

The CD Style – An Everything DiSC® Podcast

Narrator: The following podcast by Dr. Mark Scullard describes the CD style. It is an Everything DiSC® production brought to you by Wiley.

Dr. Mark Scullard: All right, so we're going to spend some time talking about the CD style, which is a blend of conscientiousness and dominance, and if you have a CD style, I think probably what you're going to find is that, you know, maybe, you know, roughly 70, 80 percent of what we're going to be talking here will probably fit for you. And, you know, some of it would be spot on. There'll be some of it that feels like, yeah, that's not really me or maybe even, yeah, well, that sounds like me when I was younger. But I think the value here is more about listening for those insights that really help you make sense of your past experience or really help you see your thought processes or your habits in a new light. So we're going to take a look at all of these different characteristics associated with this CD style, things like being strong critical thinkers, like being tough minded, you know, being determined, and there's one underlying theme that really ties them all together.

It's probably the most pronounced characteristic that separates people with this style from the average person. And it's this fundamental sense of skepticism. It's a perspective that says: the world isn't necessarily always the most friendly place. You know, it's not always well meaning. There are a lot of people out there who just shouldn't be trusted, you know, some because they're not honest, but, you know, some because they're just not capable or because they're lazy or because they're selfish. So, generally speaking, the CD style tends to be a little bit more wary of the world. And this outlook, which I'll talk about throughout this podcast, this outlook is the source of some of the CD's greatest strengths and greatest assets, but it's also the source of some of its greatest challenges.

So using that as a foundation, there are kind of these three central needs that stem from this, what I'll call kind of core psychological needs, and the first one is this: it's a—a strong need to be competent. If I'm in a world that's filled with dishonesty or ineptitude or, you know, poor decision making, I need to be able to rely on myself. And to do that, I need to be competent. So I set my standards high for myself and I also set my standards high for the people around me. If I'm going to trust you and respect you, you're going to need to measure up to these standards. And that being said, the standards that I set for myself are usually far higher than those I set for anyone else. So that's the need for competency. A second related need is a need for control.

If there's a lot of sketchiness out there in the world, I need to be able to control the variables that affect my fate: not everything or everyone, but if something has the power to shape the course of my life, I want influence over that thing. And when I don't have that control, when I don't have any way to regain it, it's very unnerving. I'm left in kind of an uneasy state because who knows what can happen. All right. So that's the need for control. And then the last, very similar to control, is a need to not be vulnerable. Again, if we've got an untrustworthy world, it's not exactly wise to make yourself vulnerable on a regular basis. So when we actually do survey people with the CD style, they're much more likely to identify themselves as being a little bit more guarded or standoffish.

And like most psychological characteristics there, there are some positive things that come from this, but there are also some negative things that stem from this. All—all right, so that's competence, control, and what I'll call non-vulnerability. And as we talk about this style, you'll see these three core needs pop up again and again because they have a huge number of implications for how this person approaches their relationships, their projects, their career. And that's what I want to get into here, the implications.

So let's start with competence. From very early on, for people with the CD style, there's often this inherent, unquestioned belief that "I should have mastery over all of the elements in my life that affect me." And this serves two functions. First, it helps create

self-sufficiency. This gives me the freedom to pursue my goals without the inconvenience of having to rely on another person. My success is entirely within my control; at least, it feels that way. And then second, it creates a safeguard against a central fear and that central fear is being incompetent. If competence is central to the value of a person, then being incompetent is completely unacceptable. It's humiliating to be a failure. It's humiliating to be helpless.

Now, I—I made a pretty bold claim right there. The claim was: competence is central to the value of a person. And actually, let's make this more personal and state it like this: I'm valuable if I'm competent. That's pretty drastic. And this is where I want to introduce this concept of driving assumptions. These are unspoken belief systems that that each of us has, beliefs that are usually well outside of our awareness. But they're assumptions that we have about how the world works and because they're assumptions and because they're unconscious, we really don't have the opportunity to question them. We just assume they're true. So, for instance, for the CD style, a common assumption is: I should always be self-sufficient.

And I call these driving assumptions because this little belief that we probably came up with when we were seven or eight years old and which is well buried by the time we reach adolescence, it drives a huge amount of our behavior and it drives a lot of how we interpret the events in our lives. So for the rest of this talk, I want to discuss some of these assumptions. And if you have a CD style, you might find yourself torn. You might find yourself saying, you know, on the one hand, this assumption is just plain stupid. I'd be embarrassed to admit that I believe something like that. And at the same time, though, there might also be some part of you that actually kind of does believe that, you know, you don't really want to admit it, but you kind of know it's there.

And the thing you should know, though, is this is true for everyone. We all have these unspoken beliefs about the world that on the surface, they they look ridiculous or even embarrassing. You know, if you examine them in the light of day, it's like, this is how a

child sees the world, not an adult. But to the degree that these assumptions are legitimately there, going on in the backgrounds of our brain, and we go on not owning them or refusing to acknowledge them, they actually have that much more power to shape our lives and to guide us towards decisions that aren't necessarily always in our best long term interest. All right. So that brings us back to the driving assumption we started with.

And if you have a CD style, try it on—maybe it fits for you, maybe it doesn't—and ask yourself if there's some part of you that believes this even in a small way. Again, here it is: I'm valuable if I'm competent. It's a very simple statement and the rational part of us can easily reject it. But to the degree that it's incorporated in our understanding of the world, at a less conscious level, it can have a really powerful influence on our behavior. OK, so think about all of the ways this assumption would affect someone's behavior if they had really, really incorporated into their worldview. So, one implication is that, I'm going to do whatever it takes to be competent, to master the challenge in front of me, because if my self-worth is at stake here, really, what could possibly be more important? And so I will push through all manner of discomfort to gain mastery.

When other people encounter something too tough, their mind is often telling them, you know what? Isn't there something more comfortable we could be doing with our time? But the CD style becomes accustomed to that lack of comfort. They become accustomed to that negative emotion. Unlike other people, negative emotion isn't necessarily a sign that I should be running away, that I'm doing the wrong thing. My—my internal assumption is that I need to push through it. And so I'll persist with an unpleasant task or in a negative atmosphere much longer. I'll wrestle with the problem. I'm determined to understand and to do things right.

Basically, because I expect resistance in the world, it's not going to scare me off. I don't automatically take it as a sign that I'm headed in the wrong direction. And I think what's interesting with this style is that, while achievement is important, personal mastery is

actually even more important. Mastery reflects an internal competency that I can carry with me and I can use to control the world in the future. I've added a tool to my toolbox, basically.

And so in the same way that I evaluate myself based on competence, it makes sense that I'd evaluate other people based on that same criterion. So one of the things that we often see with the CD style is that they have very little tolerance for people they regard as incompetent. And in fact, if you took the Everything DiSC[®] assessment and you came up with a CD profile, you probably endorsed statements like "I quickly get irritated with illogical people" and "It really bothers me when people waste my time" or "I get impatient with incompetent people".

So if someone's incompetent, or at least I perceive them that way, and I—I can't get rid of them, I'll work around them. I'll give them minimal responsibility, maybe not include them in updates, not deliberately, but because I've kind of written them off. Very much related to this is a very strong emphasis on accuracy in the CD style. You know, it almost reflects this kind of core belief: thou shalt not be wrong. Almost as if it's, you know, sinful or unethical to be wrong.

If I produce something and I put my good name on it, it absolutely must be of high quality. If I make a statement, it must be true, preferably with information to back it up. Anything else is almost morally wrong. And so it's not that everything needs to be perfect, but the things that I can commit myself to, the things that I put effort into, must be unassailable and refined. Maybe I'll allow some flaws in things that I haven't poured myself into. But if I identify with a project or an accomplishment, it must be flawless.

But I do want to make sure that I'm not painting a picture of the CD's accuracy as being purely a defense mechanism. That the only reason this style wants accuracy is because it doesn't want to be blamed for mistakes. It's broader than that. People with the CD style also—they take a lot of pride, a subtle kind of joy, in producing something of great

quality. They like knowing that they've done a truly excellent job and like having control over all aspects of it. There's a satisfaction that comes with stepping back and looking at the work that I did and admiring how well it matches up to some standard. There's a sense of completeness and closure and purpose that comes with getting things just right. It's a little like slipping that last piece of the puzzle in place.

When things fit just perfectly after a bunch of hard work, there's wholeness and stability. And I think most people can appreciate that, but particularly for the CD style. But there is still that other more defensive motivation for precision, which is to avoid mistakes, and if someone wants to avoid mistakes, one of the best tools humans have available to us is logic. It's knowable and predictable. It's also incredibly stable, like math. If you put certain variables in, you're going to get certain variables out. Each time it's the same. So the CD style learns to rely on this tool. And, as we'll talk about a little later on, sometimes they over-rely on it.

A similar tool that someone can use to avoid being wrong is skepticism. Being skeptical means that I'm not going to be taken in. I'm not going to think something's better than it really is. I'm not going to put my stamp of approval on something that's inferior, that's flawed. It protects me from making a mistake. It limits the number of false positives I get, even if, as a natural consequence, it means I'm also going to increase the number of false negatives that I get. And this is another area that can be a great asset, but it can also be overused, which we'll talk about later. And then another practice that helps people avoid mistakes is information gathering. The CD style typically wants a lot of information before making a decision and sometimes wants an unrealistic level of certainty before making a decision.

So this can translate into being very slow to act or being very risk adverse or frankly, not even recognizing opportunities where it might be worth taking a moderate risk. You know, it's just not on the radar. And of course, we all want some certainty before we're taking a chance. It's just that the threshold is particularly high for the CD style. And so

they might not even see the opportunity or if the opportunity is brought up by someone else, their go to reaction is just going to be one of cynicism, especially if they haven't had the chance to work out all the logic and all the contingencies and all the ripple effects for themselves. They're not going to be really comfortable just putting their faith and fate in someone else's judgment.

The DC and the CD styles in particular often have very high and very specific standards. And one of the offshoots of that is what I'll call a "should mindset": very firm beliefs about how people should behave, how a situation should be resolved. And "should"—this is a deceptively powerful word. Counseling psychologists, you know, really pay attention when they hear one of their clients using the word should. It's because should implies a moral judgment. So if you take it in the context of "I should be respectful of other people" or "I should be a good parent" or "I shouldn't take advantage of other people", these are pretty reasonable statements.

It's kind of hard to argue with these because if you're not living up to these sorts of shoulds, well, you know, maybe, just maybe, you're not doing life right, alright? Maybe you really do need to take a step back and reevaluate the kind of person you've become. But I don't think that's too judgmental, right? That's a pretty low bar. All right. Now, the problem happens, though, when we take this word "should" and, mostly unconsciously, we start applying it to situations that really are not moral imperatives. And as a consequence, we make those situations start to feel like moral imperatives. I should give her a call. I should be more productive. I should be exercising. And, you know, make no mistake, these are all good things to do. But not doing these things doesn't make me a bad person. But because of my should mindset here, the level of guilt or even shame I feel for these things is not in any way equivalent to the actual transgression.

And this, I think, just as an aside, is one of the leading causes of procrastination. Not at all to suggest that the CD style is particularly prone to procrastination—they're not—but,

you know, all of us do this from time to time and our shoulds are a big part of that. You know, if I'm telling myself "I should start that project" and I also know simultaneously that I haven't started it—well, whenever I think about that project, it's coated, you know, it's saturated in this guilt and anxiety. And so mentally, what am I tempted to do? I push it out of my mind as quickly as possible. I find something less painful to think about. And so next time, thinking about the topic becomes even more painful, and that's—you know, the cycle goes on with procrastination.

All right, but back to the CD style in particular, and I've been talking about this word should as with regard to my personal shoulds, alright, the shoulds I have concerning my obligations. But with a CD style, when my standards are so high and often very specific, there's also a lot of shoulds that I assign to other peoples' behavior. She should get to this meeting on time. He shouldn't be browsing the Internet when he hasn't finished that project yet. She shouldn't have used that tone. He should have called me back by now. And again, in those situation, all those should might very well have an element of legitimacy, a very big element of it.

But the should mindset makes the stakes disproportionately high. The stakes are now of a moral nature. It can feel like the stakes are this is either a good person or a bad person. Again, this isn't necessarily conscious as far as the thought patterns go, but what I am conscious of is the resulting emotion. And so what we can find is a level of anger or disgust or frustration, I feel, is not really proportionate to the person's actual transgression. You know, objectively speaking, I'm much more irritated than most people would say the actual situation calls for.

Now, I do want to point out that this is a broad human tendency. We are all susceptible to it. The reason I bring it up in a CD's podcast, though, is that I think it's a particularly strong pattern within this style. You know, the guilt that's associated with the shoulds I have about myself and then the irritation, right, that's associated with the shoulds that I have about other people. And I mentioned procrastination as a potential side effect of

should, but if we're looking for a positive side, the should can also spur us to action. It can get us to take responsibility to be accountable. Likewise, I mentioned earlier that one of the central needs of the CD style is control. And for many people with this style, this leads to this intense drive to understand their world, because I can control the world around me if I understand it better. So in particular, people with the DC or CD or C styles, they tend to be analytical. They keep digging for answers or understanding, even when those answers don't come quickly or easily.

There's this, uh, there's this psychological principle called cognitive ease. It refers to how easy it is for our brains to process information. The more cognitive ease associated with the task, the more likely we are to stick with it. That's just human nature. But when that ease diminishes, the urge that our brain, you know, sends up is to switch to another topic, something less painful, so less difficult. It's one of the reasons why advertisers want to keep getting their brand in front of you again and again and again, because the more familiar something is, the easier it is for—to process, the more likely we are to engage with it, to think about it again.

It's also the reason people prefer to get information that validates their preexisting beliefs. We'd much rather hear a fact that confirms what we already believe compared to a fact that contradicts what we believe. It's easier to process the confirmatory information. It feels better. Basically—you know, our—basically our brains are lazy. And so being someone who frequently engages in analytical, critical thinking, someone who keeps at things even when they're difficult, well, it may not necessarily always be the most pleasant way to exist, but it's crucial for developing expertise on complex topics, sticking with it through all the unpleasantness, and so this is really one of the strengths of this style.

Whereas the average person is more likely to succumb to that temptation towards cognitive ease, you know, the—the path of least resistance, the CD style, they're more likely to keep at it, to keep digging, even though it's hard. And so, again, we can call this

an instinct towards mastery. And I think this can also reinforce the belief that, my world is controllable if I just focus enough, or at least, it should be controllable. And because I have built my understanding of the world on logical, objective standards, it can also feel like I'm in a unique place to be an unbiased or fair in my decision making.

After all, I've used systematic reasoning to build my case and as a consequence, my reasoning, it feels airtight. I can envision how every piece fits together, you know. And as a side effect of that, though, it's much easier for me to justify being stubborn, to justify digging my heels in. Again, I've got an airtight case. In my mind, it's also completely unbiased. Now, of course, what's really easy for me to forget, easy for all humans to forget, is that the conclusions we come to, even rationally and logically, are completely dependent on which facts we choose to prioritize and which we choose to de-emphasize. My values impact my logic and the direction that my logic takes me. And they influence whether or not an argument seems strong or weak to me. So usually my position seems unassailable to me, and it's frustrating that other people can't see it as clearly.

And so given that, even compromising is particularly irritating because it means lowering my standards and accepting an objectively inferior solution, all because other people, you know, they're not bright enough to see the situation clearly, you know, and it's frustrating. And with the CD style, there's a—definitely a tendency to express that disagreement. So, maybe I'm not necessarily expressing my emotion directly, although that's probably coming across as well, but if you have a CD style, there's a good chance that you're known for being direct, you know, straightforward.

And there's a lot to be said for the power of candor because there's a lot of miscommunication and inefficiency that goes on when people have to guess what other people are thinking. You know, you might see me as rude, but I'm telling it as it is, I'm being honest, I'm making it clear what I think, and it's so much more efficient to do. I don't want to have to guess what you're thinking either. I want you to be frank, too. Also,

I don't want to have to waste all this mental energy trying to figure out the exact right words that aren't going to hurt your feelings. That's exhausting, and it slows me down, and it's controlling. Really, wouldn't it just be a better world if everyone could just toughen up a little bit? You know, people, grown ups, they should be strong enough to hear the truth.

I do want to take some time, though, to talk about how this argument—the argument I just made—can be taken and maybe twisted, maybe just a little bit, in a way that allows me to rationalize or justify some unhealthy behaviors in the name of truth or in the name of honesty. For instance, uh, is there a difference between being blunt and being honest? Because there are many times when a person can choose two different ways to communicate the truth, one that's blunt and one that's diplomatic, both of which are equally honest, both of which communicate the message. But the blunt option has the danger of triggering someone's defenses and actually closing them off to the message. So the question I want to ask is: in those circumstances where the blunt and diplomatic communications are both equally clear and equally honest, why would someone choose the blunt option?

All right. So, let me throw out a few options—through—a few—a few hypotheses. All right, one is that I just don't want to take the time and the mental energy to choose my words, because what does diplomacy involve? It involves putting myself in the other person's shoes and imagining how they're going to react. Then it involves choosing the words that will simultaneously communicate what I want to say without putting the other person off more than—than is absolutely necessary. This is work. It's no wonder people say, you know, to hell with it, I'm just going to blurt it out, it's their problem if they can't take it. Another reason why some people might choose the blunt option, although I think most of us wouldn't be too quick to admit that this is the reason, but it's because being blunt actually feels more powerful. It's a way to kind of indulge my irritation or frustration or anger or disgust at someone that bothers me.

You know, I might tell myself that I'm just being fair or honest, but emotionally, does it in any way actually feel good to be blunt with someone? Does it feel empowering? For, for instance, uh, which of the following statements feels more empowering to say? All right, here's the first one: "I think that sometimes you're not putting in as much effort as the rest of the people on this team." Compare that to saying: "You're being lazy." Right, the second one is much more gratifying to say if I'm a little bit irritated. And I can tell myself that I said it that way because I wanted to be direct and honest, but the first option is just as clear without having the potential negative side effects, it just doesn't feel as good to say.

The hint of aggression in there also has a sense of power and control to that. And, and, and that feels good, too. So the key here is to be honest with myself about why I'm being direct and blunt, especially if it's a sensitive situation. How much of it is because the direct statement is more clear and understandable, and how much of it is because even if I don't like to admit it, it feels better for me to be blunt, or it's easier, again, for me to be blunt. Really, this is just about understanding my real motivations so I can make a more deliberate choice in how I act.

And as a counterpart to being blunt, something that's actually usually a lot more subtle, and that's the non-verbals that the CD style often gives off that can really influence people even without me knowing that I'm affecting other people's behavior. And it's even more influential if I'm in a leadership position. Leadership, that's a—that's a particularly powerful position. If I'm a leader, people are going to be paying a lot more attention to my moods and, you know, even what they perceive to be my moods, than—than I ever realize. You know, a slight eye roll or an exaggerated sigh—that's going to get analyzed and replayed over and over again in the heads of the people who follow me. You know, moreover, expressions of anger or irritation like a raised voice, they have an even more drastic impact.

And what it can do is it can create a pretty stressful environment for people where they aren't really secure about their standing with me. So if you do have a CD style and you're in a role of authority, it is really worth considering the emotional vibe that you're giving off. Really, part of having an engaged workplace is people feeling good about the place they show up to for work every day. And more specifically, you know, they shouldn't want to avoid running into their leader in the hall. Their blood pressure shouldn't raise when their leader calls them on the phone, you know? And of course, that's a little bit of an exaggeration. But in talking with a number of people with CD styles, they don't often realize the intensity of the vibe that they can give off, particularly when that vibe is skeptical. That can be really stressful for people, especially if there's someone who really values harmony and stability in their world.

Now, you know, when it comes to positions of authority, you know, we really don't find that the typical person with the CD style is all that power hungry, all right? They're not necessarily the ones who are clamoring to be in command. Um, you know, some are. But for the most part, that's not a trait. You know, what's—what's a more common drive within this style, though, is to be an authority, right? Maybe not the authority, but an authority in some area, you know. And—now a key word here, uh, that I don't know if I mentioned yet, but I think it's a useful idea to sum up a lot of this, is the word credibility: the idea that people see me as someone that can be relied on, that they can trust what I say is true.

And, you know, of course, you know, everyone wants to be seen as credible, but for the CD style, this is very much a—a preoccupation, you know, and—and maybe unconsciously, but there's this mentality that says: I need to guard my credibility. Actually, I think probably the more common phrasing of this, you know, more internal voice is something like: I must always maintain my credibility. You know, it's another one of those driving assumptions. And if you have a CD style, try it on. Ask yourself if there's some part of you that believes this, even in a small way. And this is a deceptively

powerful little statement. In fact, the key words here are probably not what you would expect them to be.

Again, take this sentence: I must always maintain my credibility. I would argue that the key words here are must and always. Always is powerful because it's an absolute, it puts a tremendous amount of pressure on a person to live up to this standard at each and every moment in time, with no exceptions, no room for screw ups. And human beings, you know, we just can't do that. The other key word, must, is one that you might not expect at all, but here's what must does: it elevates this statement from a mere preference or a goal or a nice to have. And it elevates it to a moral imperative. That—that this speaks to our very character, whether we're a good person or a bad person. I must guard my credibility at all times because this is a reflection on my worth as a person.

Now, granted, I'm using language here that's a little grandiose and very few of us think in these terms consciously. But for all of us, there are times that our brain makes these absolute, completely irrational assumptions about life that guide our perceptions of the world around us. Okay, so let's say this assumption is in play, it's operating beneath the surface, maybe even to just do a small degree, maybe to a large degree. Maintaining self-control, then, is one of the first things a person is going to do to protect their credibility. Even if I can't necessarily control the situation, I can control myself. So there's a certain amount of pride that I take in my ability to control my desires. Self-control also assures that I won't make a fool out of myself by making a mistake or doing something inappropriate.

There is therefore a strong instinct to avoid all forms of vulnerability, not to show weakness to others, especially in areas that I think matter. So I'll go off and do research on my own rather than letting people see me in a vulnerable position of not knowing something. I keep my insecurities to myself and find it frankly, almost—you know—bordering on humiliating when those insecurities might show, because "a credible

person is strong"—I'm using quotation marks here, but, you know, the credible person is strong. They're—they're in control. They can handle the problems that life throws at them in a composed, disciplined manner.

At least, that's what should happen, should being another one of those very loaded words. Now, a much more proactive way to ensure my credibility is developing expertise. Expertise ensures my competence in whatever area we're talking about. It's not about getting attention or approval or power. A lot of the times, it's about accomplishment, but a meaningful amount is also about, if I develop expertise, I've got this competency in my back pocket. As long as I know I have that, I'm good.

And this is core. You can take everything else away and I'll still have my competency. Expertise helps cement my worth. It closes up the vulnerability that I could be exposed. Here, I have the chance to be on the offensive rather than the defensive. This is where I can get my pride needs met. Pride feels good, you know, other people get their pride needs met by being top dog or by getting a lot of attention or by having status. Being an expert allows me to dip into that well of pride in the same way. And like anything, it can be taken too far. It can be tempting for a person to hide behind their expertise, to build their self concept around it to the point where it's like a safe fortress to take shelter in and withdraw into, where wandering outside their areas of expertise becomes even more unattractive compared to the warmth and the safety of their comfort zone.

But of course, there's very much a healthy side to this instinct to build expertise as well. Once I have it, I can do things that very few other people can do. I can solve problems that very few other people can solve. It's because very few other people are driven towards mastery the way I am, and they're not willing to put in the hard, sometimes unrewarding work that's necessary to develop that mastery.

Okay, so, I definitely want to make sure the healthy side is acknowledged because the world would be much different, a much worse place, if we didn't have people who were

driven in this specific regard. All right. The unhealthy side, I mean, a lot of the time it's— it's more useful to talk about the unhealthy side of our instincts because that's the information that we can use to help us grow. So, to the degree that there is this unhealthy instinct to use expertise as a shield or to avoid putting myself in a position where I might fail, to maintain credibility all times, to ensure that I'm not the origin of mistakes, there's a deeper impulse here to make sure that flaws are not exposed.

People with a CD style, if they've really allowed themselves to dig deep, to be really honest with themselves, recognize this association between their flaws being exposed, on the one hand, and really deep sense of humiliation. And it's almost an unspoken association. But to the degree that in the back of my head, I believe that the exposure of my flaws would be awful. People seeing those flaws would be awful. I make sure that those flaws stay on complete lockdown. I make sure that my output, whatever it is, if it comes out of me, it's very controlled and very measured.

And related to this, there's a—there's another concept that I want to bring up here that weaves through a number of the CD characteristics. It's—it's really one of the more prized possessions of the CD style. And—and that is their dignity. And of course, everyone cares about their dignity to some degree. And this word can mean different things. But what I'm talking about here is dignity in terms of not looking foolish, not losing the basic respect of others. And so this is another one of those driving assumptions. I must maintain my dignity at all times, which isn't such an extreme statement.

But let's unpack a little of what this actually entails. This is a mandate that usually entails self-control at all times. It also entails that I am at all times in control of my choices. It entails that I do not say things that are foolish or things that can be proven wrong. It often means that I don't expose myself to criticism, to—open to ridicule. And these aren't necessarily conscious mandates, and they're not necessarily true of all

people with the CD style. But it's common to see these, at least to some degree, operating in the back of the mind.

So let's imagine, if true, what kind of implications you might see if someone had this very intense need to guard their dignity. And I think one of the most obvious places is in the social realm. You know, that's a realm where the rules for what's appropriate and not appropriate, you know, are usually pretty ambiguous, if not completely arbitrary. And so the normal strategy I might take when I know there's going to be a stressful situation is to prepare and to analyze and to study. But with social situations, there's no amount of preparation that I can do to ensure that I'm going to come across well.

And the people who are usually regarded as the most socially engaging are in fact the ones who usually do put themselves out there, they open themselves up, they throw themselves into the situation. They're speaking stream of consciousness a lot of the times, they're not second guessing what comes out of their mouth. The filter between what they're thinking and what they're saying is very permeable. You can see their passion and they pull people into those passions.

Now, these people may be very image conscious, they—they may thrive on attention, their self-worth might be wrapped up in the approval of others, but their self-worth and their concept of dignity is probably quite different than the typical CD's concept of dignity. For the average CD style, my brain simply won't allow me to expose myself like that. I can't let go of those inhibitions because those inhibitions have been locked in place over the years to protect my dignity, to protect me from saying that ridiculous thing, whatever it is. I've got this very intense internal monologue going on about the social dynamics and what's appropriate, but on the outside, it usually just looks like I'm a quiet person.

And the cruel irony, of course, is that all of that quietness is exhausting, you know? It's all of that internal stress, analyzing the dynamics, looking for opportunities to jump into

the conversation. But this can feel like—almost like merging into traffic that's going 70 miles an hour when I'm standing still. It's exhausting. And there are some other dimensions to this whole dignity thing, though, that aren't just about mingling or social events. And another important one of them is about emotional control or emotional displays. And the general strategy here is to really just avoid them.

I remember a friend describing to me how he sees it when someone loses their temper—and the friend is actually he's got this, uh, a lot of C style in him, maybe a little bit of D. And surprisingly to me, what he described was being embarrassed for the other person. And so let's say someone with a really strong personality loses it and starts yelling. That person, the person yelling, may feel like they're showing power or strength through their aggression.

But my friend's reaction was to just see this person as losing their dignity. They're losing control of the one thing you can have control over, they're creating a whole window into their flaws and shortcomings. When you get emotional like that, there's no telling what will pour out and—and it's not just anger. It's really any sort of strong emotional display, you know, it could be too much enthusiasm or too much sadness, right? And not to say people with this style don't experience strong emotions. They do. But they just have a very strong instinct to control the display of those emotions.

So with the CD style, you can often see this self-sufficiency projected outward through a quiet strength. There's a—a strong sense of emotional control, but also a little bit of intensity beneath the surface that people can usually pick up on, a little bit of of restlessness. But again, definitely projecting a sense of strength.

And—and part of that is keeping more tender, more vulnerable emotions internal, kind of tucked away from the outside world, you know. And by tender emotions, I mean things like, uh, you know, sadness or hurt or emotional displays of affection or empathy, you know. For a lot of people with the CD style, certainly not all, but a number, you

know, even seeing other people be too open with this kind of stuff can feel—I don't know—squeamish, you know. Particularly gushy, sentimental stuff, it's going to get a disgust reaction, revulsion almost. It feels manipulative. When someone's putting all this squishy stuff out there, it's almost as if they're implicitly demanding a reaction out of me, a reaction of empathy, or they're trying to make me feel that gushy stuff too. It's like, no, no, you know, don't try to drag me into this emotion. Don't try to play on my sympathies. You know, don't try to shame me into having those same feelings.

The CD style definitely has an aversion to being controlled and I think that sometimes listening to someone tell a sappy story can feel like that, being manipulated—indirectly, but it's still there. And there's also kind of this allergic reaction to melodrama. You know, the sense that people are exaggerating or overplaying their emotion in a situation, you know, maybe even a sense that they're faking it a little bit, but also, you know, that it's a tool for them to get attention. It's—it's another form of manipulation. You're using this trumped up reaction to get everyone to pay attention to you and pull attention away from other, more legitimate concerns. It's like a politician kissing a baby, trying to make us think he's trustworthy. I actually heard someone else describe why they found this so off-putting. They—I love the way they put it—they described it as "an appeal to shallow, uncomplicated emotions at the expense of reason."

Alright, so there are those potential reactions, but I think there's also often something else, more beneath the surface. You know, when you see that strong disgust reaction that people with the DC or CD style have to that sappy, sentimental stuff, I think a lot of that potentially ties back to the aversion to vulnerability. And disgust is an interesting emotion. The reason it's basically there is to protect us from stuff that can poison us or to hurt us. You know, our ancestors were disgusted by rancid, fetid food so that they wouldn't eat it, you know? They had that emotional reaction, it's an overpowering, emotional experience that protected them. So if you follow that logic, what is it that's poisonous about sentimentality, about touchy feely stuff? Why would, for some people, why would their brains be telling them that you need to stay away from this stuff, that it's

going to hurt you, that it's going to poison you? And one hypothesis is that there's such a strong aversion to tender emotion like this because those emotions represent vulnerability.

How do they represent that they represent that? They represent unabashed intimacy or being completely un-skeptical, surrendering that normal cynicism that protects us against things like manipulation or lying people, but also against looking foolish or overexposing ourselves.

And then, a little further, that cynicism can protect us from looking weak or soft or actually being weak or soft. Simply put, someone comes at me with this tender stuff, they're basically asking me to completely abandon my critical eye, my layer of protection. It's the opposite of control. It's the opposite of mastery. And so my brain is telling me that this is an absolute no go, you know, to make sure I stay clear. And the way that it gets me to stay clear is it creates this reaction of disgust, sometimes even anger. And so even complimenting someone or praising them or reassuring them or encouraging them, particularly at work, can feel uncomfortable. A little too kind of touchy feely, maybe even cringe inducing, maybe even unprofessional. And what's interesting is, you know, more negative emotions don't necessarily have that stigma of being unprofessional, like, for instance, getting frustrated or angry, because at least they reflect a more hard nose down to business approach.

I mean, that's what you're getting paid for, right? Is to be down to business. But—but I have seen a number of cases where this mindset has gotten people in trouble, specifically when they find themselves in a leadership position. And the problem stems from being very problem focused. If, for instance, you know, mentally I'm on the hunt for problematic issues and I always have an eye open for them, this can be a really good thing. It helps me excel as a critical thinker. It helps me spot things that are going wrong.

Unfortunately, the opposite tendency might not come easily. That is, I'm much more attentive to problems and obstacles at the expense of being attentive to victories and hopes. I consider myself a realist and I keep my expectations for the future muted. That's what a good skeptic does. I don't show too much overt enthusiasm for the future because after all, this is a form of vulnerability. If things don't pan out, I'm going to look foolish for being on the record as an optimist. And further, when we do have a victory, I may show a surge of happiness in the moment, but I'm also really quick to refocus on the next objective. It's part of my, kind of my "should" list.

Unfortunately, this can really leave other people feeling like there's, you know, there's—there's never a moment of real achievement or real celebration. It's just always on to the next challenge. What can be draining for a lot of people. And so for many people with the CD style, when they find themselves moved into a leadership position, one of the determinants of whether or not they're successful is their ability to make that transition, that they're going to have to put themselves out there sometimes with—with some optimism. They're going to need to balance out that cynicism. Maybe even more challenging, though, is the one to one stuff: showing appreciation or giving reassurance when people need it. You know, the first challenge is getting over the allergicness to it. Then there's even, you know, kind of the more practical challenge of reminding myself to do that kind of stuff on a regular basis.

But even outside of the realm of leadership, if we step back from that, it's not uncommon that the skepticism of the CD style is pretty noticeable, sometimes actually a lot more noticeable than they even realize. For instance, they might be less likely to politely laugh at someone's unfunny joke.

You know, basically they're giving fewer nonverbal and verbal cues that they're trying to please or comfort the other person, like little smiles or nods. Instead, sometimes there's an unspoken vibe that says, you know, prove it to me, or, you know, prove yourself to me. And they're not necessarily meaning to give that off. But sometimes other people

are picking up on that. And if you consider that basically we all have social needs and for a lot of people, one of those core needs is approval or belonging or admiration, but for the CD style, oftentimes the larger social need is respect. And so, for this reason, they're not usually giving off those cues that say "like me!", right? That feels kind of undignified, right? There's not much self-sufficiency in that.

But there are some consequences of this social need for dignity, both positive and negative. And one of the positive is that perception of strength in the CD style. It says, I'm not easy to please, and because of that, many people will work harder to earn my acceptance. And there's certainly a lot of benefits to that. I have more influence. It's easier to get my way. People pay attention to me. I have a seat at the table as a discerning person. People look to me for my approval because it doesn't come easily.

The downside, though, is that it might take longer before people feel comfortable being open with me, uh, being vulnerable with me, because they don't want to be judged. When you know someone has really high standards, it's a natural thing to say to yourself, I don't want to be judged unfavorably by those standards. So as a consequence, I protect the kind of information that I share with someone who I fear might judge me. There's less openness in that relationship, or at least it can take longer to build that sort of trust. There was an article that I read recently. It was, um—it was by a Harvard psychologist who studies first impressions. And she was making the point that when we meet someone new, people judge us immediately on two dimensions. One of them is, can I respect this person? Basically, are they competent or are they strong? And then the second question people judge us on is, can I trust this person, which is largely evaluated based on how warm the person comes across.

And I—and I bring up this theory here because I think at times the CD style scores very highly on the respect dimension, but it can come at the expense of the warmth dimension, which can be crucial for trust. Now, when it comes to the CD style judging

other people, there's a lot of weight put on this competence piece. As I mentioned earlier, this style really has a much lower tolerance for incompetence.

And, you know, I mean, no one's crazy about incompetence, but the CD style finds it to be particularly grating. And if you have this style, this is probably something you can relate to. And, you know, and we just talked about how other people, they pick up on that, even if we're not intentionally giving that off, they pick up on that.

But what I wanted to get to here is the underlying emotion that you often see in these situations and what's going on there. And there's this fascinating study that I think does a great job of illustrating the issue that I want to get into. So here's what they did. The researchers, they took a group of very strong political conservatives and a group of very strong political liberals, and they put them in an MRI scanner, a machine that lets us see what's going on inside the brain.

Now, the people inside the MRI, they had two tasks. The first task is, they were asked to come up with arguments that were against their own political party. And then the second task is, they were asked to come up with arguments against the other political party. And no matter which group, liberals and conservatives, they got the same results. On the first task—criticizing my own party—the parts of the brain that showed activity were in the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain most associated with logical reasoning. Basically, people were rational.

Where it gets interesting, though, is when people were asked to criticize their opponents, there was substantially less activity in the logical, critical thinking parts of the brain. Instead, there were two other parts that were highly active. One of them was the part of the brain associated with disgust. And that's not surprising. You can imagine how sour a number of people might be towards their opposition, especially politically. The second part of the brain, though, was the one that I found most fascinating. It was the pleasure center of the brain, which seems kind of weird, right? I mean, why would

talking about your political enemies be associated with pleasure? And isn't pleasure kind of the opposite of disgust?

What was happening was that people were enjoying, probably subtly, they probably weren't aware of it, but they were enjoying the contempt they felt for their opponent. It's actually an emotion that we have a name for. We call it self-righteousness. It's the enjoyment of getting angry or disgusted with someone and if you think about it, this idea of negative emotion being paired with pleasure, as bizarre as it seems, it's not uncommon. You know, we have phrases like wallowing in sadness or—or stewing in anger. It's an acknowledgment that, as unpleasant as these emotions are, sometimes there actually is a pleasurable, reinforcing component to them.

Now, I would guess if you asked any people in this study if they were taking pleasure in being disgusted, most of them would say no, you know, one, because it's not something we really want to admit, but to because the experience of disgust is what we're most aware of. And that's what can make this sort of experience so dangerous, potentially addictive, because we're not aware of the reinforcement that we're getting by engaging in disgust.

OK, so what does this have to do with the CD style?

Well, while this mental trap is one that all humans are susceptible to, for the CD style, this kind of disgust, pleasure pairing, I think is particularly tempting, again, precisely because of those high standards and high expectations that we talked about earlier. And so finding fault with someone, whether it's for not having common sense or for being too lazy or too slow or whatever, it's tempting to dwell on these flaws exactly because there sometimes can be that subtle reinforcement going on behind the scenes—to dwell on a logical argument during a fight and to enjoy building that argument about why the other person's behavior or their position is so unacceptable. And I can keep indulging in this rumination because it feels like I have no choice, that I

have to get irritated as a matter of principle, you know. I just can't let this thing slide. You know, why would I choose to get irritated about this if I didn't have to be?

Well, here's one potential reason why. And again, I want to be clear that this is a human pattern. It's not isolated to one DiSC® style. It's just that this particular mental trap can be especially tempting for the CD style. And so if you do have this style, I think it's just worth considering, you know, the next time you find yourself irritated with someone, and particularly when, you know, you're dwelling on that irritation, to what degree is there actually a hint of enjoyment that comes along with that? And if there is that enjoyment, if the behavior is being reinforced in some way, is that something you actually want to continue to indulge?

Now, I think this is related to the inherent skepticism we talked about at the very beginning, but it really is only one way that the skepticism can manifest itself. I know a number of people with DC or CD styles that notice that even when they're not feeling frustrated or irritated or impatient in a situation, other people can sometimes still think they are. A large part of this is the non-verbals that are being given off, and for non-skeptical people, less skeptical people, throughout their lives, they've often developed certain very welcoming or encouraging non-verbals that have become so routine for them that they're unconscious. Again, things like smiling or nodding or saying, you know, yeah, or ha without even knowing it.

So if the other person subconsciously is expecting those cues and not getting them, a voice in the back of their head might start asking, is something wrong? You know, does this person not like me. For a more skeptical person, on the other hand, the more natural posture is to not have immediate acceptance, to not give off that vibe, you know. Instead, the vibe is more likely to be kind of a wait and see position or posture that says, you know, prove it to me. That says, you know, I'm not easily impressed or that I'm a discerning person, I'm a critical thinker. I don't immediately put my trust out there before I have reason to believe that I can trust you. You know, that's just the reasonable thing

to do. But to that other person, depending on where they come from, this neutral stance can mistakenly come across as disinterested or even defensive or perhaps guarded.

But again, if I have this underlying perspective that says, hey, the world's not always a trustworthy place, well, in that case, openness is the last thing you want to do.

Vulnerability is the enemy. That's just common sense. And in fact, a lot of times people with the CD style can become very good at reading between the lines in an interaction and picking up on the message beneath the surface, particularly if that message is a critical one or a threatening one. You know, the potential manipulation or potentially ulterior motives, the subtle ways that people are trying to influence me.

And you can see this particular form of attentiveness as it relates to an underlying skepticism and to a higher need for control. And it's neither good nor bad thing, or rather, it can be either. It's good when I pick up on a motivation or manipulation that really is there. On the other hand, this heightened attentiveness is a drag on me if I'm picking up on problems that aren't really there, if I'm reading an insult or a power grab into a conversation when there actually is nothing of the sort going on in the person's head. Really one way of looking at this is: what type of error would I rather make? Would I rather incorrectly think that there's a problem or would I rather incorrectly think there's no problem? Would I rather be overly critical or would I rather be overly naive? For most people with the CD style, they're much more comfortable erring on the side of being overly critical.

All right, and—and so before wrapping up, the one final area that I want to touch on briefly is conflict. And, you know, there—there's a lot to be said in this area. You know, we could probably go on for a whole nother podcast on this topic. So, you know, we're certainly not going to get into everything. But I wanted to kind of pull in some of those needs that we talked about at the very beginning, particularly that need for competence and that need for control.

And, you know, if you consider someone with strong needs in both of these areas, it really makes a lot of sense that this person is really not going to want to be beat in an argument. I mean, no one wants to be beat, but I think particularly in this case. And it's kind of a mentality there that says, if I let someone out-argue me, that reflects really poorly on my competence and it also threatens my sense of control, you know? And that's a lot of internal pressure to make absolutely certain that I don't lose. You know, there's there's a lot more at stake in this conflict than whatever issue it is that we're actually arguing about on the surface.

And one of the things that people with the CD style readily admit is being stubborn when they get in a fight. And one of the things that really helps them be stubborn are those finely honed critical thinking abilities. I come up with this airtight, perfectly logical case that run through the arguments in my head, playing out all of the different points and counter points that I make. And as a result, my position feels rock solid. And hopefully, you know, because of my critical thinking, my position actually is more accurate. But regardless of how good it is in reality, it's going to feel much more defensible because I've used logic to build it, and as a strong critical thinker, I'm going to be good at defending even a bad argument to protect my preexisting beliefs. I feel more validated than in not changing and sticking to my guns.

And—and it's uniquely important to me to not lose because of all those things I just talked about, the control, the competence, the non-vulnerability. And with that incentive pushing me, there's that temptation to just bury the other person in logic and my quick thinking. Now, on the positive side of conflict, a real strength of the CD style is about sticking up for my rights and also about not letting problems get swept under the rug. Particularly in an organization, that's incredibly valuable because there are just so many incentives out there in the typical organization for people just to ignore problems, maybe grumble about them in the break room, but never actually address the issues, all right? there's a lot to be said about candor.

All right. So there definitely is a lot of information here, a lot of different dimensions that we talked about, and so: how do you make sense of it all, or rather, how do you put it to use? Well, I just want to make one broad suggestion. It's about these driving assumptions. And I think a practice that's actually really powerful in terms of our growth as people is to simply monitor our behavior and our thoughts and start to notice when these assumptions are being played out in the background.

And so let me give you kind of a reminder of the assumptions and maybe add a few new ones and think about—to what degree can I see these playing in my head? They're things like: I'm valuable if I'm competent. I should always be self-sufficient. If I'm not in control, I open myself up to disaster. I should have complete mastery in all areas of my life that are under my responsibility. It is undignified to show intimate emotions. I must maintain my dignity at all times.

Now, the whole exercise here is about becoming more aware of when these type of assumptions are driving our behaviors, our thoughts, our emotions. Some of them probably resonate with you more than others, right? And sometimes these things are going to be realistic. Sometimes they're not going to be realistic. But the first step is really just about becoming more consciously aware of them, alright? So that I can make decisions and choices in a deliberate fashion. And if the assumption is realistic in that situation, great. You know, I run with it. But if it's not, then I learn to challenge it and replace it with a statement that's more accurate, more fitting for the circumstances. And it absolutely takes some time and deliberate effort. But ultimately, I end up having more control over how I see the world and really, how I interact with it.

All right, well, thank you, everyone, for your time.

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