



**Annette Estes**  
Columnist

## Professional Development

### From Can't Stand to Understand: Getting Along with Difficult People

Can you think of at least one person you just *know* was put on this earth for the sole purpose of driving you crazy? How about someone who might think the same of you? If we're to be honest, we have to admit that a large number of our annoyances in life involve other people's behavior. And even though we know we can't make them behave the way we want them to, we still wish we could.

Psychologists tell us the behavior we dislike in others is often the same behavior we can't stand in ourselves. Ouch! The logical conclusion, then, is that we must change our own responses if we are going to get along better with others. That's probably not what you want to hear, but I can't think of any other way to do it. However, I can share with you some knowledge that will help you understand other people (and yourself) better, which will lead to more harmonious relationships.

Nearly 80 years ago, Harvard psychologist William Moulton Marston defined four types of human behaviors in his book, *The Emotions of Normal People*. Key word: Normal. He labeled them D-I-S-and-C, and once you understand the characteristics of each style, it will open up a world of understanding for you.

I'm going to give you a quick overview of the four styles here, then in the next four columns, I'll detail each and give tips on how to relate to those people who drive you up the wall, across the ceiling, and out the window.

**D-Dominant.** These people are the movers and shakers of the world. (They can shake you up in the process.) They tend to be bold risk takers, bossy, demanding, impatient, and results-oriented. They want it done yesterday and can have a "my way or the highway" attitude. They love a challenge and have no problem juggling many projects

at once. They get bored with the status quo. Famous Core D's: Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

**I-Influencing.** These people were born talking. They love to socialize and don't know a stranger. They're outgoing, friendly extroverts who use a lot of gestures when talking. People with the Core I style love the limelight and their motto could be, "Everyone's entitled to my opinion." There's never a dull moment with the Core I style. Famous examples: Oprah Winfrey and Jim Carrey.

**S-Steadiness.** These are the loyal, helpful, salt-of-the-earth type people. They tend to be uncomfortable with attention and find pleasure in serving others. They're quiet, friendly introverts. They tend to resist change, preferring the status quo. And when peeved, they are good at giving us the silent treatment. They like to have familiar methods to follow and their motto is "slowly, but surely." Famous Core S styles: Laura Bush and Tom Hanks.

**C-Cautious, Compliant.** Core C people believe rules are made to be followed. They are analytical, detail-oriented i-dotters and t-crossers. High C styles will ask permission, whereas Low C's ask forgiveness. The Core C style hates to make mistakes and wants it done right the first time. Motto: "Look before you leap." Famous examples: Sally Field and Felix Unger ("The Odd Couple").

So, perhaps you recognize yourself and others in these brief descriptions. It's important to know where you rank (from 0-to-100%) in each of the four factors because the score of each determines your behavioral style.

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## **From Can't Stand to Understand: Relating with "Dominant Dan"**

How do you feel about people who like to be in charge and order you around? Are you one of these people?

This begins a series of columns dealing with how to communicate with those who have different behavioral styles than we do. They're the people who do things in such a way that their behavior can be intimidating, maddening, confusing, or downright irritating.

Today we'll get a better understanding of how to deal with people who have the Core "D" (Dominant) behavioral style. We'll look at their characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. Then we'll look at the Do's and Don'ts of getting along with them.

The "D" factor in our behavioral profile determines how we handle problems and challenges. Dominant Dan has no problem running the show. If he's a strong Core "D" style (i.e. the "D" is his highest factor), he'll tend to be demanding, bold, driving, pioneering, direct, competitive, and determined. Dan must have authority equal to his

responsibility in any situation; if not, he'll find a way to take control sometimes to his detriment.

Dominant Dan has qualities that others with the same style admire; yet those who are low in the "D" factor see as liabilities or even as obnoxious behaviors. They include a willingness to take risks and a strong desire to win. Dan is results-oriented, argumentative, and quick to challenge. He doesn't mind making mistakes; he'll just correct them and move on.

If you're like Dan, you need to know areas in which you are limiting your effectiveness. For example, you may act or speak before thinking, be impatient, create fear in others, try to "juggle" too much at once, interrupt and not listen well.

If you're low in the "D" factor, you tend to be peaceful, agreeable, cooperative, cautious, humble, mild. You tend to think through a situation before making a decision. So you can see how people with low "D" factors can be intimidated by Core "D" Styles, and how Dominant Dan might get impatient with them.

### **Communicating with Dominant Dan**

If you work or live with those who have a Core "D" style, here are some of the ways in which to communicate and not communicate with them to be effective:

#### **DO:**

- Be clear, specific, brief, and to the point
- Stick to business, be prepared and organized
- Present facts logically
- Be efficient
- Provide win/win solutions

#### **DON'T:**

- Waste their time socializing or chitchatting
- Forget/lose things or be disorganized
- Ask superficial questions
- Make decisions for them
- Take issue with them personally if you disagree with them

When communicating with Dominant Dan use direct eye contact, shake hands firmly, and use linear gestures. Your attitude should be confident and your tone of voice strong, clear, and direct.

Understand that this type of person wants to be in control. That doesn't mean you have to let them dominate you; indeed they respect those who stand up to them. If you're the type of person who dislikes confrontation, understand that Dan has no problem with it and at times thrives on it. Don't let him bully you and yet try not to take his bossiness personally. It may help to realize that you probably do things that drive him nuts, too! Admire Dan - and Danielle - for their ability to take charge and efficiently get results!

## **From Can't Stand to Understand: Relating with "Influencing Iris"**

How do you feel about people who love to talk and have bubbly personalities? Are you one of these people?

Today we'll get a better understanding of how to deal with people who have the Core "I" (Influencing) behavioral style. The "I" factor in our behavioral profile determines how we interact with and influence other people. Influencing Iris doesn't know a stranger. She'll talk to you on an elevator, while passing you in the street, while you're working - anytime, anywhere. Don't try to ignore her; she'll think you don't like her and will try harder to make you a friend.

Iris is charming, optimistic, sociable, and persuasive. Socializing and verbalizing are her strong suits. She is friendly, outgoing, and trusting. She is expressive in her communications and, because of that, is probably the easiest type to "read."

If you have Iris's style, there are ways in which you may be limiting your effectiveness with people. You may speak before thinking, interrupt others, and listen poorly. You can be disorganized (you pile, don't file), too trusting, and overly optimistic about outcomes. You can annoy some people with your "chattiness."

If you're low in the "I" factor, you tend to be more suspicious and distrusting of people, cautious in relationships, and pessimistic. So you can see how those low in the "I" factor can be turned off by Iris's loquaciousness and attempts to get them to like her. And you can see how Iris might resent those who don't return her friendliness - an obvious source of conflict between these two types of people if they haven't learned how to understand and adapt to each other.

### **Communicating with Influencing Iris**

If you work or live with those who have a Core "I" style, here are some of the ways in which to communicate and not communicate with them to be effective:

#### **DO:**

- Smile, listen, allow time for socializing
- Ask for their opinion
- Be stimulating, fun, fast-moving
- Focus on people, not things
- Put details in writing

#### **DON'T:**

- Be patronizing, demeaning, or talk down to them

- Get bogged down in details, facts, data
- Be too businesslike
- Control the conversation
- Be unfriendly, curt, or tight-lipped

When communicating with Influencing Iris, smile, hug, and use expressive gestures. Use words like “fun,” “exciting,” and “I feel.” Have an energized, enthusiastic, friendly tone of voice.

Understand that these people thrive on social contact and verbalizing their experiences. To be effective with them, listen and marvel at their stories; yet don’t let them monopolize you when you get bored or need to move on. As long as you stop them in a genuinely friendly way, they won’t be upset or hold a grudge. If you listen raptly to them, they’ll think you’re hanging onto their every word; so don’t blame them if they keep going.

Admire Iris - and Ira - for their good-natured high spirits and their ability to include everyone in a discussion or activity. They put the “U” in “fun!”

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## **From Can’t Stand to Understand: Relating with “Steady Sam”**

Ah, Steady Sam. He drives the speed limit – or slower, doesn’t show his emotions, and can’t say no when asked to do something for someone. Is this you or someone you know?

Today we’ll get a better understanding of how to deal with people who have the Core “S” (Steadiness) behavioral style. The “S” factor in our behavioral profile measures how we handle the pace of the environment. The higher the “S” the slower the pace and vice versa.

Steady Sam is quiet, friendly, and helpful. He’s stressed by conflict, so he’ll often give in during a disagreement to avoid hurting another’s feelings and to keep the peace. Sam is people-oriented and methodical in his approach to tasks. He likes to have a particular way of doing things from which he doesn’t like to deviate. He resists change unless given time to adjust to it.

If you have Sam’s style, you may be limiting your effectiveness in several ways. You may be causing yourself stress by your difficulty in saying no and you may actually be causing others stress by clamming up and saying everything’s fine when it’s not and you both know it. You have a tendency to be too low risk, too indirect, and may hold a grudge forever.

If you are low in the "S" factor, you tend to be fast-paced, high risk, emotional, and unstructured. So you can see how those low in the "S" factor can lose their patience with Sam, and how he might be irritated by others' attempts to draw him out and pressure him to move faster. This is one source of conflict between these two types of people if they haven't learned how to understand and adapt to each other.

### **Communicating with Steady Sam**

If you work or live with those who have a Core "S" style, here are some of the ways in which to communicate and not communicate with them to be effective:

#### **DO:**

- Be patient and show interest in them as people
- Be sincere
- Be logical, soft-spoken, non-threatening
- Provide personal assurances and guarantees
- Give them time to adjust to change

#### **DON'T:**

- Rush headlong or stick coldly to business
- Threaten or pressure them
- Be abrupt and rapid
- Force a quick decision
- Touch or move things on their desk

When communicating with Steady Sam, smile and move at a relaxed pace; use small hand gestures, and don't stand too close. Speak in a warm, soft, steady voice and tone down the volume. Use phrases such as "take your time," "think about it," and "help me out." They respond well to assurances of safety and security.

Understand that people with the Core "S" style thrive on accommodating others and need your sincere appreciation for all the help they give. To be effective with them, be patient with their slower pace yet move them along when a decision is needed. Understand they may not want to talk things out in a disagreement; so give them time, don't yell at them; encourage them to speak their mind by genuinely listening to their concerns. If someday they disappear from your life without a word, don't waste time wondering why because you'll never know.

Admire Sam – and Samantha – for their helpfulness, their ability to calm and stabilize others, their loyalty, and their great listening skills. They bring serenity and structure to our lives.

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## **From Can't Stand to Understand: Relating with "Cautious Carla"**

Are there people who drive you crazy because they seem to worry too much or they're sticklers for following the rules? Maybe you're one of these people and right now you're thinking, "Of course we should follow the rules!"

Today we'll get a better understanding of how to deal with people who have the Core "C" (Cautious, Compliant) behavioral style. The "C" factor in our behavioral profile measures how we handle rules and regulations set by others. Those high in the "C" factor believe rules were made to be followed. They are compliant to their own high standards.

Cautious Carla is analytical, reserved, precise, orderly, meticulous, organized, and detailed. She tends to be a perfectionist. Task-oriented, she wants it done right the first time. Carla tends to be hard on herself and critical of others. She needs facts and data before making a decision, which can sometimes result in "analysis paralysis."

If you have Carla's style, you may be limiting your effectiveness in several ways. You may be too low risk, require too much data, and make excessive rules. You may believe expression of feelings is irrational and thereby limit your relationships.

If you are low in the "C" factor, you tend to break rules or not be aware of them; you will ask forgiveness, whereas Carla will ask permission. Those low in the "C" factor can become irritated with the time it takes Carla to make a decision and she might be irritated when they break the rules, take short cuts, or skip over details. These differences can cause conflict between these two types of people if they haven't learned how to understand and adapt to each other.

### **Communicating with Cautious Carla**

If you work or live with those who have a Core "C" style, here are some of the ways in which to communicate and not communicate with them to be effective:

#### **DO:**

- Be straightforward and direct, present specifics
- Prepare your case in advance
- Take your time, but be persistent
- Provide them with the data, facts, and time they need to make a decision
- Allow them space, don't stand too close

#### **DON'T:**

- Be disorganized, messy, casual, or informal
- Be abrupt and rapid
- Force a quick decision
- Try to convince them with feelings or opinions
- Fail to follow through

When communicating with Cautious Carla, move and speak slowly, thoughtfully, and deliberately. Use direct eye contact with little or no hand gestures. Sit or stand across from them and don't touch them, except to shake hands. Your tone of voice should be controlled, direct, and precise. Use words and phrases such as "These are the facts," "The data shows," "No risk," "Take your time, think it over."

Understand that people with the Core "C" style take pride in doing research and getting the data necessary to support their decisions. To be effective with them, respect their logical approach and the quality of their work. Understand that they don't take personal criticism well, especially if it relates to their work.

Admire Carla – and Carl – for their attention to detail, their ability to do accurate work, their organizational skills, and their ability to solve complex problems.

So now you have a short manual on how to deal with difficult people, who really aren't all that difficult unless we see them that way. Next time, I'll have some general applications for understanding DISC behaviors and how you can achieve genuine growth in your relationships with others.

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## **From Can't Stand to Understand: Some final thoughts**

We'll wrap up this series with some general suggestions about why it's important to understand behavioral styles – yours and others' – and how you can benefit from doing so. There are so many advantages of consciously understanding and adapting to people's behavioral styles, it's impossible to list them all here.

What I'm talking about is not a game we play to manipulate people, but a way to show our respect for others. There's no higher compliment than practicing the Platinum Rule with people: "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them." For example: Let's say you have a Core "I" style and you love to chat and hug everyone you meet. That works with other Core "I's." But if you treat those with a Core "C" style that way, you will push them away and watch them shut the door of communication with you.

There are numerous ways my colleagues, our clients, and I have benefited from putting this knowledge into practice. Many companies use DISC knowledge to hire and keep the best people. Managers use it to get the best from each member of their staff. Employees learn how to be better team players and "manage up."

Understanding DISC behaviors is a vital team-building tool. One of our clients says that by using the DISC format, "We have opened ourselves up to each other completely and communication is now one of the greatest strengths among our management team."

Behavioral selling will increase sales because people buy from people they like, and they like those who treat them the way they want to be treated. This involves learning to “read” people’s styles.

Some of the personal growth I have seen in people is they stop saying yes to everyone and start asserting themselves. I’ve seen people who tend to intimidate others ease up and show more respect. I’ve seen people who are great talkers learn to be better listeners and vice versa. I’ve seen people who resist change learn to better accept it. I’ve seen employees get more respect from their boss by communicating in the supervisor’s style. I’ve seen twins get along better after discovering they have opposite styles and realizing it’s all right to be different even though others expect them to act alike.

Understanding your style can help you appreciate your strengths and stop suffering low self-esteem because of your limitations. The next step is to work on what needs improving. Even though no style is better or worse than another, I think people secretly think their style is best. That’s good because it suggests they like who they are. Then as they learn to appreciate and respect the styles of people who are different, real communication begins.

I’d like to close with a suggestion that we be non-judgmental toward all types of people. Don’t get upset with people just for being who they are. Realize that most of the time, they’re not purposely trying to irritate or intimidate you. They’re just doing what they feel is best for them. We all do things for our own reasons, and we’re usually moving toward pleasure or away from pain.

That’s not to say we should let people get away with treating us badly. On the contrary, we should set strong boundaries and make it clear what kind of behavior is and is not acceptable to us. To get upset with someone because they’re doing things their own way, however, is immature and leads to unnecessary conflict.

I will leave you with the words of Lao Tse, who said, “Those who know others are learned. Those who know themselves are wise.”

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Annette Estes is a Certified Professional Behavioral and Values Analyst, Coach, and transportation safety consultant. She coaches individuals and teams on professional and personal development, communication skills, team building, conflict resolution, and hiring winners. She is an award-winning columnist, professional speaker, and author of the award-winning book and eBook **[Why Can’t You See It My Way? Resolving Values Conflicts at Work and Home.](#)** Contact her at [Annette@CoachAnnette.com](mailto:Annette@CoachAnnette.com)

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