



Stop Playing Referee

Help Managers Handle Conflict
Without HR Stepping In



Jeff Plakans

Commonwealth Payroll & HR
Founder and President



Susannah Forbes

Commonwealth Payroll & HR
Practice Lead, External People Operations

Dan Kaplan

Confident Communicators, LLC
Founder and Lead Trainer



1928

DiSC theory introduced by William
Moulton Marston in *Emotions of Normal
People*

100+ years

Of application, evolution & influence

10+ million

People complete DiSC-style
assessments every year

70+

Countries worldwide

EVERYTHING **DiSC**
A Wiley Brand

Catalyst.



Used across the world for:

- Workplace communication
- Management communication
- Leadership development
- Team development
- Emotional intelligence
- Sales & customer service communication
- Conflict resolution
- More



You and other
styles



Build better
relationships



Your colleagues



Today's Objectives



- Recognize why managers reflexively escalate interpersonal issues to HR.
- Use a simple coaching process to help managers address issues directly and constructively.
- Apply DiSC® insights to prepare managers for more productive conflict conversations.



What percentage of your HR workload is related to issues managers could likely handle themselves?

Discussion

When managers “throw their problems over the fence” to HR...

- What types of issues are showing up most often?
- Why aren't they handling these issues themselves?



Why Managers Escalate

- Fear of saying the wrong thing
- Desire to stay liked
- Lack of confidence
- Unclear expectations
- Belief that conflict is "HR's job"
- Other?



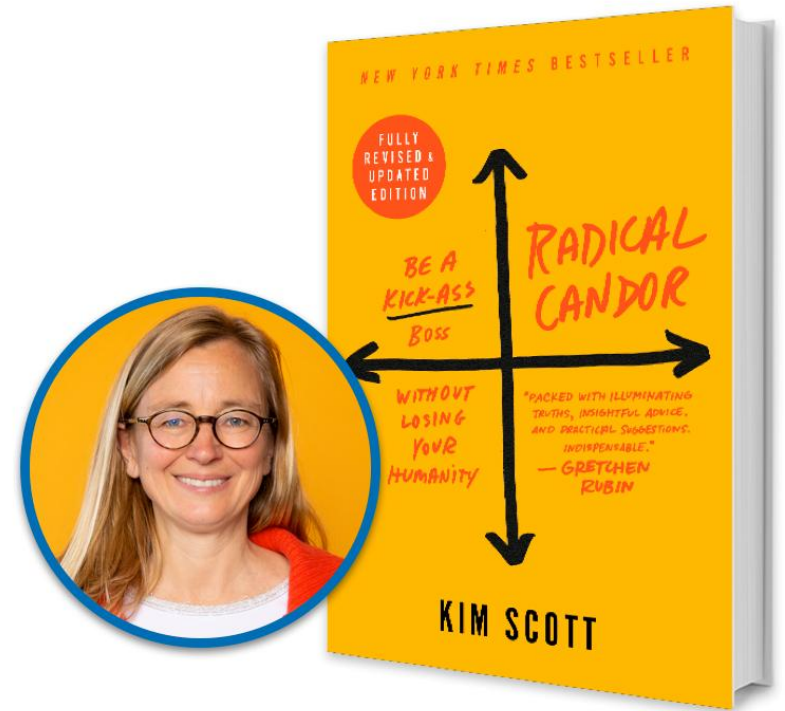
Consequences of HR Allowing Managers To Throw Their Problems Over The Fence At HR?

- Slower resolution
- Reduced manager efficiency & effectiveness
- Employees become on HR
- HR becomes the "bad guy" or “referee”
- Affects culture
- Other?

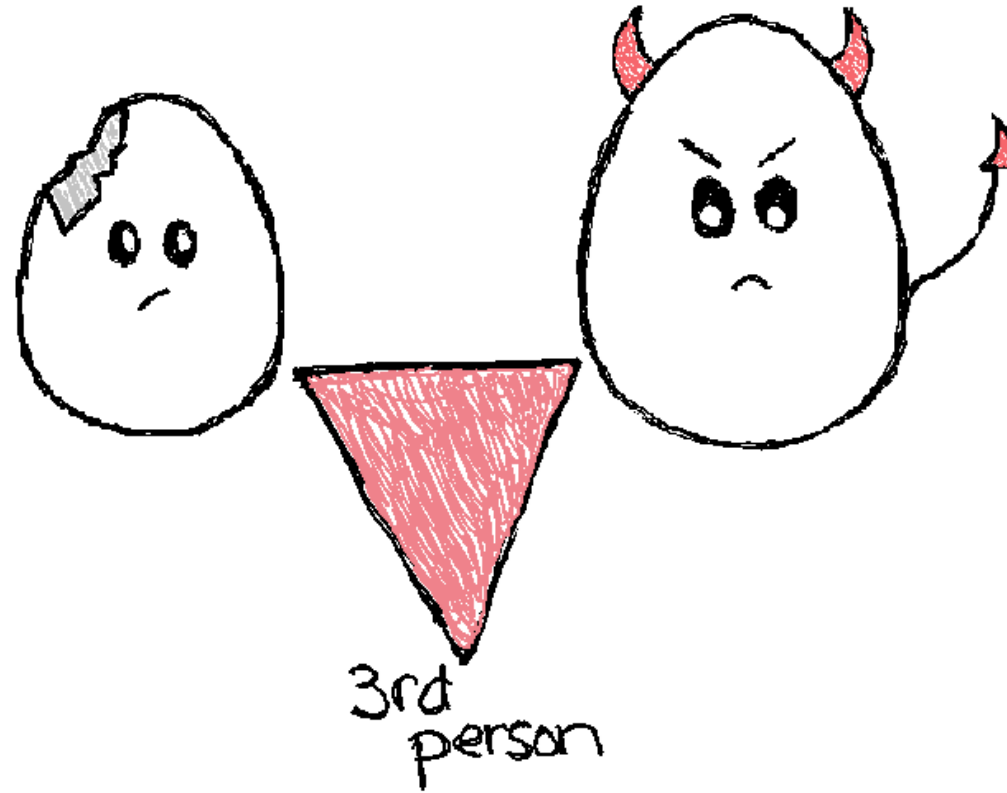


**“Avoid the Competence /
Likeability Trap.”**

-Kim Scott



Triangulation



What Can HR Do About It?



Most people have a dictator, victim, or rescuer mindset.

It's more empowering to adopt a coach or mentor mindset

“High Expectations, High Support”

The 4-Step Manager Coaching Model

Step 1: Clarify the Issue

- What's happening?
- What behavior is creating the problem?

Step 2: Identify Ownership

- Is this an HR issue?
- Or a manager conversation?

Step 3: Prepare the Conversation

- What needs to be said?
- What outcome are you seeking?

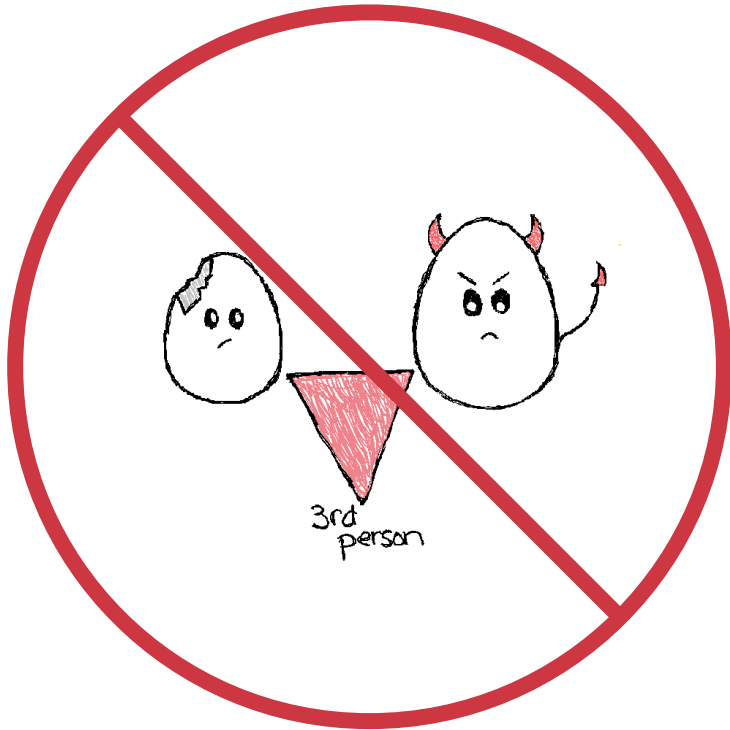
Step 4: Follow Up

- What commitment was made?
- When will you check back?



3 STEPS FOR MANAGERS TO HANDLE INTERPERSONAL ISSUES

(In a way employees can't say the organization isn't supportive.)



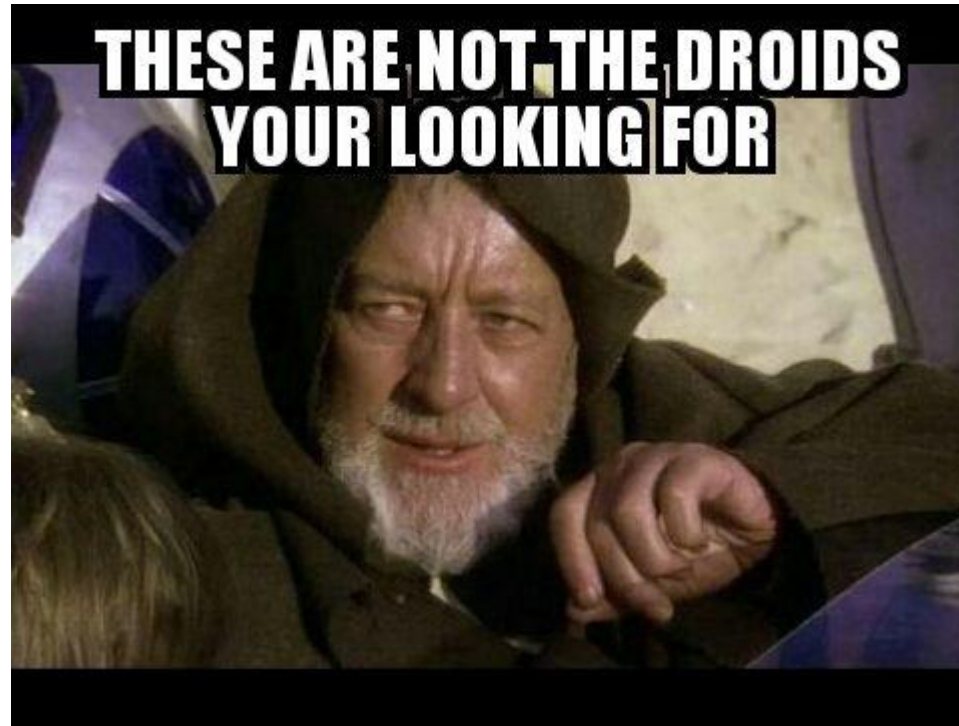
1. Did you try talking to them about this? / How can I help you have that conversation?
2. **My** expectation is that you try to work it out with them directly first, and if that doesn't work, the three of us can sit down together.
3. If that doesn't work, we can escalate it to HR.

Recommend having managers announce this policy in advance.

"High Expectations, High Support"



Your Magic Wand To Influence



It's Not What You Say But...



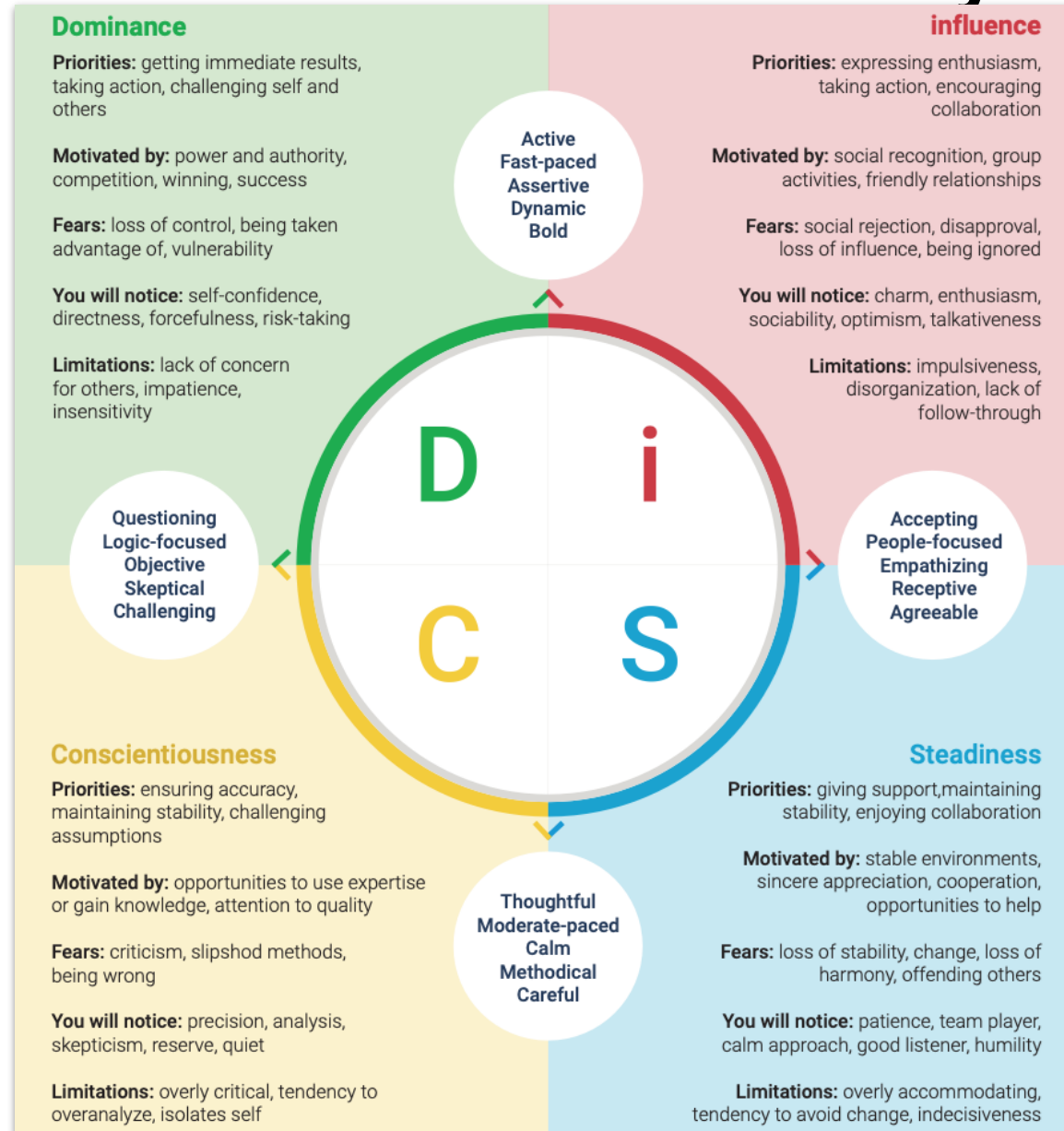
The 4 Communication Styles

RESULTS

- "Just tell me what needs to get done."
- "Let's cut to the chase."
- "We're wasting time—what's the bottom line?"

ACCURACY

- "Can you show me the data behind that?"
- "I want to get this right, not fast."
- "Let me double-check that before we move forward."



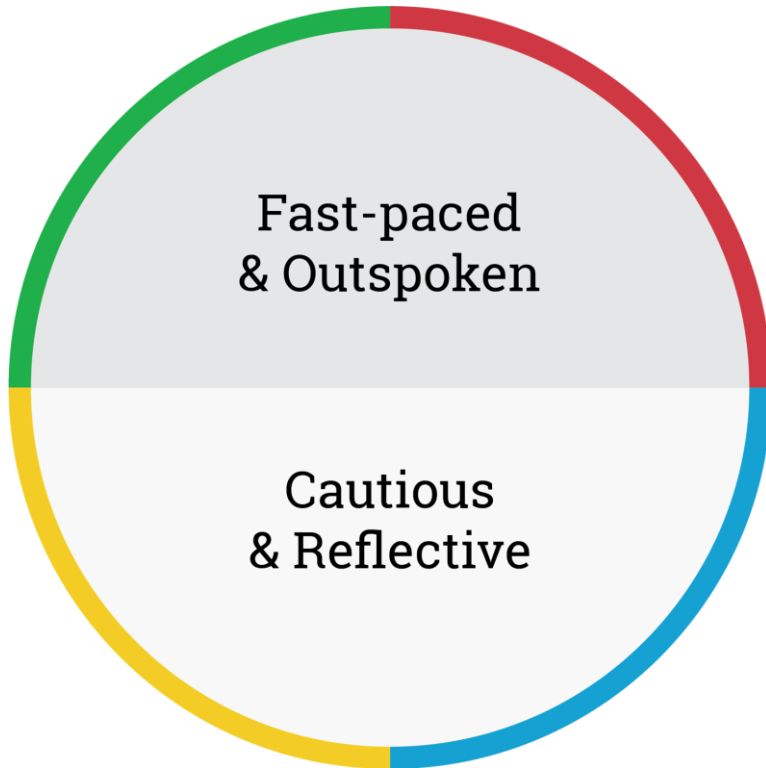
RECOGNITION

- "This is going to be so fun!"
- "I have an idea!"
- "Let's get everyone on board!"

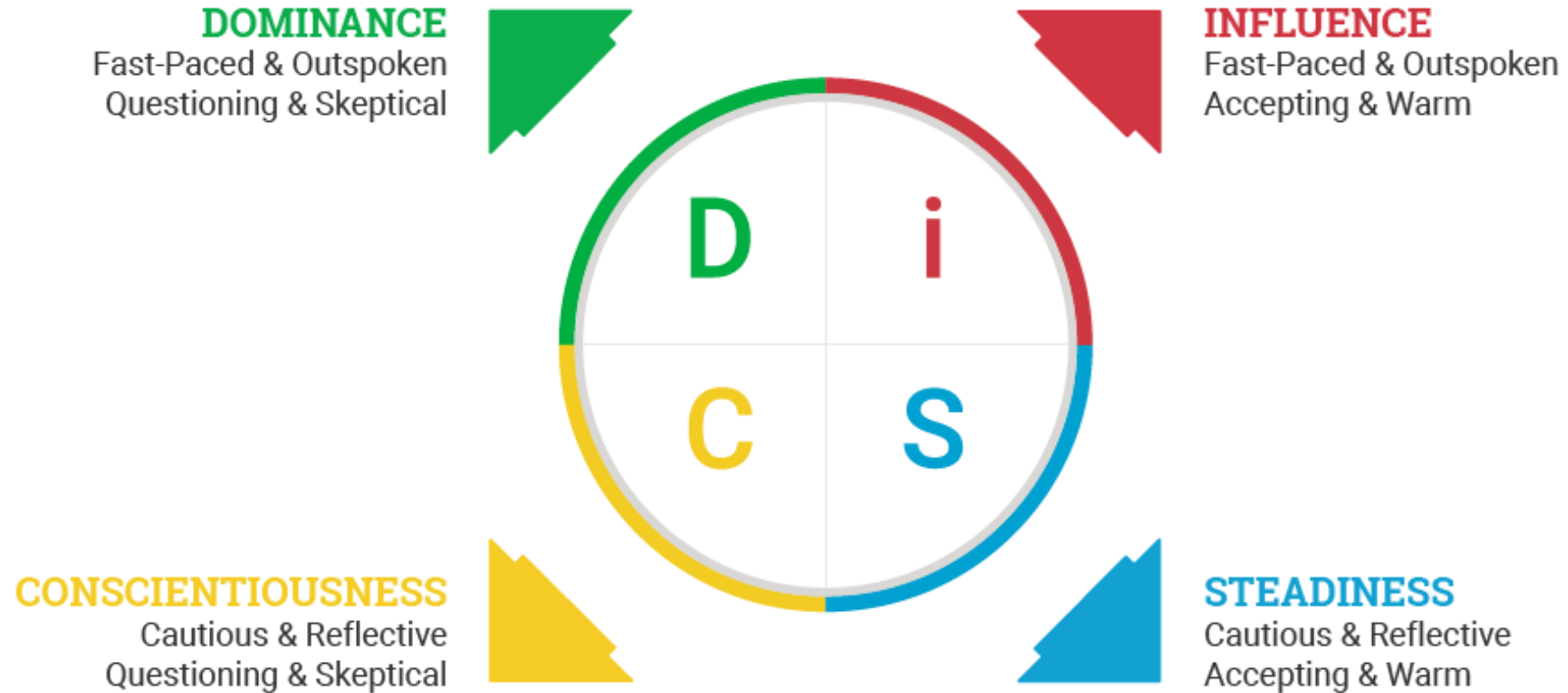
SUPPORT

- "I just want to make sure everyone's comfortable with this."
- "Let's take a minute and think it through."
- "I'm here to help however I can."

Identify Their Style



Identify Their Style



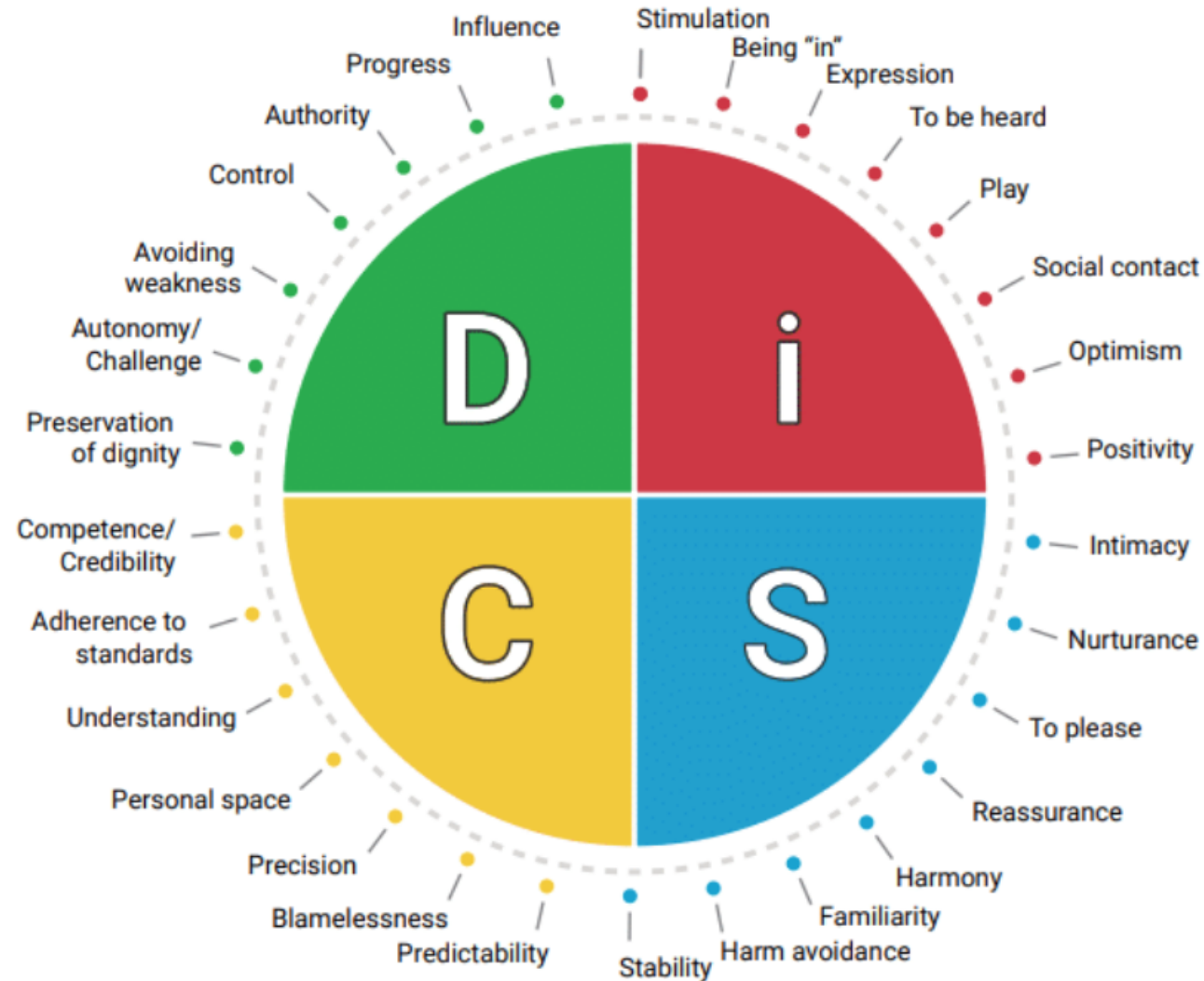
Driving Needs

Results

Relationships

Accuracy

Support



What Will They Be Listening For?

What Will They Hear?



What Are They Listening For?

Results



D Style — "Can I Handle This?"

Key Lens:

Control + Results

What they're listening for:

- Can I solve this quickly?
- Will this improve performance?
- Do I have the authority to handle it?
- What's the most direct path forward?
- What outcome am I responsible for?

Hidden fear filter:

"Are you taking control away from me?"

What Are They Listening For?

i Style — "Do You Believe In Me?"

Key Lens:

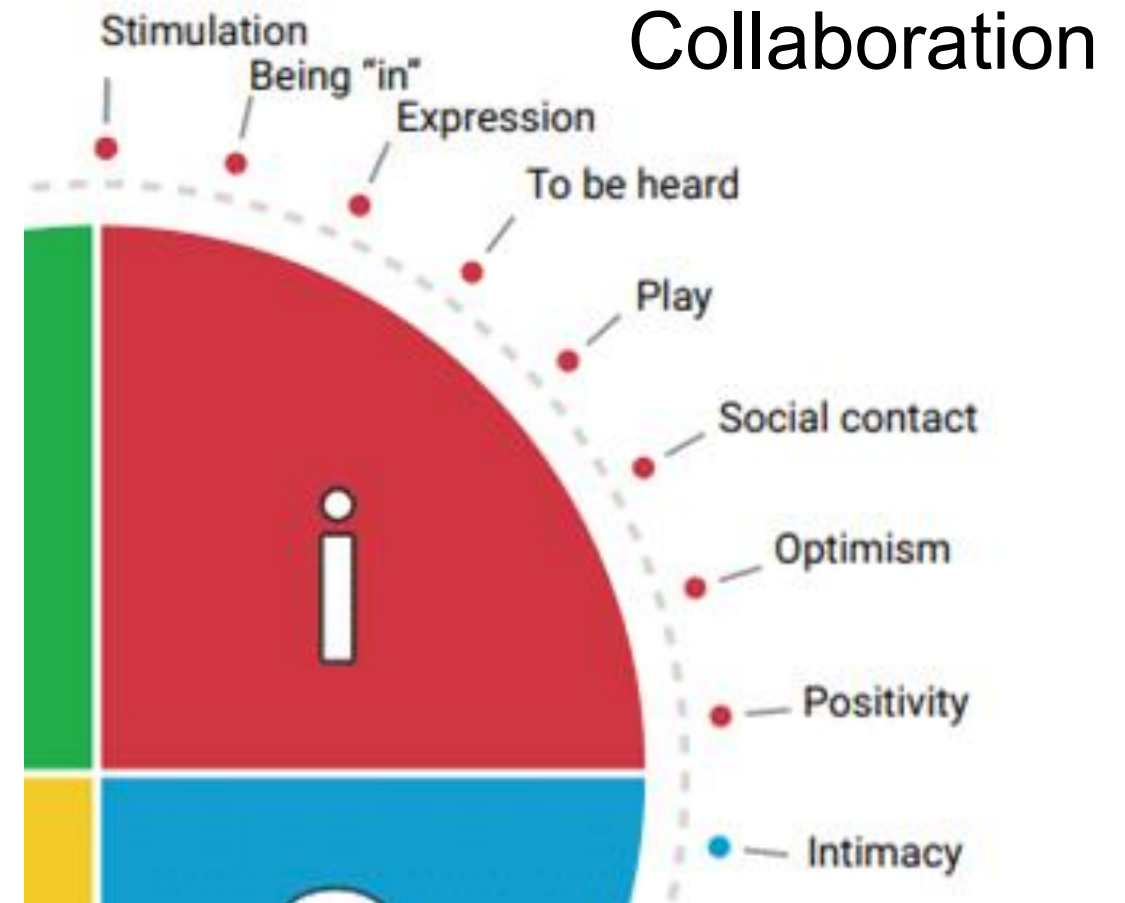
Recognition + Confidence

What they're listening for:

- Do you think I can do this?
- Will this hurt the relationship?
- Can I handle this without becoming the bad guy?
- How do I keep people engaged and motivated?
- Will people still like me afterward?

Hidden fear filter:

"What if I disappoint someone?"



What Are They Listening For?

S Style — "Will I Have Support?"

Key Lens:

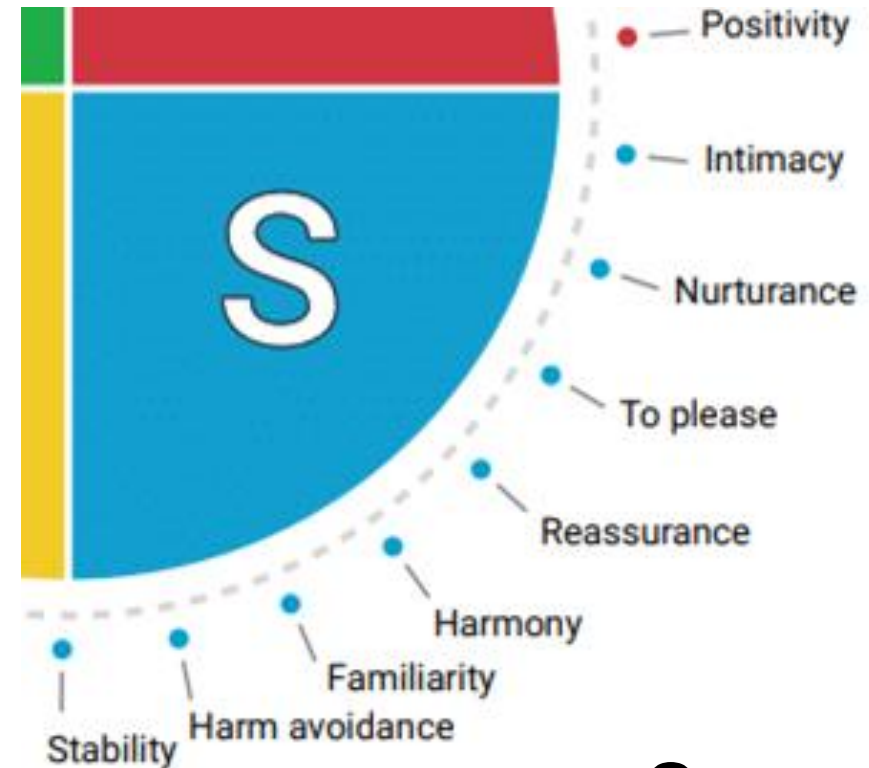
Harmony + Security

What they're listening for:

- Will this damage the relationship?
- What if the employee gets upset?
- How do I keep things from getting worse?
- Will you help me if this goes sideways?
- Can we handle this respectfully?

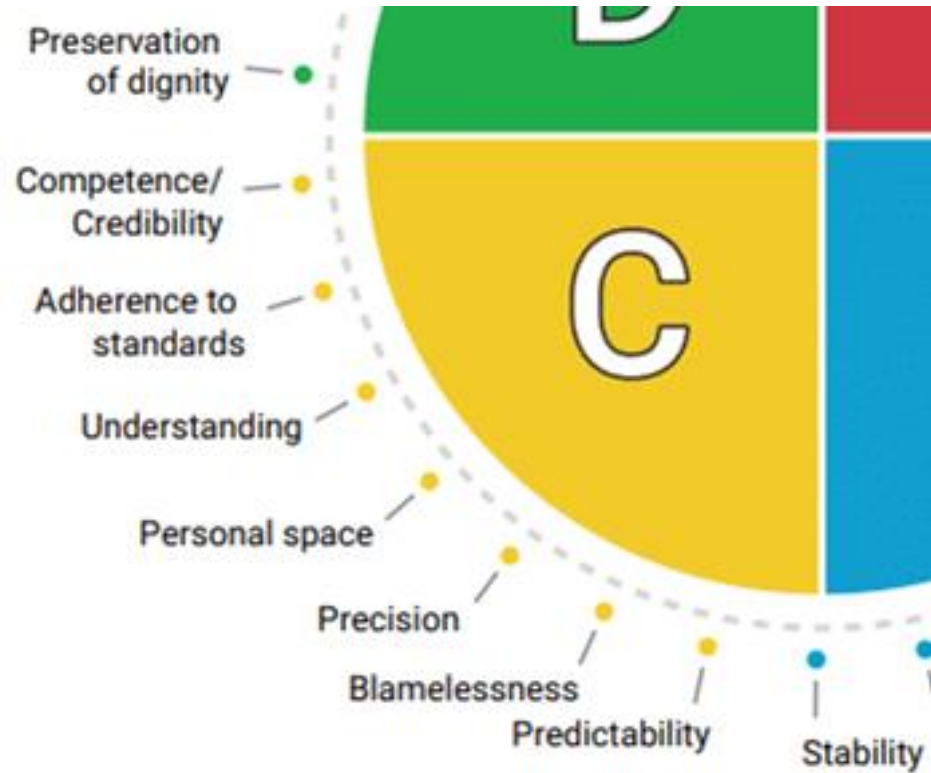
Hidden fear filter:

"Am I being left alone in this?"



Support

What Are They Listening For?



Accuracy

C Style — "What Is The Right Way To Handle This?"

Key Lens:

Accuracy + Fairness

What they're listening for:

- Do I have enough information?
- What should I say exactly?
- How do I stay objective?
- What if I make a mistake?
- What's the proper process?

Hidden fear filter:

"What if I say the wrong thing?"

Strategies To Influence

Coaching approach:

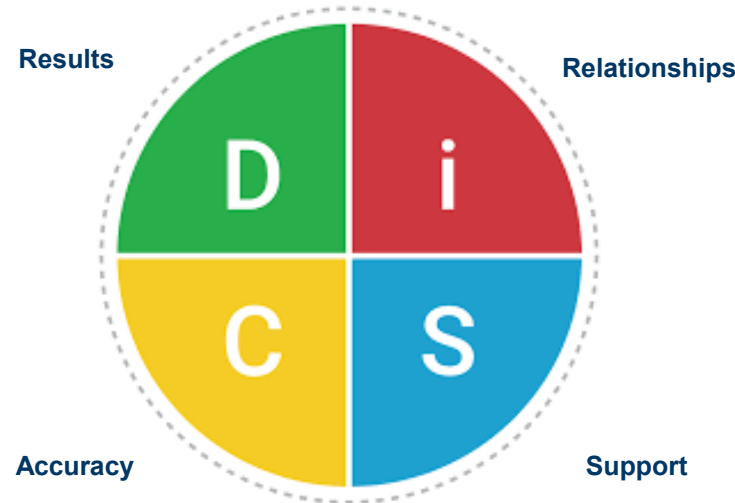
- Be brief and direct.
- Emphasize ownership.
- Focus on outcomes, not feelings.
- Position conflict as a leadership responsibility.

"This is your call as the manager. Let's talk through the conversation so you can address it directly."

Coaching approach:

- Give structure.
- Clarify expectations.
- Provide examples and language.
- Focus on facts and observable behaviors.

"Let's walk through the facts, identify the issue, and map out exactly how you want to approach the conversation."



Coaching approach:

- Provide encouragement.
- Reinforce strengths.
- Normalize discomfort.
- Help them see conflict as caring, not criticizing.

"I know these conversations aren't your favorite, but I think you're absolutely capable of handling this. I'll help you prepare."

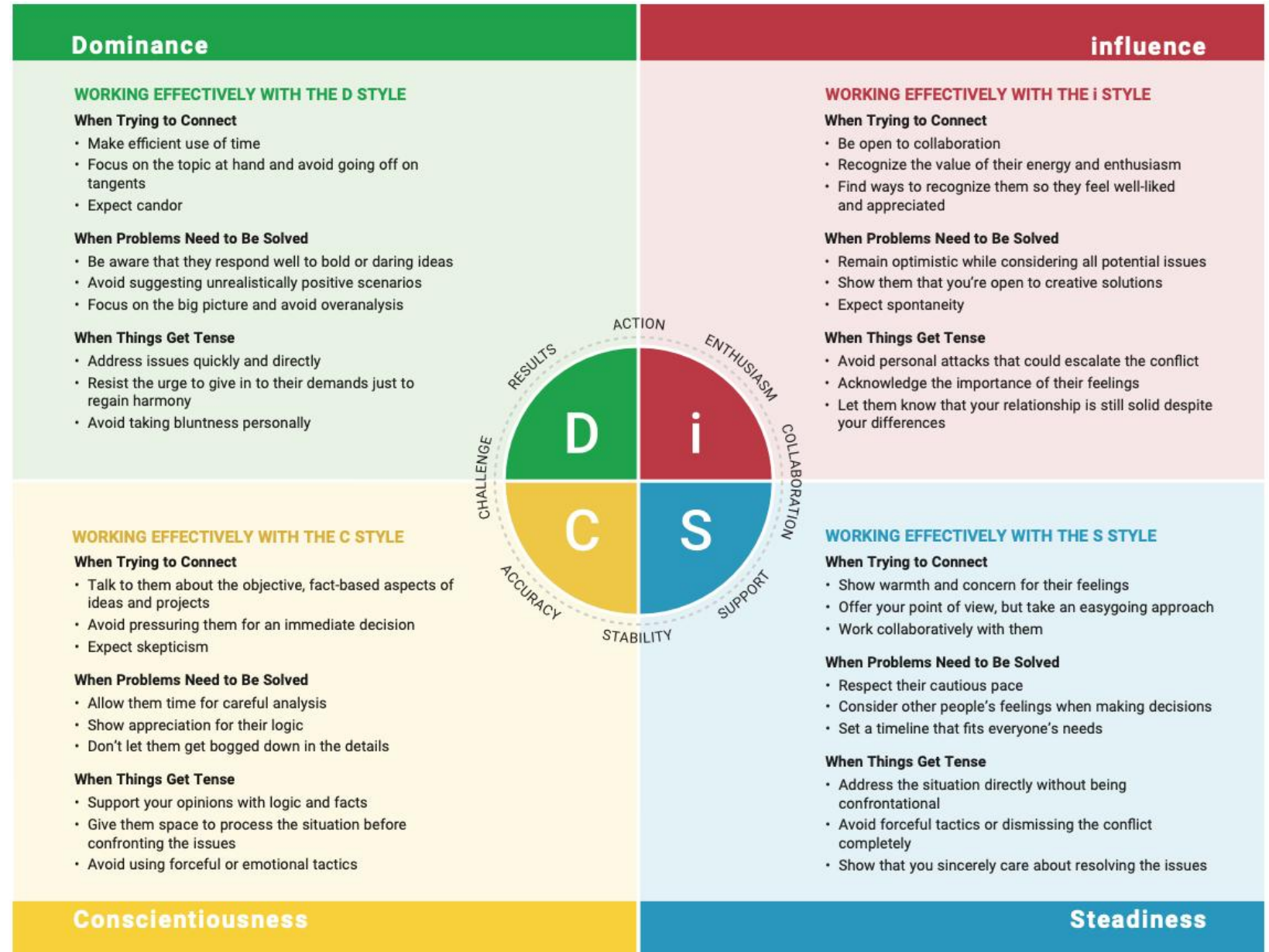
Coaching approach:

- Offer support without taking over.
- Provide a process.
- Reduce uncertainty.
- Emphasize that addressing conflict protects relationships.

"You don't have to do this alone. Let's plan the conversation together, and I'll be here if you need support afterward."



Interaction Guide



1928

DiSC theory introduced by William Moulton Marston in *Emotions of Normal People*

100+ years

Of application, evolution & influence

10+ million

People complete DiSC-style assessments every year

70+

Countries worldwide

EVERYTHING DiSC
A Wiley Brand

Catalyst.



Used across the world for:

- Workplace communication
- Management communication
- Leadership development
- Team development
- Emotional intelligence
- Sales & customer service communication
- Conflict resolution
- More



You and other styles



Build better relationships



Your colleagues



Self-guided library

This library is designed for independent, self-paced learning. Before you get started consider the following:

- 1. If you're new to DiSC:** begin by reviewing your DiSC style. [Review your DiSC style.](#)
- 2. Training events:** If you're here to attend a leadership training, [go to the Trainer-Led Library.](#)

Motivating Others

New!



Empowering Others

New!



Navigating Conflict

New!



Navigating Change

New!



Giving Constructive Feedback

New!



Motivating others.

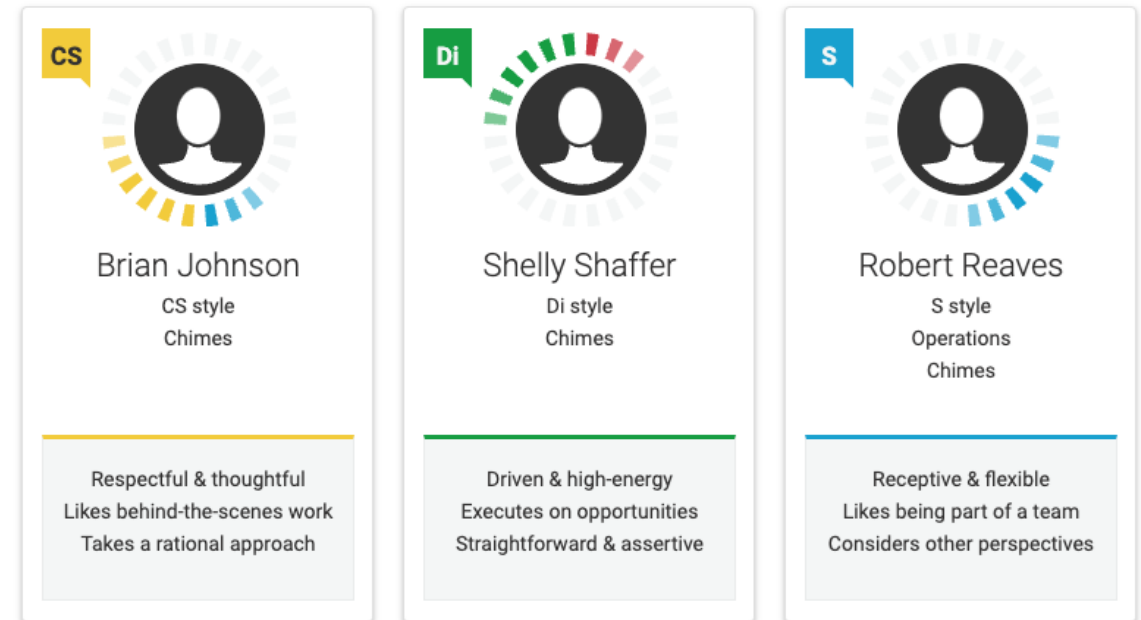
New!



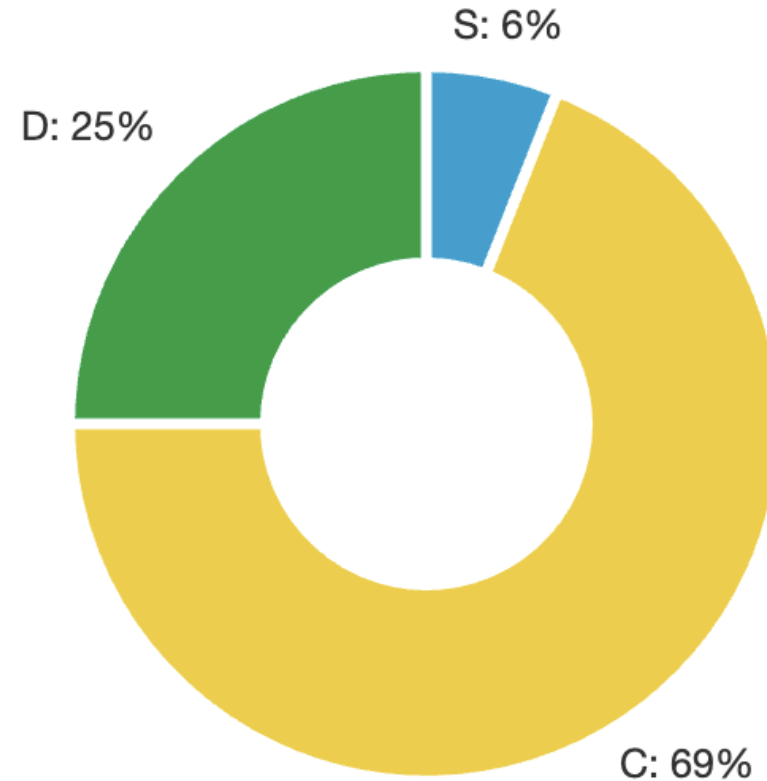
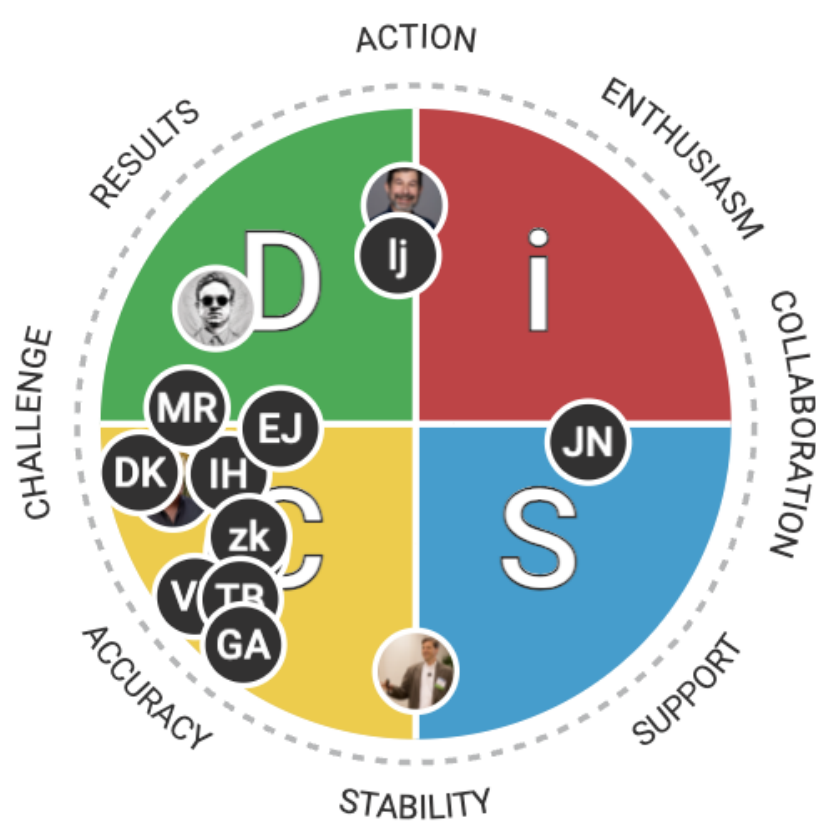
Use The Compare To Colleagues Tool Before 1:1's

Your colleagues >

Find people you know. See how you compare and explore strategies for working together.



Catalyst™ Groups Tool



Free 2 Minute Daily Communications Tip

ConfidentCommunicator.com/blog



Compassion vs. empathy

Apr 15, 2021



What to do when the other person isn't fighting fair

Apr 14, 2021



8 rules of fair fighting

Apr 13, 2021



The virtual elevator pitch

Mar 09, 2021



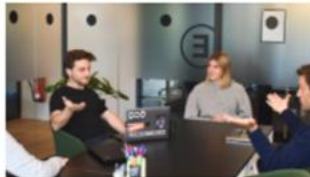
Stepping back into a tough conversation

Mar 08, 2021



If you're overwhelmed, take a break

Mar 05, 2021



7 tactics of unfair fighting

Apr 12, 2021



Interrupt gracefully

Apr 09, 2021



3 ways to end an argument productively

Apr 08, 2021



Can I remain in dialogue with someone I don't respect?

Mar 04, 2021



Mutual respect is up to you

Mar 03, 2021



Mutual purpose is the super-intention

Mar 02, 2021



How to be vulnerable

Apr 07, 2021



5 reasons you lack confidence, and 1 rule to get it

Apr 06, 2021



Learning soft skills

Apr 05, 2021



Intention influences everything

Mar 01, 2021



An apology can keep you in dialogue

Feb 26, 2021



What's my style under stress?

Feb 25, 2021





Bring DiSC To Life!

Increase your influence & build a culture of open communication in a supportive community.

 *Group Coaching*  *Forum*  *Courses*  *Resources*  *Workshop Archive*

community.confidentcommunicator.com

Request More Info Form



<https://forms.gle/ZewSemknfmpWcW9g6>

Summary

1. Stop accepting every conflict escalation at face value.
2. Coach managers through the conversation before stepping in.
3. Use DiSC as a common language for preparing difficult conversations.

Your Commitment?

"What is one thing you'll do differently the next time a manager brings you a people problem?"

