

Overview and Objectives

Effective communications are essential for any healthy relationship and foundational for effective family business planning to occur. As such, Northwest FCS' business planning process begins with helping family business members understand their own and others' communication styles. There are many types of behavioral assessments available that can be useful in guiding these conversations to identify behavioral and communication preferences. This guide uses concepts from the DiSC assessment which is grounded in decades of behavioral research and utilized by millions of individuals and companies each year.

After completing this guide, participants should:

- Have a basic knowledge of behavioral preferences.
- Recognize the similarities and differences among individuals and the importance of understanding yourself and others.
- Appreciate individual strengths and adapt behavior to create more effective communications.
- Know how to get help and additional resources from Northwest FCS.

Behavioral Styles

The DiSC Model of Behavior was first proposed in 1928 by William Moulton Marston, a physiological psychologist, in his book *Emotions of Normal People*. From his research, Marston theorized that the behavioral expression of emotions could be categorized into four primary types or styles, stemming from the person's perceptions of self in relationship to their environment. His research demonstrated that an individual's behavior tends to be predictable in terms of preferences in conversational tone, gestures, words, decision-making, problem solving and dealing with conflict. Every individual has a unique "style" or blend of styles that represent an opportunity to leverage strengths and understand weaknesses. The four primary styles are described at a high level below:


- **Dominant:** People who have both outgoing and task-oriented traits often exhibit dominant and direct behaviors. They usually focus on results, problem-solving and the bottom-line.
- **Influence/Inspiring:** People who have both outgoing and people-oriented traits often exhibit inspiring and interactive behaviors. They usually focus on interacting with people, having fun, and/or creating excitement.
- **Steady/Supportive:** People who have both reserved and people-oriented traits often exhibit supportive and steady behaviors. They usually focus on preserving relationships and creating or maintaining peace and harmony.
- **Conscientious/Careful:** People who have both reserved and task-oriented traits often exhibit cautious and careful behaviors. They usually focus on facts, rules and correctness.

No DiSC style is "better" than any other. These categories simply help individuals find out which style they tend to gravitate toward most — their comfort zone. With that knowledge, individuals, teams and family members can understand their underlying tendencies and preferences. This provides an opportunity to understand themselves better and adapt behaviors to interact with others more effectively. Effective work teams share appreciation for all styles and optimize each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Assessing Your Own Style

Understanding DiSC styles begins with taking a short online assessment. The assessment provides a report showing where an individual “fits” into the four main personality types. Click here to access the [Everything DiSC Workplace® assessment](#) for a small fee.

Alternatively, families may simply use the table below to review each behavioral style. Often times, a self-assessment can be performed by identifying the descriptions outlined below that most strongly align with one’s own preferences.


	D	i	S	C
Recognize by:	high self-confidence, competition	talkativeness, enthusiasm, optimism, energy	friendship, co-operation persistent, patient	accuracy, cautious, high standards
Prefers work environment to be:	busy, formal	stimulating, personal, friendly	personal, relaxed, friendly	structured, organized, formal
Pace:	faster	faster	slower	slower
Gains security by:	being in control	flexibility and variety	close relationships	preparation
Motivated by: <i>(Outstanding Need)</i>	achievement	social recognition	Acceptance, stability	correctness
Measures progress by:	results	applause, praise	appreciation	getting it right
Fears:	being taken advantage of, loss of control	social rejection	personal rejection, sudden change	criticism of what they do
Irritated by:	inefficiency, indecision, slowness	routine, formality	insensitivity, impatience	surprises, unpredictability
Decisions are:	quick	spontaneous	considerate	deliberate
Major limitations:	impatience, selective listening	lack of follow through	overly modest, resist change	overly critical of self and others
Could increase effectiveness by:	being patient and willing to learn	self-discipline, follow through on tasks	belief in self, being more open to change	being more tolerant of self and others
<p><i>"A person's strength, if overused, can become a weakness."</i></p> <p><i>-John Geier</i></p>	<p><i>"Emphasis Is on shaping the environment by overcoming opposition to accomplish results."</i></p>	<p><i>"Emphasis Is on shaping the environment by influencing or persuading others."</i></p>	<p><i>"Emphasis Is on cooperating with others to carry out the task."</i></p>	<p><i>"Emphasis Is on working conscientiously within existing circumstances to ensure quality and accuracy."</i></p>

Dealing with Conflict

Using DISC to understand preferences in behavioral expression is especially helpful to navigate conversations where conflict may arise. Most unproductive conflict that occurs between people, and the subsequent reduction of productivity, is due to a lack of awareness of behavior style differences and communication preferences. Understanding and valuing each style enables individuals to recognize common responses to conflict.

The table to the right summarizes each style's tendency in response to conflict. Comparing and contrasting these styles can help individuals and teams to:

- Understand individual tendencies.
- Recognize how they are different.
- Adapt behavior to create more effective communication.
- Reduce stress and lead to more constructive outcomes.

 DiSC Profile Responds to Conflict <i>(Fight or Flight)</i>	
"D"- Demands Overly Assertive Autocratic - Unbending Overly-Controlling Strong-Willed Attempts to impose thoughts and feelings on others	"i"- Attacks Explosive Emotionally attacks others and their ideas Uses condemnations and put downs to discredit others Tells people how he/she "feels" about things
D & I – Tends to Vent (<i>Fight</i>)	
S & C – Tends to Suppress (<i>Flight</i>)	
"C"- Avoids Less Assertive Keeps thoughts to self More controlled Withdraws from people and/or undesirable situations, Plans next move	"S"- Complies Gives in to keep peace and reduce conflict Appears to agree with others Tolerates things even though he/she may disagree Desires to save the relationship even if it hurts them the most

Group Discussion Guide

Including all family members and spouses in these discussions is important to ensure transparency, understand all perspectives and to maintain family relationships.

Prepare Participants

- Schedule a dedicated time (1-2 hours depending on the group size) for a focused discussion.
- Recommend listening to the [Family Business Communication episode](#) of the Northwest FCS Strategic Business Planning audio series prior to meeting.
- Provide this Family Business Communication Guide to all participants.
- Consider having all family members complete a DiSC behavioral assessment to share during the session.

Define Roles

- Identify a facilitator to keep the group focused and moving through the discussion.
- Review the meeting ground rules in the Family Business Basics discussion and verify agreement or possible changes.
- Designate one person to take 'official' notes, documenting the discussion and any decisions.

Instructions

- If you ordered a DiSC report, read it in advance of the family meeting. Highlight what resonates most with you from the report and come prepared to share during the meeting.
- Use the space provided below to inventory family perspectives together. Assess milestones and lessons learned and reflect upon how they may be applied to the future.

Assessment Questions	Discussion Notes
Why is understanding each other's behavioral style and communication preferences important?	
What behavioral styles are in our family business? Note: Each participant should share their behavioral style assessment and what is most like them.	
What do you appreciate most about each other's DiSC styles?	
How might a strength be overused and what can be the result?	
What communication preferences work best with your style?	
How does each behavioral style deal with conflict most effectively?	
How might you adjust your behavioral style to work more effectively with others?	
What can we do collectively to make our communications more effective as a family and family business?	
What is the next step in the process (see recommended steps below) and when should we meet again?	

Recommended Next Steps:

- Schedule a dedicated time (1-2 hours depending on the group size) for a focused discussion on Family Business History and Timeline.
- Listen to the [Family Business History and Timeline episode](#) of the Northwest FCS Strategic Business Planning audio series.
- Read the [Family Business History and Timeline Guide](#).

Please share your feedback! [Click here](#) to complete a short two-minute evaluation of this business resources.