or I must have no vulnerabilities has its downsides as we’ve talked about. At its worst for the person who has this belief system their fear or vulnerability leaves them kind of developmentally stagnated. They’re unable to admit their weaknesses. And that can really hinder how much they’re able to grow, how much they’re able to look at themselves and be honest with themselves.

There is, however, a positive side. If we have someone who has really grown and accepted their inevitable vulnerability, that is they’ve outgrown that belief, that lifetime of training they’ve had has given them a heightened ability to detach themselves from the immediate temptations, the pleasures that so often interfere with our long-term happiness. They have a healthy sense of moderation, both in terms of their behavior but even more subtly, in terms of the emotional moderation that’s necessary to develop sustainable contentment over a long period of time.

Okay, now the final or third area that I want to talk about in terms of our framework is this assumption or belief that I’m valuable if I’m competent. I’m valuable if I’m an expert. I’m valuable if I’m knowledgeable. And first, right off the bat here I want to say that expertise, and more to the point the quest for expertise, can be a really, really healthy motivation, particularly in an instance where it’s a person who has a genuine, sincere curiosity about a topic and they pursue it and develop that expertise.

But there's also an ego motivation for developing expertise that for some people with the C style this is a very tempting path to go down. And expertise has the promise of cementing our worth. It shores up those vulnerabilities—it closes up those vulnerabilities that could have been exposed. And so here we've got a chance to be on the offensive rather than the defensive. We have to, you know, we can go out on the offensive as the expert instead of being on the defensive holed up in our comfort zone in our defended perimeter that we've created.

This is where the C has a chance to get their pride needs met. You know pride or self-aggrandizing, you know, it feels good. And we all know when people describe someone as arrogant, it's almost universally negative. We all know that's a negative characteristic. But we all engage in arrogant thoughts from time to time, and the reason is that it feels good. It gives us kind of a shot in the arm of we're valuable, and that feels really positive.

And so being the expert allows the high C person to dip into that well of pride, to experience that positive, even if it will last a short period of time, those positive feelings. The same way someone else is getting their pride needs met by being the top dog or by winning or by getting praise or attention. And even more unhealthy situations, expertise can allow some C individuals to hide behind that knowledge, hide behind that expertise, not expose themselves. And the quest for, or the desire for mastery is a really strong instinct for not only the C but also for the D style that we've seen. But they almost approach mastery or think about mastery in different ways. You know for the D, mastery is mastery over the environment, to be recognized as being in control, being able to call the shots the way they see them. For the C, however, the drive for mastery is more about mastering a skill or mastering excellence. And in a lot of respects, this guides the way that the high C person judges others by their competence or by their expertise. They really avoid putting their faith in people that don't live up to their

standards. And particularly find, or are really annoyed by people who make illogical arguments as if it's violating their entire value system. I've built this system of values on logic and so by you making an illogical argument and standing behind that, that's nullifying that entire value system. And to many of them they can almost describe it as if it's a personal assault and they're having a reaction that almost, that bleeds into self-righteousness. And because oftentimes there is this emotional reaction, these normally reserved people don't have much of a problem speaking up or questioning ideas that don't strike them as solid. They're doing it in a very matter-of-fact way that might feel kind of critical or insensitive to others. And when they sense that someone is trying to persuade them using emotions, you know there's this whole host of red flags that just go up all over the place—not only because they're not relying on logic, but because also it's tipping off this other point of defensiveness which is I don't want to be manipulated. And in fact, it's humiliating to be manipulated and I'm not going to let it happen.

We can also see a certain stubbornness oftentimes with people with the C style. And it's almost an assumption as if my logic is the best. And they may not realize, particularly if it's a more concrete person, they may not realize that two logical people can actually reach very different conclusions even though they're both using very solid logic. You know, they may assume that since they use logic to reach their beliefs that it's unassailable. It makes sense to them, you know, it's thoroughly, thoroughly defensible. And they may underestimate the actual role that their values and their experiences and their self-interest has played in choosing the facts that they emphasize and the direction that their logic takes. And as a consequence, we sometimes end up with a person who is very reluctant to take another person's point of view.

And as I mentioned just a minute ago, they can be very matter-of-fact about this, particularly when they're correcting another person. They can give them feedback in a way that's very matter-of-fact and they may actually be surprised to learn that the other person was hurt or offended when their intention was to simply be objective. And

whereas their attention is solely focused on the need for accuracy or the need for the truth, they either minimize or completely dismiss or miss that when you're in a conversation with another person, the other person has a variety of other needs as well. Most other people do. And they have needs, for instance, they're not even aware of, but someone might have the need to be respected, to feel like their ideas were valued, to feel like they belong. And the person with the C style is solely focused on the need for accuracy or the need for truth so they can deliver messages in this very matter-of-fact way and be caught off-guard that someone received it as a criticism or an insult when they were acting perfectly rationally and doing nothing in their minds to offend the other person. And in the same way that they can in many instances be detached or cut off from their own emotional experiences, they can be inattentive to the fact that other people have emotional needs.

For instance in the area of giving praise, they don't give it too readily and I think there are a couple of reasons why this is the case. One is because there really is a level of intimacy involved in giving someone a compliment or giving them praise that can feel uncomfortable. Someone who has more of an i style, it may not feel very intimate or unusually intimate to do that. But the person in the C style and to some extent as well in the D style this does feel like a more intimate almost—for lack of a better word—icky sense of vulnerability or opening up or connection with another person, and particularly in a work situation, that feels uncomfortable.

But a second more surface reason for not giving praise is oftentimes they simply don't recognize that people have a need for praise, is that another person's work will speak for itself. Being right is its own reward. You don't need other people to point out to you that you're right or that you're accurate or that you did a high quality job. Even though, on a deeper level, they really do appreciate the praise as well. They may not need it to be gushing but I haven't met a person who is high in C who doesn't like receiving a compliment or doesn't like being recognized for their contributions. But they're much

less likely to think about those needs in other people and to act on it. But as I said before, this isn't to say that they're callous. For them, their version of being a good citizen or a good coworker or a good friend is to be fair, is to not intrude on another person's rights, to respect the other person's freedom. And chiefly to avoid burdening the other person, because this is what they want from other people.

And so this drive to be competent or to be the expert certainly has some downsides and some unhealthy motivators, but it also definitely has a very positive aspect to it as well, particularly when the insecurities that drove a person to become an expert have shed or fallen away, when that person becomes more mature. What remains is that quest for knowledge. They have a strong curiosity and discipline to follow through on the tough questions, getting the kind of knowledge that doesn't come easily, where the causal dabbler in these matters kind of loses interest when they meet too much resistance, when the answers don't come quickly enough. The C person really continues to push through because they have a genuine desire to learn and to know and to solve problems.

Alright, so that's the C style. And there really is just one final thing that I want to say, cause this is the last session on this topic. And this goes for all of the DiSC styles that we've talked about. I've been using some generalizations about tendencies or patterns or trends with a particular style. But hopefully it goes without saying, but I'm going to say it anyway, is that I would actually be surprised if let's say for the C style that all of the qualities or characteristics we talked about were true for a particular individual. Most likely I would expect that most of them would be true, but there's probably a couple of areas where it's not right, you know, we didn't hit the nail right on the head.

I think DiSC is most powerfully used and as well, you know, in parentheses, avoiding misuse when it's used as a way to generate hypotheses about people's behaviors and the reason for those behaviors. And so what we have as a tool is let's say for instance

with the C style is that we've talked about all these trends and patterns if we see some behavior or we know someone's a C, we have these lists of hypotheses in our head. And so, they more readily come to mind. And so we can expedite the process of helping someone to understand themselves or to help someone move beyond a problem pattern or work out a difficult situation with a coworker. And we're not always going to be right. We have to listen to the person to hear what's their reaction to the hypothesis. Sometimes the person's not aware of their true motivations. But at the very least, DiSC gives us a starting point, and for my money, that's one of the most valuable things that comes with this model and using this tool with other people.