The D Style – An Everything DiSC® Podcast

Narrator: The following podcast by Dr. Mark Scullard describes the D 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 D style, dominance, and if you have a D style, I think what you'll find is that, you know, roughly 70, 80 percent of what we're going to talk about is probably going to fit for you. Some of it will be spot on. There's going to be a little bit that feels like, "yeah, that's not really me" or, you know, maybe, "yeah, that sounds like me when I was a lot 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 and your habits in a new light. So we're going to take a look at all these different characteristics associated with the D style, things like being direct and forceful and strong-willed. And there's a few core needs that really tie them together. So, you know, why are people with the D style more likely than the average person to be assertive, to be forceful, to be results oriented? What's the motivation behind these more observable behaviors?

Well, let me introduce some very core needs that explain a lot of the D behaviors. First, there's often this very core need to be strong, a need to know that I'm powerful enough to shape my environment at all times, and I'm powerful enough to fend off any incoming threats at all times. And so you may have picked up the phrase "at all times" in there. And this reflects an assumption—usually an unspoken assumption—that this is a tough world. And if I'm not strong enough to hold my ground and shape my world at any point, well, then I'm at the mercy of the whims of this tough world. And so, really, if I'm a useful, productive, valuable person, I need to be a strong person.

And then a second core need, which I think is very much related, is a need to have control, a need to control the factors that influence my fate, my ultimate success or failure. I need to be able to have a say in determining that. Oftentimes, I need to have the say in determining that. And not just for myself. To the degree that I'm important or successful, I'm going to have influence in controlling larger and larger events. If I'm going to be doing this whole life thing right, I should have a large footprint. I should be expanding my influence in some way.

And so this feeds into kind of a third core need, which may not be as easy to own. But let me just throw it out there, and it's a need to be on top. Again, this might not be as socially desirable to admit, but I think it's a little easier if I rephrase it in terms of winning. People with a D style want to win. I mean, you know, everybody wants to win, but the D style really likes to win. And me being on top can—maybe even unconsciously—that can be a barometer of how well I'm doing. Am I on the right track?

I think for people with the D style, this is why having authority can almost in and of itself be rewarding, for its own sake. Respect often comes with that authority. But overall, I think the need is most pronounced—it's most easy to notice—when the opposite message is coming in. When someone else is saying to us—through their words or more likely through their actions—that in fact, "No, I'm the one who's on top. I'm the one who's superior." You know, that tends to get a reaction; particularly with the D style, that doesn't sit so well.

OK, and then there's one last core need here, which is the need to be making progress, always to be moving forward. There's this internal pressure, almost this unspoken belief that if you're a valuable person, then you produce. A nagging sense of pressure to just keep moving. You know, the word "restless" comes to mind. When they're confronted with quiet, oftentimes, people with a D style their brain is telling them, you know, you're wasting time if you're not accomplishing something. Oftentimes, it can be really so ingrained that they might not even realize that other people don't necessarily share this sense of pressure.

OK, so these elements are the foundation of what we're going to talk about here, these four core psychological needs: the need to be strong, the need to be in control, the need to be on top, the need for progress. These pieces have a huge number of implications for how a person approaches 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 a strong sense of drive. This mostly ties back to the expectation of movement we just talked about. And if you have a D style, I think there's probably a good chance you might describe yourself as a little bit on the impatient side.

Now, one of the interesting things that I've noticed when talking to a lot of different people with the D style is they often have a very clear vision of how the world should be, especially compared to other people. They have this picture in their heads, and they feel really, really confident about it, and they're, you know, they're just eager to make that happen. And if I've got this really clear vision of how things should proceed, and it isn't happening quickly or efficiently, I'm going to get antsy. I've got these high standards for myself and others. When people screw up, when they don't live up to those standards, it doesn't take much for me to get irritated, maybe even angry.

Actually, just speaking about people in general, you know, when—when do people get angry? Well, we get angry when we feel our—like our rights have been violated. But, you know, people also get angry when things don't go the way they think they should. And a key word here is the emphasis on the word "should." There's a big difference between saying I would very much like things to go this way and saying things should go this way.

And so if I'm using that "should" language in my head, it's going to be much quicker path for me to get irritated. In a way, I feel like my rights are being violated—my blood pressure spikes, my voice raises. And in the extreme cases, the people around me learn very quickly that things better go well or else. You know, don't poke the bear. Although again this is probably a more extreme case; impatience can take a lot more

subtle forms, you know, wanting direct, quick answers, uh, getting restless with people who seem incompetent, or who I feel are wasting my time.

And there's good and bad to that. I remember a director who had a sign in her office that said, "Impatience is a virtue." And a big part of that virtue is the drive to make a vision become a reality as quickly as possible. Now a vision in everyday life, that might be something like, you know, something as simple as getting to the front of the line. But it can also be something much more grand, like starting my own business, or kicking off a new project or a venture at work, taking advantage of opportunities, quickly taking advantage of them. So there's this impulse to start executing on that as soon as the decision is made. You know, I'd rather rush in too quickly and sort out the mess later on than waste all of this time deliberating. You know, instead of thinking before I act, the impulse is to think and act at the same time. To cut through the red tape, to take shortcuts because the eye is much more on the prize than it is on the process or the path. It's this strong results orientation.

And obviously there's a lot to be said about results. There's a lot to be said about moving quickly and expediently. But if you've got a D style, you've probably also experienced some of the downsides here. You know, one is it can create kind of an unpredictable environment for other people. That is, you know, the people who aren't in my head and can't see the vision as clearly as I can. Not to mention there's this tendency to get frustrated by things not going according to that vision. You know, that—that's going to create another level of emotional insecurity, particularly for other people who have a real aversion to interpersonal or emotional tension, which, frankly, is a good chunk of the population.

But interpersonally, there's also another implication of this very strong focus on efficiency. And this is about empathy. And empathy, basically being about taking the time to put yourself in another person's shoes and consider things from their perspective—to relate to their emotional experience. And doing that is not quick. To state it bluntly, empathy really isn't efficient, at least not in the short term. You know, it

might be in the long term, but in the moment, taking all that time for me to consider another person's perspective, and to process how they might be reacting to what I'm saying, how they'd feel, all the different ways that I could phrase things...That's a lot of work compared to just spitting it out, to being direct, you know, maybe even blunt. That—again in the moment—that feels like efficient communication, just say what you mean, don't beat around the bush. But again, if you have a D style, particularly a strong D style, you've probably gotten at least some feedback throughout your life about why that isn't always appreciated. You know, but let's come back to that a little later.

At this point, though, I really want to pull back a little bit and introduce this idea of driving assumptions. These are unspoken belief systems that we all have, beliefs that are—they're 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 just assume they're true. So, for instance, for the D style, one of these assumptions is, "I should always be doing something useful." And I call it a driving assumption because this little belief—that, you know, we probably came up with it when we were seven or eight years old—it drives a huge amount of our behavior, and it drives a lot of how we interpret the events in our lives.

So for the rest of this talk, I want to discuss some of these assumptions. And if you have a D style, you might find yourself a little torn. You might find yourself saying, you know, that's—that assumption is really just plain stupid. I'd be embarrassed to admit that I believe something like that. At the same time, though, there might also be some part of you that actually does kind of believe it. You know, you don't really want to admit it, but you kind of know it's there.

And the thing you should know, though, is that this is true for everyone. You know, we all have these unspoken beliefs about the world that, you know, on the surface, they look ridiculous and even embarrassing. 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, you know, going on in the background, and we go

on and on, not owning them or refusing to acknowledge them, perhaps because they're silly or whatever, they tend to have much more power to shape our lives and guide us towards decisions that, you know—the ones that aren't necessarily always in our best interest.

All right, so here's another driving assumption. And if you have a D style, try it on, ask yourself if there's some part of you that believes this, even in a small way. Maybe, maybe not. All right, so here it is: "I'm valuable because I achieve or accomplish." And that's this very simple statement. And the rational part of us can, you know, pretty easily reject that. But to the degree that it's incorporated into our understanding of the world at a less conscious level, it can have a really powerful influence on our behavior.

Okay, so, you know, think about all of the different ways that this assumption would affect someone's behavior if they really, really had incorporated it into their worldview. So one implication is that restlessness that we just talked about, that internal pressure. You know, not feeling comfortable when things slow down too much, when there's not too much to do. Or when everyone else is relaxing, you know, it just feels like they're wasting time.

And for some people with the D style, not all, but a meaningful number, there's also an assumption that I need to be expanding in some way—expanding my influence, expanding my reach, the—the footprint that I leave on the world, it—it should move beyond where I'm at right now. I can do bigger and bigger things. And almost, I should be doing bigger and bigger things. You know, this is what it's all about. And so one of the things that the D style really brings to the workplace is this incredible sense of determination to take down whatever obstacles are there, to—or—to expand over them. And so...and it's so intense because it's this buried psychological mandate to achieve, and they'll push and push and push long after other people have quit.

Now, to do this, it almost requires a huge amount of confidence in my abilities and in my vision. Second guessing my vision or my ability to accomplish—those things are going

to get pushed out on my mind because they need to get pushed out of my mind. And of course, there's a huge upside to this self-confidence. But the downside to habitually just, you know, pushing doubts out of the mind is that it can eventually weaken my ability to really doubt myself in a healthy way, to process my limitations in a really balanced fashion.

And this becomes particularly dangerous when it turns into a deafness to the kind of feedback that's coming in to me. When it becomes increasingly easy for me to blow off criticism or to blow off ideas that differ from my own all in the name of, "Well, you know, they just don't see things as clearly as I do." You know, we can all think of extreme versions of this, right? For instance, there's that, uh, there's that cliche of the you know, the very domineering, arrogant, alpha executive who doesn't tolerate anyone challenging him, doesn't consider anyone's opinion other than his own. You know, and that's a far, far extreme. But obviously, this is on a continuum. And so there are also these much more subtle examples of when someone is overly confident, when they've kind of lost a little bit of their capacity for healthy self-doubt, especially when they're being challenged.

Now, this brings us back to one of those needs we talked about at the very beginning: it's this need to be strong. And a lot of this is based on a core assumption about the world that, you know, it's not necessarily always a friendly place. You know, if—if you're going to get what you need, what you want, if, you know, you're going to have an impact in some way, if you're going to be a person of substance in this world, you're going to need to be strong.

And this relates back to another one of those driving assumptions. And again, maybe this fits for you. Maybe it fits a lot, maybe a little, maybe not at all. But try it on for a couple of minutes as I unpack it. OK, so here's this, second, kind of driving, assumption: "I should never show vulnerability." Again, you see the word "should" in there, and it almost feels like a moral imperative. And there's also this word "never." And rationally, well, no, it's not necessarily a healthy way to think, but we're talking about unconscious

belief systems here. So what would be the implications of this gut feeling that vulnerability is a bad thing? Well, self-reliance, that's going to become key for me then. I need to be able to rely on myself to solve problems.

And if I have to rely too much on others or be vulnerable, then I don't really have complete security. I'm not really the master of my fate. Also, there's going to be this strong aversion to tenderness, you know, emotions like sadness, or fear, or empathy. To the degree that vulnerability feels repellent, these emotions are as well.

Again, let me describe this at an extreme, just to really make a point and then bring it back into kind of the average D range. But at the extreme, extreme of the D style, you can think of the the characters on the show, The Sopranos. And if you're not familiar with it, uh, it's about a mob family, and it's, you know, pretty much every male character on that show is an extreme D.

So you've got this culture where there's absolutely no room to show vulnerability or weakness. Anyone who shows weaknesses, you know, they're dismissed or ignored or, you know, maybe even killed, you know, force is what's respected. And then you've got this mob boss, Tony Soprano. And, you know, here's one of the brilliant conflicts that they set up in the show: Having this ultimate tough guy, but in the very first episode, he starts suffering panic attacks. All this stress, anxiety, fear, you know, that he's just packed down because it feels weak, but it needs an outlet.

So, you know, it comes out physically—the panic attacks. The great conflict then is...this is a guy who's learned his whole life that he can't be vulnerable. You know, the only way he can cure himself, though, of these attacks, is to be vulnerable with a therapist and explore these more tender emotions. And, you know, he's genuinely and understandably torn. And he lashes out at this poor therapist because she's—she's pushing him to do something that every instinct in his mind and his body is telling him not to do. He you know, he despises that weakness in himself, and he masks that insecurity with strength, with anger. You know, that's a non-tender feeling, like disgust,

or frustration, or passion—these are acceptable emotions. It—it's, you know, it's—it's brilliant writing on the behalf of the screenwriters—one of the things that I think gave this series so much depth.

OK, so back to the real world, though, where, you know, you—even if you've got a really strong D style, you're probably not a Sopranos D, right? You know, on a more moderate level, what does this look like? Well, there's still often an allergic-ness to this tender stuff like, you know, sentimentality, or gushiness or, you know, it creates kind of a—a real visceral reaction of disgust. But for a number of people with this style, even complimenting or praising someone can elicit this kind of disgust reaction, kind of a subtle ickiness. It just, you know, feels too intimate, too touchy feely. But even though it isn't obvious, this disgust, it really does often have a connection to vulnerability a lot of the time.

But I want to take a minute and step back, actually, to something I said just a minute ago, and unpack this topic of praise. You know, really, though, not just giving praise, but also things like giving reassurance, you know, basically communicating positive sentiments. Which is actually a really important topic that might not seem like an important topic. In romantic relationships it's important, in parenting, but also surprisingly at work as well, especially if you are in a leadership position.

In fact, when we look at our 360 data, that is, when people get the chance to give a leader feedback, things like creating a positive environment is one of the areas where D leaders get the lowest marks. Far lower than any other style, in fact. And I think many times with the D style, there's this resistance to communicating positive sentiments. And the reasons for this aren't necessarily obvious, but they start to make sense when I think you dig a little deeper into them.

One of the reasons for resistance, though, I think, is in fact the expectation that I should be giving praise or reassurance. It's, you know, it's a social expectation. But if I have a D style, that expectation can almost feel like a—kind of a form of control. You know,

you're telling me how to behave, particularly you're telling me to do this kind of gushy stuff, which I don't like for other reasons, but I also don't like being pressured into it. It kind of feels like manipulation. So it's not uncommon to hear D managers, you know, say things like, "Why do I need to praise people basically for doing their jobs? You know, that's why they're getting a paycheck. That's their praise." And I think this is particularly true when I feel that the person doesn't fully deserve praise, like someone else is feeling entitled to something they didn't really earn.

And so with many people with the D style, there's this really strong aversion to coddling, you know, partly out of principle and partly out of an emotional reaction to the perceived weakness. To seeing people wallow in weakness or in helplessness when really what they should be doing is pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, you know, the way I do. I take responsibility for being strong. Other people need to take responsibility for doing that, too.

Now, there's also another angle to this as well, which I don't think is as common, but it relates back to one of those needs we talked about at the beginning: to be on top. And so I think for some people with the D style, certainly not all, but for some, when it comes to praise, there could also be kind of a resistance because I'm elevating the other person. You know, it's more likely to be true, I think, if I perceive this person as a peer, you know, basically someone playing in my field. And—and by calling attention to how great someone else is, it—it can in small ways and subtle ways it can kind of feel like it diminishes myself by comparison, right? Or it gives away some of my influence. You know, this is going to be, I think, most pronounced if I have this really socially competitive mindset. You know, that is, if I fundamentally think of relationships in a really comparative way, always being aware of, you know, who's up and who's down.

And of all the Everything DiSC® styles, the D style is probably the one that's most cognizant of power dynamics. On average, they're the ones who...in any given social situation, they're the ones who are most aware of who's influential, who's being influenced, who has control in the conversation, you know, who's being undermined.

They want to know how powerfully their statements are coming across. And, you know, this is useful information because power dynamics—they play a legitimately big role in our lives. You can try to ignore them, but they really are always there, you know, in personal relationships, in work relationships. And so in this regard, holding back approval or praise—it can be a little bit strategic. It can keep people in their places.

And again, I do want to make sure that I stress that this aspect of approval or praise, it—it's probably not going to resonate with every person with the D style, even most people with the D style. I think what's probably more common is a lack of comfort with open expressions of affection, especially if they're prolonged. You know, and that's kind of what praise is or reassurance. It's showing affection. And to be fair, I know a number of people with the D style who are actually very comfortable with this stuff. But I also know more who find the whole thing makes them squeamish. And so, if you fall in that latter camp, consider how much this squeamishness is really related to vulnerability.

You know, when you're openly and directly showing affection, what you're doing is you're making yourself vulnerable. You know, a person can't be on guard and be affectionate at the same time. Affection really does involve a level of trust that basically leaves a person exposed. It's—it's kind of like a window into my core self. You know, all the good things, but also all the ugly parts, you know, the selfishness, the unlovability, right? All of those insecurities we keep under wraps, you know, open affection calls to mind all that exposure. And it can be for some people—it can feel really repellent. And hence that disgust reaction, you know. And that's why we have disgust, that—that emotion that keeps us away from, for instance, rotten food, you know, poison, things that are going to hurt us. And so if I have a belief system that this really is a tough world, exposure has the potential to hurt us.

All right, so admittedly, this, you know, this whole discussion, there is a lot of speculation here. But on a more surface level, one of the first characteristics that people often notice about the D style is that there's a certain tough-mindedness. And also related to that, a sense of confidence. In fact, that 360 data that I mentioned earlier, the

number one asset that raters pointed out in D leaders is confidence, you know, far, far more than any other DiSC® style. And if you have a D style, you may very well be aware of the insecurities that are going through your head. But to the outside world, you probably even come across as much more confident than you realize you're coming across.

The second highest rated asset for the D style was taking charge. Again, much higher than any other style. And this feeds back to one of those core needs that we talked about at the beginning, the need for control. And really, if you mix a need for control with high confidence, you're going to have someone who really takes charge. Like we talked about before, if I'm going to make my life count for something, I need to be able to shape my environment. And if I do have this vision in my head that's so clear, I'm going to feel like I'm in the best position to take charge. And, you know, I almost feel like if everyone would just follow my lead, we're going to succeed.

And in a lot of situations, that attitude really can be a tremendous asset. In fact, I've been talking about this 360 data. It's based on ratings from managers, peers, direct reports. Let me list out for you the five areas where D leaders do the best, better than really any of the other styles. And then after that, kind of the five areas where they do the worst because they tell a really interesting story. And—and as I read these off, you know, what you'll probably see is that the things that they do well are actually kind of the source of some of their greatest weaknesses.

So. All right, so here they are. The five highest rated, you know, starting with the highest it goes: showing confidence, taking charge, stretching boundaries, setting high expectations, and focusing on results. So in there you see these themes, right, showing strength, making progress, creating movement. But think about—OK, what would be some of the downsides of someone who's overfocusing on these elements, of having too much of these qualities? You know, and here are the areas where the style tends to do the worst: showing diplomacy, showing modesty, creating a positive environment, staying open to input, maintaining composure. Two of the big themes that you see in

here are being inattentive to other people's emotional needs and believing only in my ideas.

And let me tackle the last one first, being overconfident about my ideas almost to the exclusion of other people's ideas. Now, some of this can be about ego, and there's also a part of this, which is kind of about that attentiveness to power dynamics. If I'm really aware and mindful of who's in charge at all times, it makes sense that, you know, I'm going to speak more forcefully, more assuredly, more authoritatively, you know, perhaps in a way that really doesn't leave much room for dissent. Certainly, I let people know that if they're going to openly disagree with me, they're going to get some pushback.

All right. But I also think there's another part, and oddly, it relates to this kind of sense of urgency with the D style. You know, if I've got a drive to keep things moving, it will definitely seem kind of inefficient to give attention to ideas that don't immediately strike me as appealing or as a good fit. Frankly, I don't have time to entertain every idea, regardless of its quality. But the problem is that my threshold for what's worth exploring—that can be really, really high. You know, if, for instance, I have an idea that came out of my head, you know, it makes sense to me. I see how all the pieces fit together. I know all the background information.

If someone else presents a different idea, though, I don't immediately have all that background. The connective tissue isn't as obvious. It's going to take a while for me to step outside myself and fully see things from that other person's point of view, to digest all of the context that led them to their conclusion. So if I really want to keep things moving, you know, guess which idea I'm going to find more appealing. It feels much more efficient having all of that computing taking place in one central computer, which is basically my head, right, and simply telling other people what to do. Again, reflecting this belief that the world really would just run so much more smoothly if everyone would just listen to me.

But what's the cost of that? You know, one is that people kind of slowly learn that the only opinion that really counts is mine, especially if I'm the leader. Now, not only do they feel like their ideas are ignored, but worse, they keep their mouths shut because they don't want to be made to feel stupid. You know, people's ideas, they're kind of like their children, you know, getting one ruthlessly shot down—it's—it's personal and, you know, it's kind of demoralizing. And people stop subjecting themselves to that after a while. You know, people need to feel that their leader genuinely listens to them and genuinely values what they have to say. And this is actually why an area like staying open to input is actually so correlated with overall ratings of leadership success.

Now, I think there is sometimes, you know, D leaders try to get away with, you know, picking up tricks to make people believe that they're being listened to. Um, you know, maybe asking people for their opinions, but at the same time, knowing full well that I'm just going to plow ahead with my idea anyway. You know, the real challenge for the D leader is about shifting my thinking, you know, disciplining myself to—to step away from my own ideas long enough so that I can really, really absorb this other perspective, even if it doesn't immediately appeal to me. Because, frankly, even beyond the interpersonal side of this, research into good decision making, you know, again and again and again, it—it points to the benefits of getting multiple perspectives on a topic.

And related to this and related to some degree to the D's attentiveness to power dynamics, is how people with less power are regarded and treated. And really, no matter who you are, you know, all people, there's kind of this tendency to give the most attention to people who have the most power. It's really—it's written into our DNA. But this instinct, it can be particularly pronounced for the D style. The temptation is kind of to almost dismiss people who really don't have as much formal authority, or people who have less social presence, or who are less assertive. You know, kind of see them, eh, potentially as people who can be delegated to, but not really given full consideration when it comes to making decisions.

And, you know, to be fair, it really can legitimately be frustrating sometimes when it's so much more difficult, or it's so time consuming to get, you know, opinions and ideas out of people, you know, particularly people who are more reserved. But there's also kind of a certain social cost that occurs when people feel like they're kind of ignored again and again. You know, sometimes it's resentment, um, sometimes it's people shutting down. But it really is kind of worth, if you have a D style, maybe this fits for you, maybe it doesn't. But it really is worth being mindful of, because, like I said, it's a temptation that, regardless of your style, we're all born with.

So let's pull back out again to the big picture, you know, this is where these core needs we were talking about at the beginning, the need for control, the need to be strong, the need for progress. The one I haven't gotten into as much is the one that's probably the least socially desirable. And, you know, that's the need to be on top. And socially speaking, it's a need that—that, you know, it's really valued in some situations, like in a competition. But in other situations, you know, we often get the message that, oh, you know, you shouldn't think in those terms. It's arrogant or it's selfish to think that way.

And the truth is, I think there are both positives and negatives to a need like this. You know, on the positive, it's basically all the really good stuff that comes from being competitive. Competition, you know, it brings out vigor, and passion, and determination. And it's kind of like this, this internal furnace that powers someone to just, you know, push and push and push even when other people, you know, everyone else is just said to themselves, "Well, yeah, that's good enough." You know, and I could go on and on here about the value of competitiveness. But, you know, it's a topic that I think is pretty well celebrated in pop culture and motivational posters, right? You know, needless to say, it's a—it's a—it's a really good asset. It's a great asset. And it's one that's particularly strong with the D style.

And so then there's this other side to the need to be on top. And especially in conflict or when things get heated, it can be problematic. You know, for instance, like creating win-lose scenarios where the other person is really forced to either fight or to back down.

And for some people with the D style, I think some of them have found, whether they acknowledge it or not, you know, that intimidation really can be kind of a useful tool for getting things done. You know, if I maintain a forceful, kind of matter-of-fact, commanding method of communicating my ideas, people will feel that there's little room for disagreement.

It's a method of arguing that's aggressive enough that it really takes others an extraordinary level of energy and gumption to do battle with me. You know, and I know that others typically have a lower capacity for fighting or for resisting. You know, I know I can wear them down. And as a result, a lot of people will just capitulate. You know, it's easier. And frankly, there really is you know, there's no upside in arguing a point with me if I do always get my way.

You know, when I think about successful leaders, I think a lot of people with strong personalities, they really kind of—they find that they need to be deliberate about asking questions, about paraphrasing the ideas that other people have, creating space for people to find their ideas based on their own experience and find the words to articulate them. But, you know, as we talked about, this is tough to do when there's that voice in the back of my head that's saying, "We just got to keep moving." And also that other voice that says, "I really want to control where this whole thing goes."

All right, so back to this idea of being on top, which, again, I think it's most pronounced when, you know, someone's really directly opposing me or challenging me. You know, and it's those times where compromise feels like losing, not—not just because the actual decision would be worse for it, but also partly because this person was clearly not shown that I won. You know, I may get so wrapped up in my anger in the moment and the desire to put the other person in their place, that the long-term consequences of what I do in this moment, they don't really matter. You know, things that I rationally should know very well, but the passion is so great that these consequences, they don't really have much power to temper my behavior in the moment. And it can be really

difficult to control this rush of emotion, you know, particularly an emotion as strong as anger.

I think there's a really, really powerful, kind of colorful example of this in the movie, A Few Good Men. You have the Jack Nicholson character who has this extremely D personality, right? Like, really extreme. You know, this is a guy who does not like having his authority questioned. Again, this is an extreme example. But he sees this young lawyer challenging him, and it feels like this tremendous insult. To him, it feels like this lawyer is trying to get him to submit. And he injects this power struggle into the situation, Nicholson does, because of really because of his own insecurities. You know, it's—it's a power struggle that most other people wouldn't have created in this situation.

But to Nicholson, right, not completely undoing this other lawyer, not completely crushing this person who dares to challenge him—that's a humiliating loss. You know, it'd eat away at him, and it would leave him stewing at night. And all the normal checks, you know, the things like love, or fear, or self-preservation that would normally keep a person from really going full throttle on vindictiveness, you know, those things get pushed into the background at that moment because all he's thinking about is putting down this person who's trying to humiliate him.

So, you know, basically, in the end, the lawyer, Tom Cruise's character, if you've seen the movie, he—he uses Nicholson's lack of restraint against him. He deliberately gets Nicholson worked up, betting on the chance that this guy will lose sight of his best long-term interest and say something that's really self-incriminating. You know, and it's a—it's a really great ending to a movie.

And again, this is almost a caricature of the D style. But you can probably imagine how this mentality might manifest itself in a lot more subtle ways. I think a much more subtle occurrence is people with the D style getting very tense when they sense other people are trying to control them. And of course, you know, most people—most of us don't like being controlled, but there's a particularly strong aversion in the D style. And I think

probably even more than that, there's a much higher sensitivity to thinking that the other person is probably trying to control them. You know, in other words, they're much more likely to see someone's actions as controlling even when that wasn't really the other person's intention or motivation at all.

And we talked about this before. You know, even subtle social expectations can feel like a form of control, like the expectation to praise someone, or the expectation that I need to be tactful, the idea that I should soften my words or modify my tone to meet someone else's emotional needs. And so, you know, a natural reaction is to resist that control. You know, if there's even a hint that they're being manipulated, most people with the D style, they're going to put up some pretty strong resistance. You know, it's kind of a slightly different issue, like if someone is being overly flattering, right.

Actually and I think, in fact, attempts at subtle influence can feel much more insulting than direct influence because—because if you're directly trying to influence me, you're putting your cards out on the table. You're respecting my decision making ability by being up front. You're presenting me with a conscious choice. But if you're being subtle about it, you're trying to, kind of, circumvent my decision making ability, which is actually much more controlling and much more insulting.

Now, this—this ties back a little bit to a topic we were talking about earlier, an assumption about how the world works: that the world is, in fact, not always a friendly place. That, you know, a person needs to be strong, and they need to be in control to navigate the world, right? But there's also kind of an inherent skepticism here, at least more skepticism than the average person has. And—and I—in fact, I think there's sometimes an assumption that these other kind of more non-skeptical people, that they're being naive. You know, that other people well, they don't really know what I know about the world—they don't really know the real state of affairs.

You know, I see things for what they really are. And other people are kind of naively blinded sometimes, you know, sometimes by stupidity, maybe by their insecurities, kind

of their wishful thinking, maybe even kind of a phony adherence to these unnecessary social conventions, like, you know, being falsely humble or falsely polite. You know, and other people show this kind of excessive tactfulness because, well, you know, they just want to be seen as nice and that's what they've been taught to do, but that's not the real world. So I might be seen as arrogant or rude, but that's because I'm cutting through all of the B.S. that other people cling to.

And I think this—the kind of a more mindset that I'm describing here, this can kind of lead to one of the kind of core behaviors of the D style, which is being direct, sometimes blunt. Again, you might see me as rude, but I'm telling it like it is. I'm being honest. I'm making it clear what I think. And it's so much more efficient to do it that way. And I don't want to have to guess what you're thinking either. I want you to be frank, too. Also, I don't want to have to waste all of this mental energy trying to figure out the exact right words that aren't going to hurt your feelings. You know, that's exhausting. And, you know, it just slows me down. It slows things down.

And—and frankly, it's also a little bit controlling. Really, you know, wouldn't it just be a better world if everyone could kind of just toughen up a little bit? You know, people, you know, grown ups, they should be strong enough to hear the truth. And there really is you know, there's a—there's a powerful argument to be made there. And there's a tremendous amount of value in being candid because I think there's a lot of miscommunication and inefficiency that goes on when people have to guess what other people are thinking.

I do want to take some time, though, to talk about how this argument that I just made, how it can be taken and maybe twisted and maybe just a little bit in a way that allows me to rationalize or justify some unhealthy behaviors in the name of being truthful or honest. For instance, is there a difference between being blunt and being honest? Because there are times when a person can choose two different ways of communicating a truth, one that's blunt and one that's diplomatic, you know, both of which are equally honest, both of which clearly communicate the message.

But the blunt option sometimes has the danger of triggering someone's defenses, and actually it closes them up to hearing the real message. So the question I want to ask: In those circumstances where the blunt and the diplomatic communications are both equally clear and equally honest, why would someone choose the blunt option? So let me—let me throw out a few options. One that we've already talked about before is that maybe I just don't want to take the time and the mental energy to choose my words.

Because what does diplomacy involve? It involves first putting myself in the other person's shoes and imagining how they'll react. And then it involves choosing my words, you know, the words that will simultaneously communicate what I want to say, without putting the other person off more than is absolutely necessary. And that's work. You know, it's—it's no wonder why some people say, you know, "To hell with it. I'm just going to choose to blurt it out. It's their problem if they can't take it."

I think another reason why some people might choose the blunt option, although I think most of us wouldn't necessarily want to admit this is the reason, is because kind of being blunt can feel a lot more powerful. You know, it's a way to kind of indulge my irritation, or frustration, or anger, or even disgust at something that bothers me. You know, I might tell myself that I'm just being fair or honest, but emotionally does it any way feel good to be really blunt with someone? You know, does it feel empowering?

For instance, let's take this as an example. Which of the following statements feels more empowering to say. All right, so here's the first one: "I think sometimes you're not putting as much effort in as the rest of the people on this team." OK, so compare that to this statement: "You're being lazy." The second one, it's a lot more gratifying to say, if I'm a little irritated. And I can tell myself that I said it that way because I wanted to be direct and honest. But the first option is really just as clear, but it doesn't have all of the potential negative side effects. It just doesn't feel as good to say. A hint of aggression in there also has a sense of power and control to it, and, you know, and that kind of feels good. Like we talked about earlier.

There's a—you know, there's a strong need for strength and control in the D style, so to speak in a way that empowers both of these needs, well, that feels good. You know, I'm getting my needs met. And so the key here is to be honest with myself about why I'm being direct or blunt, especially if it's a sensitive situation. You know how much of it is because the direct statement is just more clear and understandable, versus how much of it is because, you know, even if I don't like to admit it, it kind of feels better for me to be blunt. Or it's easier, again for me, to be blunt. Really, it's just about understanding my real motivations, so I can make more deliberate choices about how I act.

OK, so then there's one final aspect of this skepticism that I want to address before wrapping up, and it's kind of the counterpart to being blunt. It's really the nonverbals that the D style often gives off that can, you know, often influence people even without knowing that I'm influencing people by doing it. And actually, it's particularly influencing if you combine, you know, my skepticism with my assertive personality. And then even on top of that, it's even more influential if I'm in a leadership position. If I'm a leader or in any position of authority, I'm in a particularly powerful position. You know, people pay a lot more attention to my moods or, you know, what they perceive to be my moods, than I'm ever going to realize. You know, a slight eye roll or an exaggerated sigh, you know, that—that small behavior, that's going to get analyzed and replayed over and over again in the heads of the other people who follow me.

You know, and even more than that, expressions of anger or irritation, things like a raised voice, those are going to have an even more drastic impact. And this can create a—you know, a pretty stressful environment where people aren't really secure about where they stand with me. And so if you have a D style and you're in a role of authority, it is you know, it's worth considering, what's the emotional vibe that you're giving off? Really, part of having an engaged workplace is people feeling good about the place they show up to work every day.

And, you know, more specifically, they shouldn't want to avoid running into their leader in the hall. Their blood pressure shouldn't rise when the leader calls on the phone, you

know? And of course, it's a bit of an exaggeration. But in talking to a number of people with D styles, they don't often recognize the intensity of the vibe that they give off. You know, particularly when that vibe is more skeptical in nature. You know, that can really be stressful for the people around them, especially for the other people who really value things like harmony and stability in their worlds.

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

And so let me give you kind of a reminder of these assumptions. They were things like, "I should always be doing something useful." "I'm valuable because I accomplish." "If I'm not in control, I open myself up to disaster," "I should never project vulnerability." "Everybody needs to respect me." And maybe some of these you don't agree with at all, maybe you can just see a little bit of—of those in you, the whole exercise is about becoming more aware of when these assumptions are driving our behavior, our thoughts, or emotions. You know, sometimes they're realistic, sometimes they're not.

But really, the first step is just about becoming consciously aware of them so that I can make decisions and choices in a more deliberate fashion. And if the assumption is realistic in the situation, then great, you know, I run with it. But if it's not, then I learn to challenge it and replace it with a statement that's more accurate or more fitting for the circumstances. And this absolutely takes some time and deliberate effort. But ultimately, at the end of the whole thing, 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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