The iS Style – An Everything DiSC® Podcast

Narrator: The following podcast by Dr. Mark Scullard describes the iS 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 iS style, which is a combination of influence and steadiness. And if you have an iS style, uh, you know, I think what you're going to find is that, you know, roughly, you know, 70, 80 percent of what we're going to talk about will probably fit for you. You know, some of it will be spot on, uh, there'll be some of it feels like, well, that's not really me or maybe even some, you know, that's like, well, that used to be me in the past when I was younger. But I think the real value here is more about listening for those insights that really help you make sense of your past experiences or that, um, really help you see your thought processes and your habits in a new light.

So, uh, we're going to look at all of these different characteristics that are associated with the iS style, things like being welcoming and trusting, being very easygoing and patient. And as we talk about these, one of the things that we're going to see is that there are kind of some—some of these underlying themes that really tie them together. Actually, you know, I would call them kind of core psychological needs. Like, for instance, some people have a really strong need to be in charge. Um, you know, some people have a really strong need to always be accurate or to demonstrate their competency. Some people have a really strong need to, you know, always avoid mistakes. For the iS style, it's a—it's a different set of needs, you know, and one of the major ones is, you know, a really strong need for connection.

And, you know, and of course, most human beings, they have a need for connection, but particularly for kind of the iS or Si styles, this need is particularly pronounced, you know. It's one of the core things that gives their lives a lot of meaning. And because it's

so valuable, threats to this sense of connection are going to feel particularly gut-wrenching, you know, or even scary. And, you know, when things feel scary, you know, it's going to affect our behavior. You know, we're going to do things to make sure that our connections aren't jeopardized. Then, you know, some of those things are healthy and then some of those things are less healthy.

And then a second related need is a need for acceptance, you know, and again, this is something that everyone needs, but I think it's particularly important for the Si or iS styles. And sometimes this takes the form of kind of an underlying assumption that, you know, my value, at least in part, it really comes from belonging to a community, you know, whatever that community is, even if this is a more unconscious belief, which it really does tend to be. And so, as a result, being accepted feels really important to me. And, you know, I'm going to go out of my way to make sure that my belonging isn't jeopardized in any way.

And then finally, there's this third need that I'll mention. And this one, I think is a little more—a little more sensitive in nature, I, you know, I think it it cuts a little deeper and it's one that, you know, even if someone has this need, you know, it's—it's not necessarily one that they're going to be shouting from the rooftops because, uh, you know, maybe they worry that it comes across as a little, um, you know, maybe even a little desperate, right. But in fact, I think when it comes to this need, really the opposite is true. I see it as very earnest and profound and a need that really cuts through a lot of the B.S. that we typically fill our lives up with. And so—so the need is, um, it's a need to really be wanted.

And I think a lot of times, you know, particularly in a very individualistic culture where we're told that, you know, you should be very self-reliant and our self-esteem should be so secure that we shouldn't need the validation of another person, you know, and that's a value judgment. And, you know, hey, maybe it's a great ideal, but the reality for most of us mere mortals is that our self-esteem is pretty much never 100 percent secure,

right? And, you know, that we all have this very core need to feel valuable in some way. And, you know, maybe I seek to earn my value through my achievements or maybe I seek to kind of cement my value by becoming an expert in something.

For the iS style, however, it's not uncommon, I think, for a large chunk of this very human need to have value, it—it's directed more towards being wanted by other people. And so when I feel secure in being wanted, you know, it's likely to be a good day. And when I'm insecure in being wanted, you know, when I'm interpreting signals that, you know, I'm not surrounded by this, it's oftentimes going to be more of a rough day.

Okay, so those are three themes that we'll see kind of come up again and again throughout this discussion, you know, even if they are more subtle: the need for connection, the need for acceptance and the need to be wanted. And one of the thing that all of these needs converge on is this very positive, very accepting outlook, you know. People with this style tend to have a very open posture towards life. They—you know, they take things as they come and they accept new circumstances. They have a—a kind of a much more fluid relationship with the world than the average person, you know, just trusting that letting people in or showing them true their true selves, that that's not going to be harmful, that, you know, that's not going to lead to hurt. You know, they're much more likely to allow themselves to be vulnerable.

Now, you know, I think in kind of maybe a less mature version of this style, there's kind of this almost naive, you know, even if it's pleasant, kind of a naive expectation sometimes that the world is such a good place that, you know, it'll just take care of my needs with really little stress on my part, you know. But again, I think that's kind of among maybe, you know, less mature people with this style and it's probably not going to be true for the majority of people with it. And one of the things that I think is really illuminating, though, is if you contrast this with the opposite side of the Everything DiSC® circle. You know, that's where we find people who are inherently more skeptical in nature, you know, and as a result of this skepticism, there's often more guardedness

there, you know, and there are good things and there are bad things about, you know, this more tough-minded mentality.

And on the positive side, they often have an easier time really being like, for instance, very firm with people compared to the iS style. You know, they'll—they'll dig their heels in in the face of adversity and just, you know, keep pushing and, you know, pushing back, uh. And, you know, because there's this expectation that life is really tough and, you know, life is going to require a fight, there's kind of this entrenched determination and resilience to just kind of stick with it, rather than that instinct to kind of more go with the flow. Now, on the other hand, there's kind of—you take a look at the—kind of the downside of this more guarded disposition, and I think a lot of these examples come—come in the more interpersonal world, right.

But let's say, for instance, in a situation where someone is experiencing rejection or someone's experiencing critical feedback from someone. Now, for most people, you know, regardless of where you fall in the DiSC® map, the reaction to rejection, you know, it's going to feel hurt. You know, you're going to feel insecure. For people who are more guarded, and again, I'm talking about people are who are on the opposite side of the DiSC map from the iS style—for those more guarded people, these feelings like, you know, things like hurt and insecurity, these emotions just feel way too vulnerable, they feel way too soft, you know, they leave me exposed in this tough world. And so my mind really doesn't let me experience them as directly.

Instead, I'm much more likely to kind of cover them up and feel anger or resentment or disgust, you know. These are more empowering emotions, you know. People don't see these emotions as weak. But what they do do is they kind of cover up the hurt. They, you know, they make it extremely difficult for a person to understand what their genuine reaction was to the situation. And as a result, their judgment in how to fix the problem is actually kind of clouded and oftentimes maladaptive. So, conversely, I think this is an area of strength from the iS style, you know, even though it might not necessarily

always feel like a strength, right. They're more likely to experience hurt as hurt rather than the covered up version, you know, more in touch with the insecurities that are actually being provoked in the situation.

And as a result, there's much more of an opportunity for them to be honest with themselves, you know, and—and that's a more healthy reaction. Now, there is kind of a downside to that. I think a less healthy temptation is to just kind of because, you know it's going to hurt, is to try to avoid the negative stuff to begin with. And so I'm in a situation, you know, and I sense, hey, there's a high potential for rejection or criticism, and if that happens, it's really going to hurt like hell, you know, and because I experience hurt so directly.

So my unhealthy reaction, which—it's unhealthy, but it makes a lot of sense—is to just keep away from all that negativity, to kind of gloss it over and, you know, to take myself out of a situation where there's really any potential for that raw hurt, because, again, I feel it more directly than the average person. My defense mechanisms aren't as primed to distort the information when it happens, kind of to—to twist it in a way that makes it more palatable for my ego, you know. Instead, my defense mechanism is to really just avoid the negative to begin with.

So let's take that and say, you know, look at it in a work context, um, you know, the iS style has this very positive, welcoming presence, but at the same time, the tasks that require more criticism or negativity, those are ones that kind of tend to come less naturally. For instance, let's say in a meeting when someone has a bad idea—we've all been in a meeting where someone had a bad idea—and rejecting that idea outright, for this style, it just feels so wrong because my instinct is to support and build up people, you know, and this tiny little act of rejection, it feels like a violation of a really core value that I hold. You know, I never want to be the person who, you know, crushes someone else's passions.

So, you know, so what I do, you know, well, maybe I hedge or maybe I redirect the conversation to talk about something positive I see in the idea. But, you know, really, when you step back, I mean, that is a pretty inefficient way to approach this situation. You know, if I find a roundabout way to kind of steer the group's direction away from a bad idea, I mean, that's just kind of muddy communication. That bad idea the other person had, that idea gets to linger on in the background and, you know, people are unclear about the status of the idea, you know, or, well, are we continuing in that direction? Is—are we considering that to be a good idea? Is that something we need to develop more or should we just forget about it? Because, you know, because I didn't want to be that direct.

And that's a real danger, you know. And I think a slightly different danger is: because I want other people to succeed so much, I really will hunt down the value in their idea or their work and focus on that— that good part, you know, because when someone says, "I have a great idea," I'm really, really hoping that that idea is as good as they say, you know, compared to other people who might be—maybe might be indifferent when someone says, "I have a great idea," or might even actually be very naturally skeptical when someone says they have a good idea. So when that other person's, you know, quote, great idea turns out to be problematic, I'm kind of faced with this kind of mini crisis. You know, I'm immediately put in a position that I hate being in where I have to choose between, on the one hand, letting this bad idea live on or potentially hurting someone's feelings.

And, you know, and part of that stress that I'm doing is figuring out in my head the kind of the dance that I'm going to have to do to achieve both of those things, you know, and it really does—it feels like walking a tightrope. It's—it's very tense. In fact, we have kind of a—a 360 assessment tool where leaders get feedback from their managers, their direct reports and their peers, and the area where people with the Si and iS styles where they get the lowest ratings is about speaking up about problems, telling people

when some sort of course correction is needed, you know, when there's a problem with their work, you know.

Actually and just by the way, as an aside, you know, leaders with the Si and iS styles—they do, as leaders, kind of tend to get the highest overall ratings, right? So that is great, you know, and we're going to look at some of those areas in a minute where they get really high marks. But, you know, all of the styles really do have their challenges. And so out of, you know, 24 different leadership behaviors, the one that they were the lowest on was speaking up about problems. And I think, you know, even though part of it is actually about saying something about problems, I think there is also another part of this which is really about seeing the problem in the first place or perhaps even kind of recognizing the intensity of the problem.

I think particularly younger people with this style can sometimes be perceived as maybe even, you know, a little naive or as a little green because, you know, because of their ideals and their more kind of chipper attitudes and their inclination to kind of see the best in everyone. When someone has a drastically different opinion than they do, you know, this—people with this style, they're usually open to saying, well, hey, you know, I mean, maybe maybe it's actually me. Maybe I'm the one who's mistaken, you know, maybe I should be the one who reconsiders my opinion. In fact, the—the portion of the Everything DiSC® map that's on the exact opposite side of this style, um, that's the portion of the map that's identified as being very stubborn and strong-willed, that's the exact opposite of the style we're talking about here.

And, you know, and so being accepting, you know, it does open a person up a little bit to being manipulated or—or taken advantage of. And part of this is about a choice in values. Really, would what I rather err on the side of trusting someone who I shouldn't or would I rather err on the side of doubting someone that I should trust, you know. And by and large, people with the iS style would rather make the mistake of being taken in to easily than to assume the worst about people. Whereas for other people, you know,

because of their pride, the choice is clear for them, you know: under no circumstances do I ever want to look foolish. You know, I'd much rather be seen as cold and uncaring than ever be seen as a sucker.

And so related to this, you know, the iS style, they tend to be very patient with people and actually, you know, even—sometimes even more patient with people than they should be, giving people too many chances or, you know, they learn to live with delays and obstacles without showing too much frustration. So as a leader, for instance, you know, this can earn them very high marks for being receptive and being open to input and being supportive of other people. But it also tends to earn them lower marks for creating momentum and for getting results, you know.

And—and again, recall those core needs that we were talking about at the beginning. The priority is put on kind of acceptance, connectedness, and being wanted, all right. These priorities are much more about people than they are about getting results. In fact, oftentimes when there is a strong focus on results within this style, it's because they don't want to disappoint or anger other people. The focus is still very much on relationships, you know. It's not that nagging sense of internal pressure some people feel to kind of just produce results because my value is based on what I produce, you know.

In kind of a task-oriented business world, the iS style is the one that can help bring perspective, you know. They're able to stop and say, hey, listen, you know, we're not necessarily curing cancer here. No children are going to die if this doesn't happen on time, you know. No one ever died wishing they spent more time at the office, you know. They recognize that life is about more than kind of just meeting deadlines and making profits, you know. Life's about family and friends and giving back to other people. And so in some respects, this can create a very psychologically healthy climate that helps people balance personal and professional obligations.

But, you know, there is—there is a cost, right? And it's, I think, easy for people with this type of mindset to fall into a more comfortable place. The idea of balance can very easily kind of come to equal leisure. And so, you know, if I'm a leader or a manager with this style, when someone makes an excuse, I'm less likely to experience it as a, you know, as a, quote, "an excuse". You know, I'm—I'm quick to see their perspective. I'm quick to recognize that there often are special circumstances in life, you know, and I also—I instinctively understand that, you know, the things I care about, they're not necessarily going to be the things that the other person cares about. You know, I see the validity in their excuses, whereas other people might just look at the bottom line. In most situations, however, there really are an unlimited number of quote unquote "valid excuses" that could be found and justified. You know, someone can always find a reason for why they were late or why their work was sloppy.

You know, if people don't have a mentality that some sacrifices will need to be made and really that some discomfort will have to be endured to get things done, there's always going to be a reason that things kind of had to move slower. And, you know, for my part, as a leader, it's really tough even asking people to make sacrifices, let alone expecting them to make sacrifices. You know, I want them to be comfortable and satisfied. I want them to be happy. You know, it reflects this really fundamental drive to understand other people's experiences and needs. It's this unspoken assumption that this is what's important in life, not results, you know, not status, not even necessarily accuracy, but connecting to other people, to helping people.

But as a leader, you know, I must also communicate that sacrifices—they are something that needs to be expected at times. And, you know, this is one of the reasons that in the 360 results that I mentioned earlier, that the area where iS style leaders get rated the second lowest is setting high expectations, you know. Pushing people—that— that feels kind of icky. You know, forgiveness, on the other hand, that that feels natural. And—and typically in this style, people are really quick to forgive, you know, for a couple of reasons. One, because they trust other people's intentions are generally, you

know, fundamentally good. But two, because they're also—they're very anxious to repair their relationship and, you know, rebuild the relationship and restore harmony. You know, I want to look past people's surface flaws and see the real goodness inside. So I put people's behavior in the best possible light and give the most positive possible interpretation of someone's behavior.

Now, at this point, I do, you know, I want to pull back a little bit and introduce this idea of driving assumptions, and these are unspoken belief system that that really each of us has. You know, they're beliefs that are usually well outside of our awareness but they're assumptions that we have about how the world works. And, you know, it's because they're assumptions and because they're unconscious, we don't usually question them, you know, we just kind of assume that they're true.

So, for instance, the iS style, you know, one of the assumptions might be: it is awful to have someone upset with me. And I call it a driving assumption because this little belief, you know, that we probably came up with it when we were three or four years old, it drives a huge amount of our behavior. And these assumptions drive a huge amount of how we interpret the events in our life. So for the rest of this talk, I want to discuss some of these assumptions. And if you have an iS style, you might find yourself torn. You might find yourself saying, on the one hand, you know, well, that's kind of just—that assumption is just kind of plain stupid, right? I'd be pretty embarrassed to admit I believed something like that.

At the same time, though, there might also be some part of you, maybe a small part, that that actually does believe it. You know, you don't necessarily want to really admit it, but you kind of know it's there, you know. But I think the thing you should know, though, is that this is true for everyone, you know. We all have these unspoken beliefs about the world that, on the surface, they look ridiculous, and, you know, they're even embarrassing at times, you know, but, you know, if you examine them in the light of day, it's like, oh, my gosh, this is how a child sees the world. This isn't how an adult thinks.

But to the degree that these assumptions really are legitimately there and they're going on in the background and we continue to kind of go on not owning them or refusing to acknowledge them, they have that much more power to kind of shape our lives and to guide us towards decisions that aren't necessarily always in our best interest.

All right, so, here's another driving assumption, and if you have this style, you know, give it a try, try it on. Ask yourself if there is some part of you, you know, even if it is a small part of you that—that kind of believes this, or some close cousin of this. So here it is: I should never be the source of someone else's unhappiness. It's a very simple statement, but it can also have a really powerful influence on our behavior. And the statement can take, you know, it can take a lot of different forms, like, um: I should never burden other people. Or: nobody should ever think I'm selfish. If someone is displeased with me, I've done something wrong, you know. But the basic theme here is really not making other people unhappy, not troubling them.

Okay, so, think about all the ways that this assumption would affect someone's behavior if—if they really, really had incorporated it into their worldview. So, one implication is something that we just talked about, you know: not burdening anyone or, um, you know, keeping things inside, internalizing them, not asking for favors, not asking for help, you know, being willing to take on this, you know, immense workload by ourselves and dealing with the frustration internally rather than potentially upsetting a relationship. Or—or not telling people that we're unhappy with them and even to some degree kind of putting the blame on ourselves, you know, worrying about situations where we might have offended someone.

And so if you have this style, you probably have a strong instinct to protect other people's feelings. And in fact, it—it really may not even occur to you how much energy is being consumed in the background trying to understand and cater to other people. You may not, you know, realize just how much more efficient it really would be to just tell people what you're thinking without filtering it to adjust for their emotional response.

Oftentimes with this style, when they're talking to someone, you know, they're running through a variety of different ways to phrase things, kind of to be least offensive. But on the other hand, kind of the downside of this is kind of—it can make them appear a little bit hesitant or even unassertive when they're talking. And in the head of this style, there's—there can almost be this kind of unconscious assumption that they should be living up to the other person's expectations.

So if, for example, um, the other person is showing impatience in the conversation, you know, I see that. And now I work extra hard to kind of speed things up or to get them the information they want really quickly. You know, basically, I feel this internal pressure to attend to the other person's expectations of how the conversation should go. And so if you take this a step further, the idea of being outright aggressive is usually pretty hard for someone with this style. You know, after years and years of informal training, the brain is telling them that aggressiveness—that's the behavior of a bad person. You know, it violates this core principle of do no harm. And so even showing forcefulness in—in smaller ways is often avoided.

And so if you work with a lot of strong personalities and you also—you find it really exhausting to use force, your needs and your ideas are unfortunately going to get dismissed a lot. And most people with the iS style actually do recognize this. And in fact, you know, they really can be very self-conscious about being seen as timid. On the other hand, you know, mustering up the energy and the force necessary to get their say really can be exhausting, especially in the long run. Generally speaking, though, they just, you know, they really don't want to be in an environment where they constantly have to fight, they constantly have to push.

Now, I do want to pull back again to the big picture here, um, because, again, all of these tendencies I've been talking about, they really can be traced back to this driving assumption that I should never be the source of someone else's unhappiness. And so if you have this style and you really have internalized this belief, it—it actually does, all

this stuff really, really makes sense is that, you know, you wouldn't want to be aggressive and that you would want to please people in a conversation and that you wouldn't want to impose on anyone, and even that, you know, I'm going to be very slow to kind of push back against someone. And in this light, all of these habits, they really make perfect sense.

And I think there's also another important driving assumption, one that's very much related to this, which people with this style sometimes find rattling around in the back of their heads, and, again, it's, you know, it's not true for everyone, but it is worth considering. So, it's this: I can show my value by helping people. And one of the really key words in this sentence is value. You know, it doesn't really feel like a key word, but it actually is crucial. You know, one of the core needs that every human being shares, no matter who you are, is this need to feel like we're valuable, you know, that we have worth. We all have this need in common. But on the other hand, we can have very different ideas about what gives a person value. You know, sometimes we think it's about our accomplishments, sometimes about getting attention or being connected with another person or about being competent.

You know, again, these can be very, very unconscious assumptions and, you know, not necessarily the kind of things that we're always proud to admit. You know, everybody has them. And so for this style, one of those assumptions is about my value being shown when I help people. Or another way to phrase this is: I'm valuable because I make other people happy. And so to the degree that someone does have this assumption going on in the back of their heads, they're going to be very accommodating. You know, they're going to adjust to other people's needs and perhaps minimize their own needs. They're going to let other people know that they're always there to help, that, you know, they're going to have difficulty saying no, because a good person in this framework, a good person helps others. It's just part of what makes me a decent human being.

And like I said earlier, we really all do derive our sense of value from somewhere. And again, I think in an ideal world, we all accept that, you know, we're just inherently valuable and we don't have to earn that. But that sort of belief system, you know, really internalizing that, you know, as wonderful as it might be, that really only comes with some maturity, um, and oftentimes kind of some serious maturity. And I think our our default setting is more to kind of try to earn our value somehow, you know, and, you know, sometimes I try to do it through my achievements, sometimes through my talents, and oftentimes, in, you know, in the case of the iS style, through my relationships, you know, at least in part.

And I think this directly ties back to that core need to be wanted. And one of the more kind of subtle strategies that our subconscious can use in this context is getting people to need me, because certainly if they need me, well, they're definitely going to want me, you know. And so there really are—there's a lot of different ways to make people need me if I'm useful to them. Right. I'm needed, you know, if I'm the source of comfort and support, that's needed. Or if I can be the life of the party, right, you know, people like that. Whatever the strategy, getting people to need me is a—a very concrete, actionable way to get them to want me, you know, wanting me to stick around, wanting to include me.

And I think this is one of the reasons why the, you know, the prospect of exclusion feels particularly painful for the iS style, you know, and of course, not that many of us really want to be excluded, but I think this can be particularly difficult if I've got the iS style. You know, I remember talking to a woman with this style who, you know, very reluctantly acknowledged that when she gets a group email, for instance, you know, she pays attention to where she is on the list of names, right, that people wrote: did they think of me first or was I an afterthought? And she was, you know, legitimately, you know, embarrassed to admit it, uh, but she was also mature enough to be honest with herself about why she did that. And it was, you know, kind of a question for her of: how wanted am I?

I think another place where you can see the implication of this is in the area of expression, which is certainly really important to the iS style, you know. It—it feels good to express myself, but it feels particularly good to know someone else is really listening, you know, really registering my thoughts and feelings that, you know, I'm really being heard, that this—this other person genuinely cares about my inner experience, you know. And that's—that's incredibly validating, you know, and why wouldn't it be, you know, when—when I have a core need met, that feels good.

And so if relationships are such an important source of my ups and downs, I'm going to put a lot of energy into this area, you know, perhaps spend a lot of energy trying to read other people's thoughts, kind of reading social cues, not only, you know, what did this person do, but what didn't they do? You know, did they not say hi the way they normally do? Did they laugh at this other person's lame joke, but not mine? You know, I remember a—as a little bit of an aside here—I remember an episode of This American Life, which is a radio show and a podcast, and they had a very—had a very extreme but also, you know, very concrete version of this.

Um, you know, it was with teenage girls, so, you know it's going to be extreme, right. But it was an interview with these high school freshmen. And the girls are describing in it the process of, you know, posting things on social media, you know, Facebook, Instagram, probably a whole list of things that I have no idea that even exist. But they described how they'd post something, you know, something even casual and light, and then they'd sit and they'd wait for the response that they got. You know, did they get just likes or did people take the time to comment? And who were the people that commented and how quickly did they respond and who didn't respond? You know, are they mad at me, you know?

And this whole thing was, you know, energy consuming enough as it was. But then they also had the flipside, which is they had to also constantly be on their phone so that they could respond to other people's posts. You know, seriously, it really—it sounded like a

full time job. You know, it sounded completely exhausting, you know. And again, this is a this is a very extreme example, but I think virtually all people do some informal version of this from time to time in their heads, you know, tracking our social standing, you know, where do we stand with other people?

It—it's just that if relationships are particularly important to me, I might be that much more inclined to do this sort of tracking, you know, and—and that does take energy. Stress in particular is a big energy drain. So to the degree that, you know, for instance, I worry about letting other people down or not meeting their needs or expectations, that processing power, you know, it does consume a lot of me. You know, I also think— kicking this up a notch—that it's not uncommon for people with the iS style to be very quick to absorb blame. And—and what I mean by this is if, you know, if someone else is angry or upset around me, my brain immediately goes into scanning mode, sorting through all of the different things that I could have done to possibly upset that person, you know, whereas in reality, the vast majority of the time, it really does have nothing to do with me.

You know, the person, you know, they're just in a bad mood or something else happened or really oftentimes they're not even really just upset at all, I'm just reading that into them. But, you know, there is this real attentiveness to other people's internal states, you know, and a real willingness to listen, you know, a willingness to really put in whatever amount of time that it takes helping the other person feel like they're important and that their concerns matter. You know, the idea of cutting someone off, it just doesn't feel like an option. You know, you're not allowed to do that. So there's a lot more time spent listening than speaking. In fact, a lot of times people with a style just kind of assume that others don't maybe have as much interest in hearing about their experiences or their ideas, you know, worry that they might be boring people.

And so as a consequence, they can be kind of hesitant or tentative when speaking, you know, always testing out the waters to make sure the other person is really still

interested, which, uh, which actually that behavior may in turn actually cause the person to be less interested because the other person actually isn't picking up on the passion for what's being said and, you know, and that inherently just isn't as engaging. But the listening, right, that is something that people really, really appreciate, you know, although sometimes it really does take them a while to realize just how much they appreciate. You know, it can be subtle. Being a good listener, almost by definition, that doesn't draw attention to itself. But it really is so needed. I mean, really, how often do you have someone else who is, like, truly listening and, you know, truly showing this kind of intense interest in your world? And that feels good. You know, it's validating.

And for the listener, the person with the iS style, I mean, there generally is an interest in the other person's life, but they're also sometimes is kind of, I think, a secondary motivation and some of it kind of ties back to this assumption that I can show my value by helping people. And listening, really, that earns appreciation, sometimes even affection. And so sometimes early on in life, people with this style realize that, hey, you know, this is actually a pretty effective strategy for connecting with people, for—for fitting in. You know, I ask questions. I listen, I show interest. This is a really reliable tool in a social setting. And so over a lifetime, people with this style, they really hone this listening skill.

And even bigger than that, they hone this kind of natural attentiveness to other people's needs and they—they learn to pick up on the happiness cues or the sadness cues at the anger cues. And this can really be a tremendous asset that they don't even realize that they have. And because there is naturally a higher willingness to be vulnerable in this style, they do also tend to be kind of more comfortable empathizing with people expressing compassion in an un-selfconscious way. Whereas, for other people, this kind of stuff, you know, it just feels a little too intimate, you know, maybe a little too touchy feely, you know, especially in a professional environment. But with the iS style, there's such a—a comfortable, approachable quality to this style that this type of connection, it feels natural and just unforced. It's—it's sincere, you know. Even if they're

not naturally interested in a topic, people with the style, they'll often find their interest in that area because it's a way to connect with another person and another human being and a way to enter into their world.

And when I pay attention at this level, I really start to understand what's important to them. And now I'm in a position to give encouragement and praise that—it's especially powerful to them because I know what they care about. You know, to a lot of people listening at this level, that feels like a waste of time, you know, they get impatient, but to the iS style, why wouldn't I choose to spend my time like this, you know? If one of my core values is connecting with people, then, yeah, you know, of course, I'm going to choose to invest my time like this.

In fact, with that 360 data I was talking about earlier, the Si and the iS styles, one of the areas where they got their highest ratings, was in being approachable, you know, higher ratings than any other style. Leaders with this style are just really good at maintaining solid, informal relationships with everyone, you know. It—it feels like a personal relationship because it is one of their strongest gifts as a leader is to create that sense of cohesion. People feel personally connected to the leader and, you know, even personally connected to each other and members of the team. And as a result, it—it's much more likely that the group perceives themselves as a team rather than just a group of individuals working together towards the same goal. Cohesion, familiarity, trust. These are a huge asset when it comes to a team.

And by now, though, you know, it's probably obvious how this strength can also be a limitation, right? Um, you know, confrontation—that tends to be pretty difficult for people with this style, for basically for people in this region of the Everything DiSC® map, precisely because relationships and cohesion are so important to them. So if there's a problem, the indirect path to to tackling it is much more tempting for these people, you know, maybe continuing to explore a situation when there's indecision or disagreement, you know, seeking consensus rather than just making a call. You know, even if I have a

clear opinion as to who's in the wrong, you know, there's less of a mentality that I'm going to forge forward with my own opinion and cut through all of this B.S. that other people have created.

The iS style really doesn't like doing this. And in this regard, the conventions and the structures and the systems that other people create in an organization, they can actually kind of be attractive in a—in an unusual way. You know, these things are already established. The rules are there. And I can point to them as kind of an objective source of authority when there's a problem. You know, I don't have to get heavy-handed. You know, even if I'm not a highly structured person myself, the rules and the structure around me can be nice and I can rely on them because they do provide a sense of alignment, which can also kind of mean harmony, and it also means I don't have to impose that on other people, I can just point to the rules and use that rather than having to kind of push myself on others.

Now, the danger in this, particularly from a leadership perspective, is when change really is needed, you know, when there's unproductive systems or processes or ways of doing things that, you know, can linger on far beyond their usefulness because other people are really attached to them, you know. And even though I might address, you know, this really egregious issue or problem, the real danger, uh, are these kind of poor systems that are just kind of barely acceptable, you know, and I'm slow to kind of push for them to change, not because I don't like change, but because I'm really not crazy about the tension and the resistance that comes along with the change, you know. I don't want to be the cause of anyone's hurt or really even discomfort.

And so to the degree that this is true, you know, it doesn't necessarily mean out and out bad choices, but what it does is it increases the chances of kind of sub-optimal, less efficient choices and actions, you know, particularly when it comes to addressing these really kind of entrenched, politically charged problems. Now, conflict, you know, out and out conflict, that's even less comfortable, you know. Basically, conflict, that's the exact

opposite of harmony and connection. So it kind of makes perfect sense that even the vague potential for conflict can really be stressful. And, you know, the iS style will not only avoid the things that cause conflict, but they're also going to avoid the things that cause the things that cause conflict, like, for instance, uh, you know, generally avoiding argumentative people, you know.

And so when they find themselves being forced to work with a really aggressive person, they may be inclined to cave in in the moment, but then they'll kind of go out of their way to avoid working with that person in the future. Because really, I mean, you know, frankly, having to argue for every point that you need to make or to get your perspective across is, you know, that's exhausting. And I think it's particularly exhausting for this style. And because conflict can be so uncomfortable for this style, they oftentimes find themselves in group situations playing the peacemaker role, really trying to make everyone happy or to find compromises and oftentimes putting aside their own needs and so they can just really focus on getting harmony restored, which in respect—in some respects, you know, that is their need, right. So they're putting some of their more surface needs across because their need really is to have kind of the harmony in the group.

And it's interesting because in many instances, this need for harmony even extends to kind of the ideas that are being discussed in a group, right. You know, let's—let's take, for instance, in a meeting, you know, there's this really strong drive to make ideas work, you know, especially if it's someone else's idea. That emotional reward for making an idea work is that it reduces the tension in that group, you know. There's the tension of not knowing, right? You know, trying to figure out something that you don't know. There's, you know, there's also kind of the tension of having to push to come up with an idea, that—that mental struggle, kind of that creative tension.

Uh, and there's also the kind of the tension of having to disagree with someone or having to shoot down their idea. And so people with this style, they usually come across

as very agreeable when someone else pitches an idea, you know. What they might not realize in the moment, though, is that actually some people are actually even more likely to respect the opinion of another person who is known to be challenging or skeptical. And, you know, on the other hand, someone who's seen as always being agreeable, they can appear, for right or wrong, they can appear to be less discerning or to be less of a critical thinker, regardless of how sharp the person actually is.

But, actually, back to conflict. The initial instinct for this style, then, is to really smooth things over. But when things really do get heated, one of the tendencies is to just shut down and kind of silently wait for the tension to pass. And on the surface, it usually looks like this style is like really calm and they're not too bothered by it. But underneath, there really can be a whole lot of stress going on, you know, knowing that someone is mad at me or really has, even—just has the potential of being mad at me, that's going to eat away at me, you know. It's that lack of acceptance, you know, a lack of connection, and really a lack of being wanted. In fact, in general, the iS style has this real tendency to internalize their stress, to—to put a lot of pressure on themselves mentally to figure things out, not to—not to burden other people with the weight of their problems.

And actually, one of the things that you do sometimes see are these kind of alternating or opposing strategies within this style of, you know, ruminating on the one hand, uh, and on the other hand, really kind of just glossing over things in their minds, you know, putting things out of mind or pretending everything is just fine, um, you know, maybe even—maybe even just kind of bordering on denial in some cases. But both approaches, both of these approaches that I've talked about, they can be adaptive and helpful at times, but they can also really have their downsides, you know, obviously.

Ruminating, you know, things like, um, fretting over problems or playing them over and over in your head, right—in essence, this is this strategy to kind of reduce tension or to get harmony by replaying an incident in my head, hoping that, you know, this time when I replay it, I'm going to get some resolution, I'm going to get some closure, I'm going to

figure something out. But of course, and the research backs this up, that—I rarely actually do get that sense of closure by ruminating, you know. I just actually stress myself out. And you can kind of show this in a laboratory setting as well. Now, if you do have this style as you've gotten older and, you know, hopefully more mature, maybe more mature, you may have developed, you know, more comfort with other strategies for dealing with conflict, you know, maybe, um—maybe more direct strategies.

But that instinct for harmony really is kind of always pulling us back from the fray a little bit, telling us to just, you know, nagging us to just kind of end this thing as quickly as possible with as little bloodshed as possible. And so, you know, there's always a little bit of that temptation to kind of just withdraw or cave in just so we can have the peace again. But on the positive side, you know, particularly as this style matures, there's often this openness and sincerity in conflict, you know, and—and I mean, after the initial blow up has happened, you know. When things are really heated, you know, we can all act in some pretty unpredictable ways. But after that initial intensity of the emotion has passed, this style is often really kind of almost quicker to kind of return to that sincere, open posture in—for discussing an issue, which can really feel foreign to some other people who might still be very guarded or cynical in those moments, you know, still defending their turf or their position.

On the other hand, though, you know, I don't want to minimize the sense of hurt that often comes in the midst of these situations, the sense that, you know, if you were willing to put me through this inner turmoil, you know, how much could you really care about me? You know, how could you do this to me? Because, again, the experience of conflict from, you know, for this style is often very raw. And it kind of shakes his core needs, you know, for—for acceptance, for connection, to be wanted. And so, unlike some other people who can compartmentalize a fight, you know, this is an ordeal. And even if it's not a rational thought, I can sometimes feel like, you know, I really feel like the mere act of fighting with me is a sign that, you know, you must not really care about my feelings, not even to mention the things that cause the fight in the first place.

Because the connection is so important to me and because I've made myself so vulnerable and trusted you to handle my feelings with care, it sometimes can feel like a little bit of a betrayal.

Okay, but even having said that, getting back to what I was mentioning earlier, when the other person does extend an olive branch, you know, and—and makes it clear that they don't want to be in tension anymore, you know, people with this style, they're—they're usually very quick to jump on board, you know, maybe even forgive some people that—that they shouldn't forgive, again, because of these core needs connection, being wanted, acceptance. And so, you know, well, one option is, you know, I could hold on to my anger or resentment or, you know, I could immediately have all of these core needs met, you know. Hmm. Yeah, I think I'll take the second one, right. And in that sense, you know, reconciliation, that's—it's particularly tempting.

And so this is one of the reasons why the iS style can be so good at focusing on the win-win in a conflict situation, really showing a willingness to give up some of their position, and also showing a willingness to—to shift perspectives and see things from another person's point of view. And that is so, so difficult to do when you're really mad at someone, you know. If I'm mad at you, it feels like I shouldn't have to take your perspective because you're just wrong, you know, and—or we're tempted to create a straw man argument, you know, a really weak description of the other person's side.

But to genuinely swallow my pride and empathize with how someone else might be thinking, that's—that's extremely difficult to do in the midst of a fight. And I—I'm not saying that the iS style can always do this, but they're often quicker to do it than the other styles. And when it comes to hashing things out, you know, taking the first turn at listening and sitting while the other person says all these things that, to me, feel misleading or a distortion of what really happened—you know, that takes a lot of discipline and this style tends to be really good at it.

So that's a bit about interpersonal conflict. You know, the good and the bad things. There's a related to area that I wanted to get into briefly, which is about the reaction that this style can sometimes have to resistance. At the very beginning of the podcast, we talked about one of the defining characteristics of this style is positivity, acceptance. And within the Everything DiSC® model, you know, that circular model, there's often a— a classic distinction that's made between people who fall on the left side of the circle and people who fall on the right, right, the right side being the Si and iS styles. So, on the right side, people over here, they're naturally inclined to see the world as a much friendlier place. It's a place where people are, you know, generally good. They generally can be trusted to do the right thing.

Compare that to the other side of the circle where people are inherently more skeptical, you know, are much more likely to assume that life's going to be tough and you got to be tough to get through it. If you have this mentality and you run across a messy problem, well, you're not surprised. You know, you expect things to be difficult, you know. This is one of the reasons that the left side of the circle is so associated with being kind of very determined and very strong willed. But on the other hand, you know, if I expect that the world is a very kind of friendly, enjoyable place, when I run across that kind of same messy problem, well, you know, what's going on in my brain?

Well, one of the potential reactions is, you know, part of my brain is just saying, hey, you know, this isn't supposed—this isn't how my day is supposed to be going. There's got to be something more pleasant I could be doing, you know, there's got to be a smoother path, you know, this is this is the opposite of harmony. And so perhaps even unconsciously, you know, I might steer myself away from those kind of more stubborn, complicated tasks and more towards the ones that—that come naturally to me. Now, you know, there's a related psychological principle here called cognitive ease. Basically it says that people, and this is pretty much all of us, no matter who you are, that people will generally take the path that requires the least cognitive effort.

So, for instance, we're much more willing to pay attention to information if it confirms what we already believe compared to contradicting information, because it's easier to kind of go on having the same opinion than it is to challenge that opinion. Our brain really does this thing where it just automatically does that. The brain wants to conserve energy, right. And again, we all do this. And all I'm suggesting here is that there can kind of be this heightened tendency to take the path of least resistance within this iS style, you know, precisely because there is more of a positive expectation about the world and a positive expectation about what life should be like. So what might be an implication of this?

Well, one good example I think is really is in-depth analysis, which isn't necessarily always kind of the favorite pastime of this style, um, you know, particularly those analytical tasks that require someone to really kind of continue to push and push to understand something when the insight is coming very, very slowly or when things feel really confusing at those initial stages. And the only way for me to really gain mastery over this topic is to just keep doing this kind of thankless work, you know, the drudgery and the—the frustration. And, you know, and again, my brain is telling me over and over again, you know, hey, hey, listen, you know, who's in charge? Isn't there's something more pleasant we could be doing with our time? I mean, you know, come on, this thing clearly doesn't even want to be understood.

Or that little voice that says, you know, if things don't feel harmonious, something is wrong, you know. Here's a time when the path of least resistance is really tempting for the iS style, you know, just kind of to walk away and to find something more comfortable to do, something that's going to come much more naturally. In fact, uh, you know, when I look at the kind of people who are often most committed to sticking with these unpleasant analytical tasks, it's often the people whose self-esteem is—is very much tied to their sense of mastery of the world or to their sense of expertise. And, you know, from that mindset, it's a necessity to master this topic. And the eventual reward of

understanding it makes the pain of going through it all worthwhile, and, you know, and they become experts. And that's really nice to have in their back pockets.

And so, you know, there's that inclination to stick with it until everything clicks like that. But on the other hand, there—there can also be that temptation to say, well, this is just good enough, right, you know, and just to find the shortcut, that will decrease the pain and means I can stop doing this—this—this painful task. And if you have this iS style or Si style, you know, and, to the degree that my brain is begging for harmony and positivity, you know, that good enough path, that path of least resistance, that might be tempting enough that it's the path that I take. Basically what I'm describing here is acquiring skills or knowledge on those occasions when they feel, you know, really, really complicated or inaccessible or just, you know, impenetrable.

For instance, for me personally, um, it's about understanding how my computer works, you know, much beyond the superficial stuff, right. That just doesn't come naturally to me, you know. So how much time do I really want to spend figuring it out, you know, is the question. And—and if I have this more go with the flow mindset, maybe it's not a whole bunch of time that I'm going to spend doing this. And—and that has the potential to impact a variety of other choices in my life. Basically, those times when I'm faced with a choice between one thing that's more harmonious and then one thing that's less harmonious, you know, particularly in the short term.

For instance, I can think of many times in my own life when, you know, I've just—I've lived with a problem for quite a while because at any given point in the moment, you know, the prospect of tackling it was just really unharmonious, you know? And in hindsight, I was—what I was doing is I was just kind of enabling this really drawn out period of discomfort so I wouldn't have to endure kind of a sharp, immediate pang of discomfort. So, you know, maybe it was things like giving someone feedback that I really need to give them, but I kept putting it off. Or maybe it was, you know, disciplining someone or, um, bringing up a problem on my team. That's going to disrupt the

connectedness that's so important to me. And, you know, connected to that is that this voice just below the surface of me that's saying, you know, I should never be the source of someone else's unhappiness.

So, now I do want to kind of be clear about a few things as I'm wrapping up here, you know. This description, it—it certainly isn't true of everyone with this style. Uh, you know, I really am just describing broad trends. And so if you have this style, it may not describe you. But I think it is worth taking some time to kind of reflect on your patterns and wonder, you know, is there something to this for me? And then a—a second point I want to reiterate is that there is very much a positive side to this, you know. Even if I do have this tendency to go with the path of least resistance, this is a big part of what allows me to be flexible, to—to bend, you know, to be open to another person's point of view. Like pretty much all psychological traits, there are both kind of strengths and challenges that come with it.

All right. So, really, you know, there's a lot of information here, a lot of different dimensions that we talked about. And so, you know, how do you make sense of all of it or rather, how do you put it to use? Well, I'll just make one broad suggestion, and it's about these driving assumptions. I think a practice that's really powerful in terms of our growth as people is to simply monitor not only our behavior but also our thoughts, and start to notice when these assumptions are being played out in the background. And so let me just kind of give you a reminder of what the assumptions were that we talked about, maybe add a few new ones, um. There are certainly going to be some of these that don't fit for you, you know. The question is more about if there are any of them that—that—that do fit, or maybe there's kind of a close cousin of one of these that fits.

Okay, so here are some of them: It is awful to have someone upset with me. I can show my value by helping people. When I see others in need, I must help them. I am responsible for other people's happiness. I must be accepted. It is intolerable to have someone mad at me. And maybe you don't see yourself thinking any of these, you

know, but maybe it's a close cousin of one of them. You know, again, this whole exercise is about becoming more aware of when these assumptions are driving our behavior or our thoughts or our emotions. And sometimes these assumptions are realistic. But, you know, sometimes they're not.

Really, though, the first step is about becoming more consciously aware of them so that I can make my decisions and my choices in a—in a deliberate fashion. And if an assumption is realistic, then, you know, that's great. I run with it. But they—if the assumption's not realistic, then what I do is I learn to challenge it and replace it with a statement that's more accurate, that's more fitting for the circumstances. And absolutely this—this takes a lot of time and deliberate effort. But ultimately, what I end up with is 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.

Narrator: This podcast is a copyrighted production of John Wiley and Sons.