The DC Style – An Everything DiSC® Podcast

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

Dr. Mark Scullard: All right, so we're going to be spending some time talking about the DC style, which is a blend of Dominance and Conscientiousness. And if you have a DC style, I think what you'll find is that, you know, roughly 70, 80 percent of what we're going to talk about here is going to fit for you.

You know, some of it will be spot on, there'll—you know—there'll be a little bit 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 the DC style, things like being strong critical thinkers, like being tough-minded, uh, 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 DC 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 DC'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

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needs that stem from this, what I'll call kind of core psychological needs, and the first one is this. It's 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 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 D C 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 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.

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So let's start with competence. From very early on, for people with the DC 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 confident. 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 DC 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 DC 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

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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 DC style, try it on. Maybe it fits for you. Maybe it doesn't. 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. Okay, so think about all of the ways this assumption would affect someone's behavior if they had really, really incorporated it 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 DC style becomes accustomed to that lack of comfort. They become accustomed to that negative emotion.

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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—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 DC 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 DC 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.

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 will, 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.

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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. All right. Maybe you really do need to—take a step back and reevaluate the kind of person you've become. But—and, you know, I don't think that's too judgmental, right, that's a pretty low bar. Alright. 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 D C style is particularly prone to procrastination. They're not. Um, 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 coded, you know, it's saturated in this guilt and anxiety.

And so mentally, what am I attempted 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—the DC style in particular, um, and I've been talking about this word should as with regard to my personal shoulds, all right, the shoulds I have concerning my obligations.

But with the DC style, when my standards are so high and often very specific, there's also a lot of shoulds that I assign to other people's behavior. She should get to this meeting on time. He shouldn't be browsing the Internet when he hasn't finished that

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project yet. She shouldn't have used that tone. He should have called me back by now. And again, in those situation, all those shoulds 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 the DC podcast, though, is that I think it's a particularly strong pattern within this style. You know, the—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 at—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 DC 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 a 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, less difficult. It's one of the reasons why advertisers want

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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 DC 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 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

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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—and it's frustrating. And with the DC 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 DC 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 are—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

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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 that—than is absolutely necessary. This is work and 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.

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 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

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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 DC 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. You know, 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 I 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 DC 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 DC 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—who really values harmony and stability in their world.

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Now, again, I do want to make sure that I'm not just highlighting the negative here. Um, there's a lot of value to candor, and specifically, there's a great deal of value to speaking up about problems in an organization. It's easy to go with the flow if some policy or process is inefficient, uh, but it's ingrained in the culture. Most of us are inclined to maybe grumble a little bit about it, but just try to kind of make do with it.

Oftentimes, the people who get these things changed, they're the people who are direct and perhaps more importantly, they're the ones who stay determined in the face of resistance. It's not easy to get established problems changed. And the DC and the C and the D style, these folks don't necessarily expect the world to be all roses in the first place so they're not scared off when they meet resistance. They almost feel compelled to speak up when their standards are violated. It's almost an insult that I have to keep doing things in this inefficient way that completely defies common sense. And this actually also extends to the area of innovation.

I was part of a project a few years ago on the topic of innovation and one of the eye opening parts of that for me was this realization that the real key to innovation in most organizations, it's not brilliant ideas, because the—it turns out there's usually a lot of good ideas floating around in organizations. No, instead, it's the organization's ability to implement those ideas. And the biggest factor here is the champion's ability to keep pushing for that idea, for that change, despite all of the resistance that it's going to meet along the way. And there's going to be resistance.

An organization of any size has, I mean, for lack of a better term, an organization has organization to it. It's called an organization for a reason. Things are set up a certain way and challenging that setup is extremely trying. It takes stubbornness. It takes someone who's willing to stick with their understanding of the truth, despite all of the pushback that they're getting. Now, at this point, I want to go back to one of those core needs that I talked about at the beginning. Specifically, it's the one about being non-vulnerable. And—and I'm not using the word invulnerable just because that has some

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different connotations. But I bring up non-vulnerability here because it's related to the toughness I was just talking about. It takes a certain toughness to keep standing up for your principles in the face of social pressure.

And in this regard, non-vulnerability is—is really can be a tremendous asset. If I have a DC style, one of the things that allows me to go out on these limbs is my self-sufficiency, because if I'm dependent on people, well, I'm not as free to speak my mind. I have to fear the consequences more because I have to depend on other people and I—I need to stay in their good graces. But if I'm self-sufficient, well, I can afford to be less diplomatic. It's not the only attractive thing about self-sufficiency, but it's a very nice perk. So with the DC style, you can often see the 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, you know, sadness or—or hurt or emotional displays of affection or empathy. You know, for a lot of people with the DC 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. And it feels manipulative.

When—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 DC style definitely has an aversion to being controlled. And I think that sometimes listening to someone tell a sappy story can feel like that,

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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 out a little bit, but also, you know, that it's a tool for them to get attention.

It's an—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, 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 to 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.

Now, how do they represent that? They represent unabashed intimacy, you know, 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

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stuff, they're basically asking me to completely abandon my critical eye, my layer of protection. And 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 rea—the way 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—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

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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 DC 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. When we've done 360 research, you know, that is, we have people—managers, direct reports, peers—we have them rate various leaders—there are certain areas where DC leaders get really high marks, you know, like speaking up about problems or insisting that things be efficient. But one of the areas where they get lower marks than the average leader is on being approachable.

And I think, you know, for some less experienced leaders, they don't necessarily see that as a problem. In fact, I think there are some of them who actually take a little bit of secret pride in being intimidating, uh, you know, even if they wouldn't necessarily admit it. You know, the skeptical vibe, in a certain way, it—it earns respect for me. You know, when another person is confronted with my cynicism, you know, exuded in their direction, they're essentially feeling pushed to prove themselves.

And a lot of the time, the other person actually does respond by attempting to prove themselves, especially if they have a high need for approval. You know, it puts the ball in my court. It's a form of power, you know, I'm driving the relationship. I'm the arbiter. I'm the one defining reality. I define what's important and what's not. And, you know, of course, another reaction the other person might have, though, is to say, oh, to hell with

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it, and walk away. Either way, the other party is less likely to feel comfortable with me in the future. They may still follow me because they see me as strong, but they'll be keeping their distance.

Okay, but to be fair, I don't think most people with the DC style are intentionally trying to harness intimidation for their benefit. In fact, in my experience, the more mature leaders with this style, the more likely they are to recognize that, yeah, leadership isn't just about making decisions and coming up with strategy. There is a real human side to this. You know, I know it's important, even if it's not the most natural part of the role for me. Even if I wish I could just focus on the task at hand, I know I need to get people on board. I know that there's an emotional part to that. You know, that's part of the gig.

But even outside of the realm of leadership, if we step back from that, it—it's not uncommon that the skepticism of the DC 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 DC 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. 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 D C style. It says: I'm not easy to please, and because of that, many people will work harder to earn my acceptance.

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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, uh—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, 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 DC 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 DC 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 DC style finds it 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 I—what I wanted to get to here is the underlying emotion that you often see in these situations and what's going on there.

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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 are 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—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

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them. Now, I—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 two, 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. Okay, so what does this have to do with the DC style? Well, while this mental trap is one that all humans are susceptible, for the DC 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, right? it's not isolated to one DiSC® style. It's just that this particular mental trap can be especially tempting for the DC 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?

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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 are saying, you know, "yeah" or "huh" 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 a posture that says, you know, prove it to me, uh, 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—it feels neutral to me as the DC, all right—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 DC style can become very good at reading between the lines in an interaction and picking up on—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.

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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 a 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 and 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 a DC style, they're much more comfortable erring on the side of being overly critical.

All right, and so, before wrapping up, there—there is one final area that I want to touch on briefly, and that is conflict. And there's a lot to be said on this topic. We could probably go for a whole nother podcast on this topic, so we certainly won't get into everything. And actually, I just want to pull out those three needs from the beginning of this podcast and talk about how these needs would very understandably have an effect on sow—someone relates to conflict and how someone reacts in a conflict situation. So these needs were being in control, being non-vulnerable, and being competent.

And if you take these needs as a whole, someone with these needs, there's going to be a particularly strong voice in their head saying: I absolutely cannot be bested by someone else. If I admit defeat and weakness, that makes me vulnerable. If I acknowledge someone else has beat me, that puts them in a position of control. And if I let someone out-argue me, that reflects poorly on my competence. That's a lot of internal pressure to make absolutely certain that I don't lose. There's a lot more at stake than whatever issue that we're arguing about on the surface.

And one of the things that people with the DC 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

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finely honed critical thinking abilities. I come up with this airtight, perfectly logical case, run through the arguments in my head, playing out all of the different points and counterpoints 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 pre-existing beliefs. I feel more validated then 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 DC 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, um, 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

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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.

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, all right? And some of the times 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. All right. So that I can make decisions and choices in a deliberate fashion.

And if this 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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