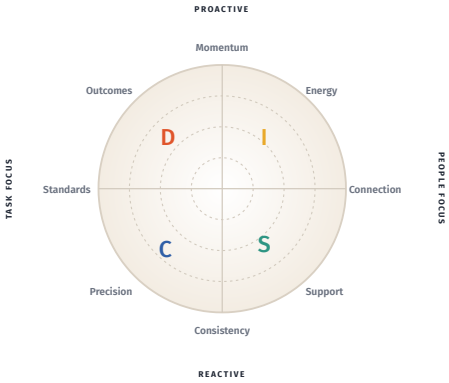
Start with what you reach for first



The idea of four basic temperaments goes back to the ancient Greeks. In 1928, psychologist William Moulton Marston formalised it into the DISC model: a framework for how people direct and express their energy in response to their environment. It describes how you tend to work, not how capable you are. Everyone uses all four; your pattern is the one or two you reach for first, especially under pressure.

Fast or steady
Dominance and Influence lean towards pace and action (proactive). Steadiness and Conscientiousness lean towards care and consistency (reactive).

Task or people
Dominance and Conscientiousness focus on the work. Influence and Steadiness focus on the people doing it.

D Dominance

How directly you push towards a result.

Decisive, direct, competitive, results-first

WHEN OVERUSED
It can land as impatient, blunt, or deciding before others have spoken.

TRY THIS
Keep the clear call. Before you make it, ask "What am I missing?" and wait.

I Influence

How much you work through people and energy.

Enthusiastic, persuasive, sociable, optimistic

WHEN OVERUSED
It can land as unfocused, over-promising, or light on follow-through.

TRY THIS
Keep the energy. End each conversation with who does what by when, in writing.

S Steadiness

How much you value patience, stability and support.

Calm, loyal, patient, dependable

WHEN OVERUSED
It can land as agreeing when you don't, or holding a concern until it has grown.

TRY THIS
Keep the patience. Say the concern you are holding, once, plainly, the same day.

C Conscientiousness

How much you rely on accuracy, quality and logic.

Precise, analytical, careful, systematic

WHEN OVERUSED
It can land as slow, critical, or stuck on a detail others have moved past.

TRY THIS
Keep the standard. Agree what "good enough" means before you start, then stop there.

No result yet? Take the free assessment

Take the free DISC assessment » No purchase needed.

Or go to workspace.professionalleadershipinstitute.com/disc-assessment

Until your result arrives, or with someone whose result you don't have, two questions give a rough orientation:

- When something new lands on you, do you **act first** (proactive) or **wait and weigh** (reactive)?
- Is your first question about **the task** or about **the people**?

An orientation, not a diagnosis. Check it against a recent real situation.

Have a PLI result? How to read it

- Four scores, one per style. Each measures one style on its own, so the four don't add up to 100.
- A score shows how often you rely on a style, not how well you use it. No score is better than another.
- Your highest one or two scores are the styles you lead with. Close scores: consider both.
- Check each description against a recent real situation. If it doesn't fit, trust your experience over the description.

COMPLETED EXAMPLES (FICTIONAL)

With a result: Marcus, shift supervisor at a distribution centre

Result	Dominance 74, Conscientiousness 71, Steadiness 52, Influence 40.
Reads it as	D and C sit close, so he leads with both: task-focused, quick to act, then careful with the detail. Last week's roster fits: he decided fast, then went back over it.
Can land as	"He decides fast, then picks holes in how we did it."
This week	Before posting the next roster he asks the two team leads "What am I missing?" and waits.

Before her result: Priya, project coordinator on a remote team

Recognises	"I wait and weigh, and my first question is how people will take it." Reactive and people-focused, so she starts from Steadiness as a working guess and takes the free assessment this week.
Checked against	Last week's vendor update: she agreed in the meeting, then emailed her concern two days later. That fits.
This week	Say the concern in the meeting, once, plainly.

Your turn

A recent situation, and what I tended to do first

What I bring to it, and how it can land when overused

One adjustment I will try this week, with whom, and when

I will know it helped if

Give people what they need, then check

You'll rarely know someone's exact type, and you don't need to. Spotting which style leads is usually enough to adjust. If they have told you what they need, use that. If not, watch what they reach for first, guess, offer it, and check. One phrase, one bad day or one email is not a diagnosis: people flex, and pressure changes behaviour.

WORKING WITH EVERY STYLE

STYLE	WHAT THEY'RE LIKE	START WITH	AVOID	ASK
D **Dominance** Proactive · Task focus	Fast, direct and results-first. Wants a clear position.	Your view, plainly, and the decision you need	Turning a disagreement into a contest	"What do you need from me?"
I **Influence** Proactive · People focus	Warm and energetic, and talks ideas through out loud. Needs the relationship to feel right.	A minute of genuine connection before business	Cutting off their thinking out loud	"Who else needs to be on board for this to work?"
S **Steadiness** Reactive · People focus	Steady, loyal and careful with change. Rarely says no out loud.	Explain the reason for a change, not just the change	Reading silence as agreement	"What would make this easier for you to do well?"
C **Conscientiousness** Reactive · Task focus	Precise and reserved, and wants the reasoning settled before moving.	Bring the facts and give them time to check	Rushing them to a decision	"What would you need to see to be confident?"

Adapt one real message: four steps

1. Pick one message you need to send this week, to one specific person.
2. Find out what they need. If they have said what is hard to act on, use that; if not, ask a check question (right) first. Can't ask? Guess the style that leads from what they reach for more than once.
3. Rewrite the first two lines to give them what that style needs (the table above). Keep your facts, your request and your deadline; change the order, the opening and the ask.
4. Send it and watch the reply. If it didn't work, ask which is missing: clarity, facts, time, tools, or who can decide. Clearer wording fixes only the first; the others need a different conversation (page 3).

Check questions that work with anyone

- "What would make this easier to act on?"
- "Do you want the short version or the full picture?"
- "Is this a good time, or would you rather have it in writing?"
- "What else do you need from me to decide?"

COMPLETED EXAMPLE (FICTIONAL): PRIYA WRITES TO LENA, HER MANAGER

What Priya has seen One-line replies, decides in meetings: Lena looks proactive and task-focused, so Dominance probably leads.

What she asked first "Do you want the short version or the full picture?" Lena: "Short version, with a recommendation." So: start with her view, plainly, and the decision needed. Same facts and deadline in both messages.

Before

Hi Lena, sorry to add to your plate! The vendor has confirmed their lead time is now 5 weeks, not 3, which might affect the 7 Nov launch. We could keep the vendor and launch 14 Nov, or split the order with a second supplier (about 8% more) and keep 7 Nov. We need to decide by Thursday to hold the slot. Let me know what you think when you get a moment!

After

Lena, decision needed by Thursday: the vendor has confirmed lead time is now 5 weeks, not 3, so the 7 Nov launch moves. Option A: keep the vendor and launch 14 Nov. Option B: split the order with a second supplier, about 8% more, and keep 7 Nov. I recommend B. Do you want the full comparison, or is this enough to decide?

Reply: "B. Send the comparison to finance." Had Lena replied "What is this about?", Priya would ask which was missing (clarity, facts, time or the decision) and adjust.

Your turn

The person, and what they have told me (or what I have seen them reach for)

My check question, or my guess at the style that leads

My new opening lines (same facts, request and deadline)

What the reply showed, and what I will do next

One change, one owner, one date, one check

A 25-minute exercise for a pair or a team, in a room, on a call, or in writing over a week. Nobody has to share a score or a style, and the host takes part rather than running a quiz. It ends with one change the group chose, an owner, a date and a check-in question, confirmed with everyone it affects.

Host script

Before you meet. Pick a recurring moment where communication costs time or goodwill. Invite people; taking part and sharing are voluntary. Say what will be recorded (needs and the change, not scores).

1. **Name the moment** · 5 min
   "Where does the way we communicate cost us time or goodwill?" Agree one specific moment: "the Monday handover", not "communication".
2. **Needs round** · 8 min
   Anyone who wants to answers "In that moment, what do I need?", using what each style needs (page 2: a clear position, connection, the reason for a change, the facts and time to check) or their own words. The host goes first. No styles or scores required.
3. **Choose one change** · 6 min
   Anyone can propose one. Pick the change that gives the most people what they need and that you could notice next week. If you can't agree, the host picks one to trial; a second change gets its own plan.
4. **Owner, approval and date** · 3 min
   Who will make it happen, and by when? The owner volunteers. If it needs sign-off beyond their authority (a rota, a budget), name who can approve it, who will ask, and by when.
5. **Set the check** · 2 min
   Pick a date two to four weeks out and one question: "Did it help, and what did we notice?" Then keep it, adjust it, or drop it.
6. **Confirm with everyone it affects** · after the meeting
   Send the change, owner, date and check to everyone affected who wasn't there; invite concerns by a stated time, then record the agreed version.

When it is not a communication problem

If the moment is really about workload, missing facts or who can decide, say so and log it separately: who can resolve it, the next action within your control, and by when. DISC can make that conversation kinder; it can't fix a short-staffed shift.

Fits your situation

- **Pairs.** The same steps in ten minutes: each names one need, agree one change, set one check.
- **Remote teams.** Run it on a call with a shared document open. The owner types; anyone who missed it confirms in the document by a stated time.
- **Shifts and asynchronous.** Post step 1 on the board or in the group chat and collect needs in writing over a week. The host summarises, the group picks, and step 6 closes the loop with every shift.
- **Larger groups (8+).** Split into groups of four to six and allow ten extra minutes. Each brings one proposed change; the whole group picks one.
- **Coaches and facilitators.** Use the same script. Join the needs round only if you share the work; otherwise let the team own the needs, the change and the approval.

COMPLETED EXAMPLE (FICTIONAL): MARCUS'S DAY AND NIGHT SHIFT LEADS, SIX PEOPLE, IN THE BREAK ROOM

The moment	The 6 pm handover: the night shift finds out about problems from the pick list, not from a person.
Needs heard	"The three things that broke, first." "Warning before the roster changes." "Why the change, not just the change." "Hear it from someone, not just the board."
One change	A three-line note posted 15 minutes before shift end: what broke, what changed, what needs a decision. The outgoing lead reads it out at handover.
Owner and date	Theo drafts the template by Friday; all leads use it from Monday.
Confirmed	Posted on the board and in the night-shift chat; concerns by Thursday. One comes back (it clashes with the truck arrival), so the note moves to 20 minutes before.
Check-in	The shift huddle two Fridays after it starts: "Did the handover get shorter and clearer? What did we miss?"
Separate item	Nights are one picker short on Tuesdays and Thursdays: a staffing decision, not a communication fix. Marcus raises it with operations and asks for a decision by next Friday.

Our plan · one change per plan

The moment	**Needs we heard**
One change (what we will do differently)	**Owner, and by when**
Needs approval from / who asks, by when	**Confirmed with everyone affected by**
Check-in date and question	**Separate items (workload, facts, authority): who, next action, by when**