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excerpt from

DEMYSTIFYING DiSC[®]

How to Understand the
DiSC Behavioral Model
and Explain it to Others

KEITH AYERS

A hand holding a magnifying glass over the text 'DEMISTIFYING DiSC®'. The magnifying glass is positioned over the word 'DiSC', which is written in a stylized orange font. The word 'DEMISTIFYING' is written in a larger, bold, orange font above it. The background is a solid light yellow color.

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Chapter 1

The Whole Person Concept

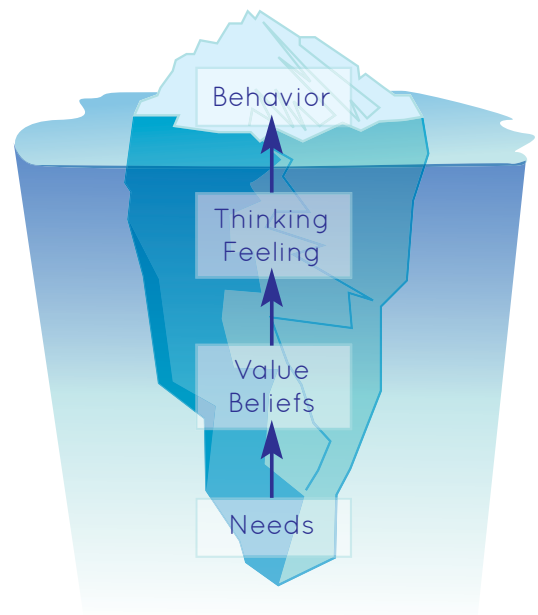
Do you know how your behavior is perceived by your coworkers? Everything you do at work creates a climate around you that determines how other people feel about being around you and how comfortable they are working with you. If you are in a leadership role, this is even more important for you to be aware of. How people feel about coming to work every day is largely determined by the climate their immediate manager creates. But even if you are not a manager, you need to know that your behavior affects your coworkers, and the productivity of your team. Do you want to have a positive impact, or a negative impact? It is important to be able to take a step back and look at yourself objectively, and the Whole Person Concept can help you do that.

Have you ever noticed that wherever you go, there you are? All of you! This is not some existential question designed to confuse you. Take it literally. You know you cannot leave part of yourself at home when you go to work. You are a *whole* person. The Whole Person Concept is a simple way of understanding what you take with you everywhere you go and how others see you. I also refer to the Whole Person Concept as the *iceberg model*, because, as you can see in the graphic, people have a lot in common with icebergs.

There are four aspects to the Whole Person Concept:

- Behavior
- Thinking and feeling
- Values and beliefs
- Needs

The Whole Person Concept



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Behavior

Scientists say only about one-seventh of the entire iceberg mass, just the tip, is obvious and visible above the waterline; the rest is beneath the surface. People are like that too. Your behavior is the tip of the iceberg because that is what everybody else can see. When you meet people for the first time, all you can see is their behavior; you really don't know anything else about them. You only have their behavior by which to attempt to understand them and figure out how you want to relate to them. That is one of the primary benefits of the DiSC model—it describes behavior that is easy to observe in others, which makes it a very practical tool for managers, salespeople, and customer service staff.

But there is so much more to people than their behavior and so many things going on below the waterline that you can't see. I am sure you can think of people who are a complete mystery to you. You look at them and say to yourself, "Why do they do that? That just doesn't make any sense to me."

Their behavior doesn't make sense to you because what's going on inside them is very different from what goes on inside you. So, if you are going to create a positive climate around you, and one that gets positive responses, you need to understand your behavior, and what is going on underneath the surface that drives it. This will also help you understand how your behavior can be misinterpreted by people with different DiSC profiles from you, who look at your behavior and say, "Why does she do that?" or "Why did he say that?"

Thinking and Feeling

Everything you do happens because you think you should do it, or because you feel like doing it. The *thinking and feeling* aspect lies just below the waterline of the Whole Person Concept. In many ways, thinking and feeling are inseparable. When you think about something, you have feelings associated with that thought. When you think about something you love to do, hopefully your work, you feel energized and enthusiastic. But when you think about something you hate to do, hopefully not your work, you experience feelings of dread and you may want to avoid doing it.

You also have thoughts about your feelings. When you are feeling angry with people, you are likely to be thinking about all the reasons why you should be angry with them, why they should not have done what they did. Or, you could be questioning your *feelings*: "Why am I getting so angry over something so insignificant?"

Even though they are so closely linked, thinking and feeling often come into conflict. Have you ever woken up and not felt like getting out of bed? That question is rhetorical; of course you have. What do you do? Do you hit the snooze button and go back to sleep because that is what you feel like doing, or do you drag yourself

out of bed and get ready for work because you think you should? Hopefully, your feelings about facing the day change by the time you get to work. If not, then what do your employers and customers get from you? Someone who is going through the motions with no enthusiasm, no commitment, and certainly no passion!

At the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, I was a sprinter and 220-yard hurdler on the track team. At training one night the week before the National Inter-Varsity Championships, I had absolutely zero motivation to train. I told my coach how I was feeling, and being the wise coach that he was, he suggested I jog a few laps to warm up and then see how I felt. He was right! After a few laps and some short sprints, I really felt like training, and I had a great workout. I subsequently finished second in the 220 yards hurdles final. The same idea probably holds true for you when you don't feel like going to the gym to work out. You think you should, and, once you get there, most of the time you are glad you did. Start doing what you believe you should be doing and let your feelings catch up. But always be aware of how your thinking and feeling are affecting your behavior.

Values and Beliefs

We are more complex than merely our thinking, feeling, and behavior. Deeper motives stir within us: our *values* and *beliefs*. Like thinking and feeling, they are interconnected. A value is something you believe in and it serves as a compass for how you think and feel. If you value honesty, then you no doubt have established beliefs about what honesty is, what it means to you, and what you believe to be right or wrong. When someone does something wrong according to your standards of honesty, it impacts how you feel and think about that person, and maybe how you behave towards him or her as well.

The difference between a belief and a thought is that beliefs are thoughts that became a fact. When you first hear something, you mull it over a bit then decide upon its validity as a truthful statement. You say, "I agree with that. It's a fact." Once you've made that decision, it is no longer just a thought, it is a belief. Beliefs are much deeper down in the iceberg than thoughts. They are more personal and exist closer to the core of your being. You make decisions based on your beliefs and values all the time without questioning them.

But beliefs are not always right. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples of a mistaken belief occurred in Europe just before the Renaissance when, until the publication of **De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium** in 1530 by Nicolas Copernicus, people believed the earth was a fixed, immovable mass located at the center of the universe with the sun and stars revolving around it. Copernicus refuted this belief, citing astronomical and mathematical evidence that the earth revolved around the sun, but he did not publish his work at the time because it went against the philosophical and religious teaching of the time that mankind was the center of the universe.

After his death, two other Italian scientists, Galileo and Giordano Bruno, published work based on Copernican theory only to find that the Church was still not ready to believe it. Bruno was burned at the stake in 1600 and Galileo was imprisoned for life, albeit comfortably, in 1633. The world leaders at that time operated on beliefs that were false, but they were so convinced they were right that they were willing to put to death anyone with alternative views. Of course, we now have scientific evidence that the sun is the center of our solar system, but the fact that people stubbornly held on to their beliefs for so long, even though they were false, shows how our beliefs can potentially stand in the way of progress.

What are your beliefs about what it takes to create a great workplace and achieve outstanding results? If some of your beliefs have actually prevented you from getting the best possible performance out of yourself, your team, or your organization, are you willing to question what you believe to be true? I'm not asking you to throw out your beliefs. What I am suggesting is that there is real value in being open-minded enough to question your beliefs. If you are right, you will be even more certain of it by being open to the possibility of being wrong.

Differences in values and beliefs are the cause of so much unnecessary conflict in the world. It is very important to understand that if someone else's beliefs vary from your own, it does not mean that person is wrong and you are right. I was brought up in the Salvation Army religion, believing that smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol were sins—they destroy God's holy temple: my body. Yet they are not sins in the Catholic Church. Who is right? Ok, so enough about religion, but I hope you get my point. Every belief you have about the way people should behave or how work should be done are your beliefs that you got from somewhere and decided to believe in. That doesn't mean you are right. Other people hold opposite beliefs, and they are convinced they are right. It may be that you are right. It may be that you are both right. What is more important, to be right, or to be effective? Effective people are open-minded enough to listen to other people's points of view and are willing to question their own beliefs.

The key to minimizing values-based conflict in the workplace is to focus on the values you and your coworkers have in common. Yes you will have different values based on ethnic, cultural, gender, and generational differences. But there are many values that all people share. For example, everyone wants to be respected—so make respect a value that all your team members are committed to. Everyone wants to make a difference, to know that what they do is significant. Why not have a discussion with your team about the values that are important to them and draw up a list that is important to everyone.

Needs

At the bottom of the iceberg, at our core, are our *needs*. Needs are the most instinctive part of us. These are necessities like eating, drinking, and breathing that spring from something primal in us all. Eating is a good example of how our needs connect with our behavior, thinking and feeling, and values and beliefs. When we are hungry, we eat. Eating is the behavior that satisfies our need. Sometimes these needs are filtered by your beliefs and values before you act to satisfy them. When you're hungry, you don't necessarily grab the first edible thing in sight because you feel like it. You may believe it is not good for you, so you choose something more appropriate to eat. The need to eat is there, nonetheless, and must be satisfied.

Some needs are more instinctive and go straight through from needs to feelings to behavior, bypassing values, beliefs and thinking altogether. For example, if you see something flying through the air towards your head, you will instinctively duck. You don't have time to check out your beliefs or even to think—you just react. None of us is born with values and beliefs because the cognitive thinking part of the brain is not yet functional at that stage; we have no language, only primal needs, feelings, and behavior. As babies, when our needs were satisfied, we felt happy, content with sleeping, playing, laughing, crawling around, and just being inquisitive. When our needs were not met, however, we were not satisfied and acted accordingly. In other words, we cried.

Unfortunately, some adults still operate in such a basic and primal way. They do not think about their actions; they merely react to their needs and feelings without having learned to manage their emotions. Yelling and screaming at people is inappropriate behavior in the workplace or, for that matter, anywhere, except perhaps when you are a spectator at a football match. It accomplishes nothing positive in the long term, especially if the goal is to create a great workplace. Yet, I hear stories all the time about managers who yell and scream to get employees to do what they say.

Why? To regain control when they feel they are losing control. They are control freaks! Those who work with them will do just about anything to make sure their managers don't yell and scream again. So it works—in the short term. People who scream at other people are a liability to the organization, no matter what they are producing. It also seems very immature to have no more emotional control than a baby!

Two Sources of Motivation

I have found this Whole Person Concept very helpful for increasing emotional intelligence (EQ)—my own, and those I provide coaching and training for. The starting point for EQ is *self-awareness*. What better way to increase self-awareness than to understand what your needs and values are, how they influence your thinking and feeling, and the impact they have on your behavior.

So first, you need to understand the two primary sources of motivation—*needs* and *values*.

Needs Motivation is doing what makes you happy, makes you money, gets you recognition, gets you affection, earns you respect, or achieves results. Unsatisfied needs create desire or fear, driving you to get the need met. When you are thirsty, your desire to satisfy this need will motivate you to get something to quench the thirst. When you feel like you have lost control of a situation, your fear of losing control kicks in and you retake control.

Notice that in each of these examples, you satisfied the need by doing something through your behavior. The only way you can satisfy your own needs is through your own behavior, even if that need is going to be satisfied by someone else. For example, we all need affection from time to time. The way to get this need satisfied is not by sitting around, waiting for someone to give you affection. You meet the need by doing something that will get someone else to want to give you affection. This applies to any need you have. You usually have to do something to get the need satisfied.

DiSC is a Needs-driven Behavioral Model

People don't walk around thinking: "I might just use my dominance behavior on this person who is irritating me." It doesn't happen that way. They get irritated with someone, become impatient, and act it out in some typically high dominance way of behaving. DiSC behavior is instinctive. We do it without thinking because it satisfies our instinctive needs at the bottom of the iceberg.

Values motivation, on the other hand, is doing what you believe you should do, what you believe is right, and what you believe is appropriate. It may not suit your short-term needs at the time—but it will serve you in the long haul. For example, I'm sitting in my office working on a writing project and can see that it is a beautiful sunny day outside. I would really love to be out there playing golf—that would make me very happy. But then I have made a commitment to others that I will finish this project today, so I stay and do it. It is not uncommon to have some internal conflict between needs and values.

Because your behavior has an impact on those around you, the people you live with and work with, it would help you a lot to understand what your needs and values are, how they influence your thinking and feeling, and ultimately your behavior. If you want your coworkers to work well with you and give their best every day, then you need to be aware of your own behavior and the impact you have on your work relationships.

You do that by creating a balance between the natural instinctive drives of your DiSC profile, and a level of flexibility and adaptability driven by your values and your belief that it is important to behave appropriately and effectively.

The Instinctive Drives Behind Your DiSC Profile

It surprises those who know me now that when I was a boy, I had an explosive temper. Until I was eight or nine years old, I easily flew into fits of rage at the slightest provocation, most often as the result of my older brother, Kevin. He knew which buttons to push and when he did, I could be a dangerous ball of rage. Once, Kevin locked me out of the house after I chased him around the yard, trying to hit him for teasing me. I was so angry at him for locking me out that I punched the glass door so hard it shattered. I was not cut or seriously hurt, but I got into a heap of trouble for breaking the glass. My mother repeatedly told me what a bad-tempered little boy I was, and this was just another example. But as far as I was concerned, I was a really nice person with many friends who liked me. I did not see myself as bad-tempered—it was all my brother's fault! If he hadn't teased me, then I wouldn't have reacted the way I did. I vehemently denied that I had a bad temper and got defensive about it when my mother brought it up.

Breaking the glass door was a wake-up call for me. I realized that I did lose control of my emotions and behavior and that I could be dangerous. In fact, I became quite afraid of what else I might do if I did not learn to control myself. I was not in a position to change that aspect of my behavior until I accepted the fact that I did have a bad temper! Interestingly enough, once I accepted responsibility for my own reactions, my brother's teasing did not have the same effect and he eventually stopped. We have been the best of friends ever since.

How well do you know yourself? Have you ever had someone tell you something about yourself you thought was untrue? When people give you feedback you don't agree with, how do you respond? Do you reject it outright and tell them they don't know what they are talking about? Or are you open to exploring the situation to see whether it may be something you didn't realize about yourself?

I am a very keen golfer and play at least once if not twice a week, weather permitting. I have been a student of the golf swing since taking up the sport and continue to take lessons every few months because I believe my handicap does not reflect my true potential. I know what a good golf swing looks like and what I need to do to improve, but I still feel that I need a coach to watch me hit a few balls on the range to get a sense of what I am doing and where the ball's going. Afterwards, my coach and I go inside and videotape my swing from different angles. When we sit down to watch my swing on the monitor, I immediately see what I do that causes the bad shots, even before my coach says anything. It felt like I was doing what I should be doing when I was swinging, but the reality was, I was doing something different. Every successful

golfer, even Tiger Woods, has a swing coach. Why? Other people see things in our behavior that we can't see.

When we add the DiSC Model to this situation, not only does the other person see things that I may not be aware that I am doing, they also may interpret that behavior very differently depending on their DiSC behavioral style.

Your self-awareness is primarily inside of you, below the waterline, and your behavior is on the outside for others to see, at the tip of the iceberg. You are far more aware of what you think and feel than you can be about your behavior. How aware are you of the degree to which your feelings impact your behavior, especially when you are experiencing emotions such as anxiety, anger, or frustration? How aware are you of your values and beliefs and the degree to which they impact the decisions you make? The more aware you are about yourself, that whole person that is you, the more effective you will become.