

DiSC: A Tool to Enhance Team Communication

By Jesse McCurry

People are different. Personality styles and approaches to communication, while making us unique, can also create tension and uncertainty in the workplace. Rather than letting unstated differences go unchecked, a tool exists to identify, appreciate and build on those differences.

"We've found a tool that has very much become part of our firm culture," says Donna Funk, member of Kennedy and Coe LLC. "It helps new employees and supervisors alike communicate better for the benefit of the client."

DiSC, a behavioral assessment, has been used for years by more than 50 million people. A group of psychological tests developed by John Geier and based on the 1928 work of psychologist William Moulton Marston, the four-quadrant model tests four aspects of behavior by exploring one's preferences in word associations. DiSC is an acronym for Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Conscientiousness.

Ethanol managers need tested tools not only to enhance plant production but also to enhance their most critical resource: their people.

"When it comes to behavioral styles, there is no right or wrong," says Robyn Heinz, human resource consultant at Kennedy and Coe. "We just have to recognize the differences and adapt our approach to fit the style of the person we are working with."

Many organizations utilize DiSC for supervisor training, coaching and employee development. The results inform employees what his/her dominant style(s) are and supervisors can use the framework to make informed choices on how to deliver tough messages and resolve conflict. For example, high "Ds" tend to be forceful, strong willed, driving and ambitious. A high "S" tends to be more calm, patient, predictable and unemotional. One can imagine a situation where these two personality types might clash. The role of DiSC is not to say one style is better than another. It is a tool to help us recognize the differences and provide strategies for mitigating



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and building on those differences.

High "Ds" can be dealt with by focusing on results, and by providing options so that they don't feel a loss of control. High "Is" want people's involvement and recognition, and they fear rejection or loss of approval. A supervisor will know that a staffer who scores high in this category will tend to wing it, trust people over facts, and tend to be disorganized. Each personality trait has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses.

Understanding the different behavioral styles is a powerful tool that can also be applied in sales and vendor relationships. An ethanol plant employee may need

to secure a piece of land for an expansion. If the seller of land is conscientious, one will learn to key in on performance, logic, questions that will allow the seller to demonstrate their knowledge, and respond to requests with information and evidence.

A chief executive officer can use lessons from DiSC in governance issues. If a board member is unusually blunt and focused on the bottom line, strategies exist to enhance communication by focusing on efficiency and results. Rather than get defensive, DiSC teaches an appreciation of differences in behavioral styles and enhances team communication skills.

Supervisors have the most day-to-day contact with your employees, and good communication is one of the keys to their success and that of your organization. DiSC is a powerful communication tool that allows people to understand themselves and how to adapt their approach to maximize their relationships with others.

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