

The C Style – An Everything DiSC® Podcast

Narrator: The following podcast by Dr. Mark Scullard describes the C 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 C style, Conscientiousness. And if you have a C style, I think what you'll find is that, you know, roughly 70, 80 percent of what we're going to talk about will fit you. Some of it will be spot-on. There will be a, you know, a little bit that feels like, yeah, that's not really me. Maybe some that, you know, that was 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 C style, things like being reserved and methodical and precise. And there's one underlying theme that really ties them together, one basic instinct that's core to this style, a central theme. And here it is: that people with the C style have this very strong instinct to analyze. And by analyze, I mean an instinct to really step back and think. Step back, remove themselves from the situation, get some distance, then break it down rationally, really try to understand it in an objective, logical way. And we have a word for that tendency, and that is analytical. But what drives this tendency to step back and think? Why is someone with the C style so much more inclined to do this compared to the average person?

Well, I think there are a couple of very core needs that drive this tendency. First, there's this strong need for safety and security—to have things in their life be stable. Reduce the unknowns as much as possible. Identify and limit dangers and threats. It's a strong need to have a comfort zone around me where I can feel like I understand all of the

rules. I can see all the disruptions coming with a lot of advanced warning. Basically a strong need for safety and security in my world.

And then there's this second core need, which I think is a little less expected. It's a strong need to be beyond reproach. And what I mean by beyond reproach here is that someone's actions are so justifiable that they can't be criticized. The need is to make absolutely sure that they're not to blame when things go wrong. And, of course, you know, no one wants to be blamed, but it's particularly strong for the C style. The idea that they might be the ones responsible for a screw-up or for things falling apart—it's particularly crushing for people who fall in this region of the DiSC® map. And because of that, they'll spend a lot of time and a lot of energy ensuring that they don't ever find themselves in that position.

All right, so if you take both of these needs together, security and being beyond reproach, you have a third need that emerges and that's this need to control. Not to control other people, but to control the factors that will influence their own fate. They don't really trust their fate to other people or to chance. They want control over it. And so they're willing to develop deep knowledge in an area or expertise to ensure this control—to ensure that they know exactly what they're doing and that they can succeed without having to rely on any potentially unreliable people.

And developing this kind of intense expertise—it's hard. Most other people aren't willing to invest this level of time and energy. But for the C style, it's worth it because then they don't have to trust other people's judgment if they don't want to. That leaves them too vulnerable. They can evaluate the facts for themselves. They're self-sufficient. But when it comes to a situation where they don't have the preparation or the expertise, that's where you see a lot more reluctance to engage. That's when the instinct to step back and think really kicks in. They either enter the situation very, very cautiously or they don't enter it at all.

So a major example is social situations, where there really is no such thing as, you know, as being an expert, and you can't control the flow of a conversation without appearing stiff. The rules of any given social interaction, you know, they're infinitely complex and functionally they're unknowable. And so, given this, here we see the triumph of these two primary needs, security and being beyond reproach. The natural strategy then is control—to pull inward and to minimize how much I say or how much I reveal. I might not come across as dynamic or the life of the party, but at least I'll have stability and I'll avoid saying anything humiliating.

OK, and so these elements are going to be the foundation of what we're going to talk about here—this basic analytical instinct and then these three core psychological needs. These pieces have a huge number of implications for how people with a C style approach their relationships, their projects, their careers. And that's what I want to get into here: the implications.

So one of the behavioral implications is putting a lot of energy into avoiding mistakes. And I think other people sometimes misinterpret this instinct in the C style as, oh, I always need to be right or I am always right. But that's really misleading. It's not a matter of arrogance. It's not I'm more right than you, although, you know, it can evolve into something like that if a person starts to build their self-esteem around being an expert all the time. But at the most basic root level, it reflects this really core need that I should not be wrong.

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

But I do want to make sure that I'm not painting a picture of the C's accuracy as being purely a defense mechanism. That the only reason this style wants accuracy is because it doesn't want to be blamed for mistakes. It's broader than that. People with the C style, also they take a lot of pride, a subtle kind of joy in producing something of great quality. They like knowing that they've done a truly excellent job and like having control over all aspects of it. There's a satisfaction that comes with stepping back and looking at the work that I did and admiring how well it matches up to some standard. There's a sense of completeness and closure and purpose that comes with getting things just right. It's a little like slipping that last piece of the puzzle in place when things fit just perfectly after a bunch of hard work, there's wholeness and stability. And I think most people can appreciate that, but particularly the C style.

But there is still that other more defensive motivation for precision, which is to avoid mistakes, and if someone wants to avoid mistakes, one of the best tools humans have available to us is logic. It's knowable and predictable. It's also incredibly stable, like math. If you put certain variables in, you're going to get certain variables out. Each time it's the same. So the C style learns to rely on this tool. And as we'll talk about a little later on, sometimes they over-rely on it. A similar tool that someone can use to avoid being wrong is skepticism. Being skeptical means that I'm not going to be taken in. I'm not going to think something's better than it really is.

I'm not going to put my stamp of approval on something that's inferior, that's flawed. It protects me from making a mistake. It limits the number of false positives I get, even if as a natural consequence, it means I'm also going to increase the number of false negatives that I get. And this is another area that can be a great asset, but it can also be overused, which we'll talk about later.

And then another practice that helps people avoid mistakes is information gathering. The C style typically wants a lot of information before making a decision and sometimes wants an unrealistic level of certainty before making a decision. So this can translate into being very slow to act or being very risk adverse or frankly, not even recognizing

opportunities where it might be worth taking a moderate risk. You know, it's just not on the radar. And of course, we all want some certainty before we're taking a chance. It's just that the threshold is particularly high for the C style. And so they might not even see the opportunity or if the opportunity is brought up by someone else, their go-to reaction is just going to be one of cynicism, especially if they haven't had the chance to work out all of the logic and all the contingencies and all the ripple effects for themselves.

They're not going to be really comfortable just putting their faith and fate in someone else's judgment. And so one of the general strategies with this style is to avoid exposure, avoid putting themselves out there. This could be socially or with a new project. The instinct is to secure a comfort zone, to stabilize that and have it as a home base so they can work from it without stress. So if things look like they're getting out of control or unstable, they have a secure base that they can retreat to and work from to fix things out, to regain order.

And if I've got this relatively well-defined sphere, what that allows me to do is gain mastery or expertise over all the variables in that space. I can really, really understand these things. And the sense of control and security that comes with that is huge. Not to mention because I have all of this expertise I'm incredibly valuable in my domain, I know all the rules and the systems and the interactions, the causes and effects of what's going on and what's going to do this or that. That's a great resource to have in an organization. Of course, then the downside is when I'm pushed outside that zone or something I want is well outside that zone or when someone invades that zone, that can be really unsettling. And we'll see this idea pop up again and again as we talk through the C style.

But I want to first come back to this idea of avoiding mistakes and relying heavily on logic to make sure that happens. And there are definitely a lot of benefits that come with a lifetime of mastering the use and application of logic. If you've got a C style, I probably don't really need to expound on those for you. It's powerful, okay, but there is this other side to it, particularly if you combine these two elements: if you have someone who

really abhors being wrong and also someone who puts an immense amount of faith in their ability to use logic, one of the consequences of those two mindsets together is that it can be really, really tough for this person to admit when they're wrong. Because when there's even a whiff in the air that I might, in fact, actually be on shaky ground with my reasoning, my logic faculties kick into overdrive, working through every possible angle to justify my position.

I reframe the parameters of the situation so they support my argument. You know, rationalizing things is extremely tempting when my competence is being called into question. And it's also tempting for me to not only think, but also feel, that my logic is the logic, thinking that in any given situation there is just one logical conclusion that can be arrived at. It's easy to forget just how much of our logic is based on arbitrary values and core assumptions that we bring to the table. Consequently, they don't necessarily recognize that two equally logical, equally smart people can come to completely different conclusions, both using 100 percent logic. And the difference is because they started with different values and priorities, and because of this, they weigh the facts differently. They pay attention to this piece of evidence, but ignore this other piece where the opposite is true of the other person.

And unfortunately, if I have a great deal of confidence in my logic and I hate being wrong, I'm never going to let go of my position or at least it's going to take a lot before I do that. I'll keep arguing my point, deeper and deeper, believing that other people just simply don't get it. You know, I'll try to make them understand. I'll generate more and more logical defenses for my position. And they'll be impressive arguments. I'll fall in love with them. My logic will feel more and more airtight and my mind becomes more and more closed to the possibility that your line of logic might, not only have some validity, but actually, I can't believe I'm going to even think this, it might actually be a more adaptive way of looking at the situation. It can become a really, really painful cognitive switch to make in that moment. And as a result, most of the time, well, I'd much rather focus on making my position stronger than genuinely entertaining someone else's position.

Now, a key word here that I don't know if I've mentioned yet, but it's a useful idea that sums up a lot of this, and the word is credibility. The idea that people see me as someone that can be relied on. They can trust what I say is true. And of course, you know, everybody wants to be seen as credible, but for the C style, this is very much a preoccupation, maybe unconsciously. But there's a mentality that says I need to guard my credibility. Actually, I think it's probably more common phrasing of this internal voices kind of goes something like, I must always maintain my credibility. I must always maintain my credibility. This is what I'll call a driving assumption for the C style.

So what I mean by driving assumption is it's basically an unspoken belief system 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 don't question them. We don't really have that option. We just assume that they're true. So, for instance, for the C style, another one of these assumptions is, "It is awful to be blamed for something." And I call it a driving assumption, because this little belief that we probably came up with when we were three or four years old, it drives a huge amount of our behavior and a lot of how we interpret the events in our lives. So for the rest of the talk, I want to discuss some of these assumptions.

And if you have a C style, you might find yourself torn. You might find yourself saying, you know, that assumption is just kind of plain stupid. I'd really be embarrassed to admit that I believe something like that. And at the same time, though, there might also be some part of you that really kind of actually does believe it. You don't want to admit it, but you kind of know that it's there. The thing you should know, though, is that this is true for everyone. We all have these unspoken beliefs about the world that, on the surface, they look ridiculous and even embarrassing. And 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 background and we go on not owning them or refusing to acknowledge them, they have much more power to

shape our lives and guide us toward decisions that aren't necessarily always in our best long-term interest.

All right, so the driving assumption we were just talking about is this: "I must always maintain my credibility." And if you have a C style, try it on. Ask yourself if there's some part of you that believes this even in a small way. And this is a deceptively powerful little statement. In fact, the key words here are probably not what you would expect them to be. Again, take the sentence: "I must always maintain my credibility." I would argue that the key words here are "must" and "always." "Always" is powerful because it's an absolute. It puts a tremendous amount of pressure on a person to live up to the standard at each and every moment in time, with no exceptions, no room for screw-ups. And human beings, you know, we just can't do that.

The other key word, "must," is one that you might not expect at all, but here's what "must" does. It elevates this statement from a mere preference or a goal or a nice-to-have. And it elevates it to a moral imperative. That this speaks to our very character, whether we're a good person or a bad person. I must guard my credibility at all times because this is a reflection on my worth as a person. Now, granted, I'm using language here that's a little grandiose and very few of us think in these terms consciously. But for all of us, there are times that our brain makes these absolute, completely irrational assumptions about life that guide our perceptions of the world around us.

Okay, so let's say this assumption is in play. It's operating beneath the surface, maybe even to—just to a small degree, maybe to a large degree. Maintaining self-control then is one of the first things a person is going to do to protect their credibility. Even if I can't necessarily control the situation, I can control myself. So there's a certain amount of pride that I take in my ability to control my desires. Self-control also assures that I won't make a fool out of myself by making a mistake or doing something inappropriate. There is therefore a strong instinct to avoid all forms of vulnerability.

Not to show weakness to others, especially in areas that I think matter. So I'll go off and do research on my own rather than letting people see me in a vulnerable position of not knowing something. I keep my insecurities to myself and find it frankly, you know, bordering on humiliating when those insecurities might show because a credible person is strong. I'm using quotation marks here, but, you know, the credible person is strong. They're—they're in control. They can handle the problems that life throws at them in a composed, disciplined manner. At least, that's what should happen—"should" being another one of those very loaded words.

Now, a much more proactive way to ensure my credibility is developing expertise. Expertise ensures my competence in whatever area we're talking about. It's not about getting attention or approval or power. A lot of the times it's about accomplishment. But a meaningful amount is also about if I develop expertise I've got this competency in my back pocket, as long as I know I have that I'm good. And this is core. You can take everything else away and I'll still have my competency. Expertise helps cement my worth. It closes up the vulnerability that I could be exposed. Here I have the chance to be on the offensive rather than the defensive. This is where I can get my pride needs met.

Pride feels good, you know, other people get their pride needs met by being top dog or by getting a lot of attention or by having status. Being an expert allows me to dip into that well of pride in the same way. And like anything, it can be taken too far. It can be tempting for a person to hide behind their expertise, to build their self concept around it to the point where it's like a safe fortress to take shelter in and withdraw into. Where wandering outside their areas of expertise becomes even more unattractive compared to the warmth and the safety of their comfort zone.

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

unrewarding work that's necessary to develop that mastery. OK, so I definitely want to make sure the healthy side is acknowledged because the world would be much different, a much worse place if we didn't have people who were driven in this specific regard. All right.

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

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

And this is where I want to take a little bit of a chance in this talk to discuss some ideas that go a little bit out on a limb, a little bit speculative because it's about unconscious stuff. But just—just bear with me, if you will. And if you have a C style, maybe this fits your experience. Maybe it doesn't. But it's something that's worth considering. And I promise not to indulge too much here. So just general human nature, not just the C style, but everyone. One of the things that sometimes happens when we take an idea or a realization or an insecurity and we try to push it out of mind, when we try to pretend it doesn't exist, basically, what psychologists call repressing—it can actually make this issue even more powerful in a person's mind.

It kind of works like this: when we stuff an insecurity out of mind, it tells the mind that this is highly dangerous territory and it must not be revealed at any cost. It says this issue, this thing, whatever it is, it's extremely dangerous. We need to make absolutely sure that we steer clear of it. And so no matter how small or insignificant the insecurity is, in reality, the mind doesn't care. All the mind knows is that this thing is a disaster waiting to happen. And so you can kind of see where this is going, this process of stuffing flaws or insecurities out of my mind, it actually, ironically, makes the issue even more powerful. It's like increasing the size of a planet. The gravity becomes that much more powerful. The insecurity or flaw becomes more powerful and influential. It has more pull in determining the topics that we can't think about, can't talk about, can't acknowledge.

Basically, it means that we have to be even more vigilant. We need to expend more energy managing what we might let slip out. We have to be much more controlled about whatever that issue is. So, back to the C style, if I have this broad, unspoken assumption that flaws and insecurities, they must not be exposed. And if they are exposed, it'll be incredibly humiliating, you know, reveal me as awful or lacking and worth, then naturally, what I'm going to want to do is shut down any vulnerability in a general sense. The idea of letting loose or just speaking stream of consciousness without monitoring myself almost becomes unthinkable. It creates the possibility of who knows what could slip out. Self-control becomes a priority. Self-sufficiency and autonomy also become a priority, lack of dependency. And so building up my confidence also allows for independence. And working alone allows me to control the quality of my work, ensuring that things get done the way they should.

But this also gives me freedom from the control of another person. You know, for the average person with a C style, they don't really want to control other people, but they also very clearly don't want to be controlled themselves, almost to the point sometimes where the idea of being controlled, especially in an overt way, can almost feel humiliating. At the very least, it's something to avoid whenever possible. Now, now, one last thing I do want to say about the C striving for expertise. I don't want to suggest that

this drive is all defensive in nature, that it's all done for the sake of protecting myself against looking foolish or being embarrassed.

Usually in this style, there is a genuine quest for knowledge, a desire to understand that's an end in itself. There's a strong curiosity and discipline to follow through on these tough questions, to get the kind of knowledge that—that doesn't come easily to the casual dabbler in these matters, who loses interest when they meet too much resistance or when the answers don't come quickly enough. The C continues to push through because they have a genuine desire to learn and to know. And that end result, when the pieces start to come together and there's mastery over subject, it's its own reward. Solving a tough problem on their own—that's extremely gratifying.

All right. So we talked a little bit about an aversion to vulnerability and also this parallel attraction to independence and self-reliance. And so if you take these preferences together, it really makes sense that you have someone who's rather private, who's introverted, who's not very expressive, who can sometimes come across as a little guarded. Here, I want to get into one of the common C qualities that can have a pretty big impact on how someone goes through their life. And that's this general tendency to insulate oneself, to create at least a little bit of a space between myself and the outside world. Almost to create kind of a protective parameter around myself, kind of like a comfort zone. Sometimes almost to the point that when I have to allow some other people inside my parameter, there's a sense of intrusion or discomfort, even if I only feel it unconsciously.

I have to gear up my energy to deal with this outsider, unlike, for instance, a really extroverted person who welcomes the outsider and really doesn't require much internal preparation to shift from being in their private space to being interactive. When people with a C style have to go outside their comfort zone, they can feel almost by instinct that they need to put on a mask, you know, perhaps bump up their energy level, act more friendly because they sense that their normal, quiet, reflective self isn't appropriate, that it's not enough, that more is expected out of them socially. And this is draining, frankly.

The instinct then is to just return to the safety of their parameter as soon as possible, where they can let their guard down, be themselves, relax, not feel the pressure to talk or to follow these social niceties.

A really good description that I've heard of introversion is that when you're an introvert, social interaction is expensive. It requires a lot of energy. So if I'm introverted, I'm going to be very selective about where I spend my energy and who I spend it with. I'm going to limit that stuff. But for someone else, someone for whom interaction is cheap, it doesn't cost them much energy at all. They're going to look at me and think I'm standoffish or shy or insecure. It is frustrating fighting those assumptions, particularly in America where there's such a strong bias toward extroversion. I remember talking to my uncle about my daughter. She was three at the time and my uncle is this really dominant, forceful kind of guy. And I said, well, I'm pretty sure she's going to be an introvert. And he says, don't give up on her yet. And I—and I think the assumption he was making in that statement isn't just unique to him.

But one of the really interesting things that we see in the research is that there is on average a slight tendency for people to get more introverted as they get older. On the other hand, there's also this tendency for people to have a stronger social presence and more social confidence as they get older. And so if introversion really was just about insecurity, we wouldn't see those two findings going side by side. There may sometimes be an element of insecurity driving a person to be reserved or private, but it's also that sometimes people are just more reflective, that they thrive in the internal world and can find external interruptions to be a little jarring.

Now, if you combine this more internal nature with a strong desire for control and also this desire to avoid blame, one of the things that you sometimes see in the C style—not always, but sometimes—is this unspoken policy of detachment. Nothing should be so important that one cannot do without it. This really is kind of the ultimate manifestation of self-sufficiency. I limit my external needs and therefore I'm less dependent on the

external world, on other people. And I also have much more ability to ensure that my world is stable now.

And even to the degree that there is a tendency to pull back and do things for myself, it's not all good or bad. Like most psychological tendencies, there are some healthy and some unhealthy motives that drive it. For instance, generally speaking, the C style is reluctant to ask for help. But there are a whole slew of reasons why this can be going on. For instance, I don't ask for help because I want to gain the expertise. I want to be able to handle this situation by myself the next time it comes up. Also, though, I don't want to bother others. I'm very sensitive about infringing on other people's time, their private space, their territory, because I know how important that space is to me. There might also be the fact that I don't want to admit the need for help.

We've already talked about this buried belief that I don't want to expose flaws, but there's also an element of mastery. I love the feeling that comes with taking on a tough problem and solving it myself. Problem-solving is highly emotionally satisfying. It might be about sorting through all the complexity to find an elegant order, or it might be about the enjoyment of working through a process to find the correct answer. But the same way that socializing is gratifying to some people or getting attention is gratifying, my brain is wired to find this gratifying. In the C style, pleasure centers of the brain just absolutely light up when figuring out a problem. The reward is hiding just behind the corner.

Okay, so we've got a simple tendency like not wanting to ask for help and a whole slew of different motivations behind it. If you've got a C style, you can probably think of times that any of these motives were driving your behavior sometimes, maybe all at once. And the point I want to make is that there's healthy and unhealthy angles to all of the traits that I've been talking about. All right, so one of the words you probably noticed me saying a few times is logic. You can't really talk about the C style without mentioning logic. Of all of the styles, no one values logic more than this one. It is the way to navigate life. Not only does it seem like the best way to accurate conclusions, but, you

know, logic is knowable. It's predictable. Logic is what allows for objectivity. Emotions may be a natural part of being a human being. They may add richness to life. But from this perspective, this often common C perspective, they're absolutely no way to make major decisions.

Particularly in a work setting, emotions should be put aside in favor of making decisions rationally. And this value can be so prevalent, makes so much sense, that it's just assumed to be a universal truth that well, you know, of course, every reasonable person should agree with this. So, of course, when someone isn't using logic, and in particular when they're making decisions that affect me based on something other than logic, it's genuinely disturbing. And so people making illogical arguments are going to be extremely annoying, sometimes making me much more annoyed than the situation actually deserves, because it's almost as if my value system is being violated, almost as if it's a personal assault. And the emotion coursing through me might accurately be described as something akin to self-righteousness, even if I don't want to admit it.

But one of the things that such a strong reaction allows me to do is speak up and question someone's logic or their lack of logic when my normal instinct would be to stay internal and reserved. And that questioning is very precise and incisive, often very matter of fact, very black and white. And to me it feels like I'm just laying out an argument. But to other people, because I'm so objective and impersonal in my reasoning, it can feel cold. Understandably, it can feel like I'm being insensitive or judgmental when in fact my genuine motivation is to just be as objective as possible.

And the temptation for me is to stick to my perspective on this whole thing, that I'm just being objective and not journey outside and ask myself how this might be misperceived by someone who is, say, very attentive to emotional cues. Someone who is used to going through life and reading subtle non-verbals to gauge where the other person is coming from. Realizing that, hey, I might not approach relationships like this, but there really are a huge number of people who do. And it's actually a legitimate way to go through life, even if it's not my way.

And so if we have a situation where someone mistakes my logical, dispassionate objections (in my mind) as callous criticism or simply as being mean in their mind, I think it would be a mistake for me to say, well, the fault for this miscommunication lies solely with them. It's a case here where we have a fundamental difference in social norms and expectations. What's "appropriate" (and I'm making air quotes here) really is in the eye of the beholder. And both parties have an equal responsibility to bridge that gap.

And so, generally speaking, it's not unusual for the C style to view emotion with a skeptical eye, more so than the average person. To see emotions as an obstacle to good decision-making, as kind of a nuisance. And the C style is particularly skeptical of people who make emotional appeals, who try to convince other people by appealing to their excitement or their fears or their outrage. And these are likely to get the reaction of disgust. And the flip side of this is that the C style usually doesn't even consider making an emotional appeal. Say, for instance, we have a situation where there's this compelling emotional argument to be made or a complex, less compelling, logical argument to be made.

The C style is going to choose the logical one, partly because doing anything else, it almost kind of feels dirty. But also because they don't want to be put in a situation later on where they have to defend a flimsy emotional argument. Again credibility is crucial. But it can be immensely frustrating when they find themselves in a group situation and someone else's emotionally based reasoning is gaining traction, is really swaying people—and the C's more nuanced, logical argument is getting ignored, getting swept under the rug. It can really be enough to make you want to throw your hands up in the air and just —and just give up.

And so I think this leads into another common trait for the C style, which is cynicism. After dealing with so many people who brush logic to the side, who make decisions based on flimsy evidence or flimsy arguments, seeing people so easily sucked into beliefs that just seem to be so clearly, demonstrably wrong. And after repeatedly finding it really, really frustrating, it's easy to develop an outer coat of cynicism. It's a natural

reaction. But on a less obvious level, the cynicism can also serve an additional purpose, a couple actually, that are more emotional in nature. First, it can help justify the distance I put between myself and the world. That is, if my instinct is to pull back and create kind of a protective comfort zone around myself, having a cynical stance toward the world outside my zone makes that okay. It says the world is rotten anyway.

So naturally, I'm not going to fully engage in it. I'm going to keep my distance. Cynicism also helps protect me from doing something foolish. It minimizes my exposure. It sharply reduces the chances that someone's going to dupe me, that they're going to take advantage of me without me noticing, that someone will convince me of something that's not true. And when I'm cynical or skeptical, I'm also slow about what I put out into the world, the things that might be criticized or condemned as flawed or foolish. I don't put myself out there. I, I don't engage fully because that feels like a crazy amount of exposure. Who in their right mind would make themselves that vulnerable? Just as I judge other people by their competence and composure, I assume that other people are going to be judging me by the same measuring stick.

And so I do want to bring up one final concept related to this that I hope can pull together a lot of the other concepts that I've already discussed. It's one of the most prized possessions of the C style, and that is their dignity. And of course, everyone cares about their dignity to some degree. And this word can mean different things. But what I'm talking about here is dignity in terms of not looking foolish, not losing the basic respect of others. And so this is another one of those driving assumptions. I must maintain my dignity at all times, which isn't such an extreme statement.

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

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

So let's imagine, if true, what kind of implications you might see if someone had this very intense need to guard their dignity. And I think one of the most obvious places is in the social realm. As we talked about before, the rules for what's appropriate and not appropriate in the social realm are pretty ambiguous and often completely arbitrary. And so the normal strategy I might take when I know there's going to be a stressful situation is to prepare and to analyze and to study. But with social situations, there's no amount of preparation that I can do to ensure that I'm going to come across well. And the people who are usually regarded as the most socially engaging are in fact the ones who usually do put themselves out there, they open themselves up, they throw themselves into the situation.

They're speaking stream of consciousness a lot of the times. They're not second-guessing what comes out of their mouth. The filter between what they're thinking and what they're saying is very permeable. You can see their passion and they pull people into those passions. Now, these people may be very image conscious, they may thrive on attention. Their self-worth might be wrapped up in the approval of others. But their self-worth and their concept of dignity is probably quite different than the typical C concept of dignity.

For the average C style, my brain simply won't allow me to expose myself like that. I can't let go of those inhibitions because those inhibitions have been locked in place over the years to protect my dignity, to protect me from saying that ridiculous thing, whatever it is. I've got this very intense internal monologue going on about the social dynamics and what's appropriate. But on the outside, it usually just looks like I'm a quiet person. And the cruel irony, of course, is that all of that quietness is exhausting, you know. It's all of that internal stress, analyzing the dynamics, looking for opportunities to jump into the conversation. But this can feel like almost like merging into traffic that's going 70 miles an hour when I'm standing still. It's exhausting.

And there are some other dimensions to this whole dignity thing, though, that aren't just about mingling or social events. And another important one of them is about emotional control or emotional displays. And the general strategy here is to really just avoid them. I remember a friend describing to me how he sees it when someone loses their temper. He's this dyed-in-the-wool C style, by the way. And surprisingly to me, what he described was being embarrassed for the other person. And so let's say someone with a really strong personality loses it and starts yelling. That person—the person yelling—may feel like they're showing power or strength through their aggression. But my friend's reaction was to just see this person as losing their dignity.

They're losing control—the one thing you can have control over there, creating a whole window into their flaws and shortcomings. When you get emotional like that, there's no telling what will pour out. And it's not just anger. It's really any sort of strong emotional display, maybe too much enthusiasm or too much sadness. And not to say that people with a C style don't experience strong emotions. They do, but they just have a very strong instinct to control the display of those emotions.

And this is one of the reasons why conflict can feel like such a nightmare for this style. Even if it isn't heated, there's always this voice in the back of my head saying, this could go there at any time. You know, that core need for stability is at risk. And this aversion to conflict can be such a dilemma for the C style, because on the one hand, they care passionately about things being accurate and fair and just. But on the other hand, confronting issues has this potential to throw them into this massive emotion and this can really—this tension can really pull them apart.

So there's a danger of an emotional outburst when it comes to feeling anger or being offended or hurt. But there's another class of emotions that can be equally uncomfortable for the C style. And those are what you might call, kind of, the more tender emotions, particularly open displays of emotional intimacy. The stuff that gets

labeled as touchy-feely. I think the standard C reaction to this kind of stuff is best described as squeamish, maybe even a little repulsed. But there's this intense reaction that if you step back a little and look at it objectively, the intensity of the emotional reaction, honestly, it seems a little disproportionate to the actual event. In other words, why is a display of tenderness so off-putting?

Well, let me throw out some idea, some hypotheses. So I think one potential reason is because touchy-feely stuff can feel basically manipulative. When someone's putting out 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 just like, no, don't try dragging me into that emotion. Don't try playing on my sympathies. Don't try to shame me into having those same feelings. We've already talked about the C style and their aversion to being controlled. I think that sometimes listening to someone tell a sappy story can feel like that control or manipulation—indirectly, but it's still there.

There's also often this allergic reaction to melodrama, the sense that people are exaggerating or overplaying the emotion in a situation. Maybe a sense that they're faking it a little, but also that it's a tool for them to get attention. It's kind of another form of manipulation. You're using this trumped-up reaction to get everyone to pay attention to you and to pull attention away from other more legitimate concerns. So there are those potential reactions. But I think there's often also something else as well, more beneath the surface.

When you start to see this strong disgust reaction that people with this C and also the D style have to sappy, sentimental stuff, I think some of it ties back to this aversion to vulnerability. And disgust is an interesting emotion. And the reason it's basically there is to protect us from stuff that could poison us, hurt us, disgust is. Our ancestors were disgusted by rancid, fetid food, so they didn't eat it. They had 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,

their brain be telling them that you need to stay away from this stuff at all costs, it is going to hurt you?

And one hypothesis is that there's such a strong emotional aversion to tender emotions like this because it represents vulnerability. How does it represent it? Well, it represents unabashed intimacy. Being completely unskeptical, surrendering the 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 from being weak or soft. So simply put, someone comes at me with this tender stuff. They're basically asking me to completely abandon my critical eye, my layer of protection. And my brain is telling me that this is an absolute no-go. And to make sure I stay clear, the reaction is disgust, sometimes even anger.

Okay, so admittedly, there is a lot of speculation there and in linking all this stuff together. And that brings me back to the whole purpose of this podcast, is to throw some ideas out there. And if you have a C style, consider how much they might explain some of the patterns that you see in yourself. Some pieces probably fit more than others. But I think regardless of why the C style shies away from this overly intimate stuff, there is still that tendency to be reluctant, to be too openly tender. And so one of the consequences is that this style typically doesn't show empathy in a way that's traditionally associated with the word. Now, the C style is hyper-concerned about justice and respecting people's rights, even if it means that they personally have to sacrifice. And this can be one of the upsides of pulling back and distancing myself from my personal needs. Because for the average person, emotions and egos often lead them to rationalize what's in their best interest, to rationalize their ability to act selfishly and for their own passions and interests.

But if we're able to look at this situation logically and dispassionately, we recognize that everyone has the same rights as we do. And this is a huge benefit of being dispassionate and something a lot of people really respect about the C style. And so the compassion is there for other people, but it's probably more often based in

dispassionate logic than it is in traditional empathy. And when I say traditional empathy, one of the big differentiators is being outwardly warm, outwardly heartfelt. Like we just talked about, this stuff just feels icky to a lot of people with a C style. It also often feels insincere. Forcing myself to do it can almost feel dishonest.

The problem, of course, though, is, you know, we live in a world where a meaningful number of people look for those cues to tell them what the other person is thinking and feeling—that another person cares. So there can be a miscommunication issue. But there's also the issue that for many people, there's an expectation that if you and I have a close relationship, I should be able to count on you to give me, you know, warm emotional support when I'm in need. And so if I do have that unspoken assumption toward you and I'm in a bad place, let's say, it makes sense that I might feel a little let down or hurt or angry when my expectations aren't met, when I'm not getting that traditional empathy. And of course, this is probably most obvious in personal relationships, a romantic relationship or a parenting relationship.

But I do think, even in the workplace, this is something that often catches the C style off guard when they move from being an individual contributor role to having more of a management role or a leadership role, that now there is actually a legitimate expectation that I will have to provide some emotional support. People need praise. People need encouragement. People need support when they're feeling demoralized. And more and more in the workplace the idea that I can just be completely task-oriented and ignore the human side of the equation, that's becoming more and more outdated. It comes with the recognition that you do, in fact, get better performance out of people, better teamwork, the more attentive you are to those expectations, even at work.

All right, so there is a lot of information here, a lot of different dimensions we talked about. And so how do you make sense of it? Or rather, how do you put it to use? Well, I'll just make one broad suggestion here. It's about these driving assumptions I've talked about. 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 to start to notice when

these assumptions are being played out in the background. And so let me just give you a reminder of the assumptions. Here they are: I must always maintain credibility. It is awful to be blamed for something. I must maintain my dignity at all times.

The whole exercise is about becoming more aware of when these assumptions or assumptions like them are driving our behavior, our thoughts, our emotions. Sometimes they're realistic. Sometimes they're not. But the first step is just about becoming consciously aware of them so I can make decisions and choices in a more deliberate fashion. If the assumption is realistic—great run with it. But if it's not—then I learned to challenge it, replace it with a statement that's more accurate and more fitting for the circumstance. And it definitely 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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