

KNOW YOURSELF: THE DISC PROFILE

(from the book *So Many Leaders, So Little Leadership*; to order a copy, please go to the Store section.)

When I was growing up, I would tell people that I wanted to be a priest. I don't know why. There was something attractive about the job and it seemed like you had an inside track on serving God, something I felt called to do.

After graduate school, while working as a financial aid officer for a chain of trade schools, I began to prepare for the ministry. My pastor began to mentor me and expose me to the things I would need to be a successful pastor. I eventually enrolled in a seminary and received a masters and doctorate in pastoral ministries. In 1989, I became pastor of Covenant Church in Orlando, Florida, and pastored that church for four years.

There was only one problem. I found out that I didn't like pastoring. More than that, I discovered that pastoring didn't like me! I was a task-oriented individual functioning in a career and position that required a lot of people-oriented skills. While those skills could be (and were) learned, they still took a lot of energy and generated a lot of stress. I wasn't a happy leader because I wasn't leading where I could utilize my strengths to the fullest.

There was one tool that helped me come to this realization. At the urging of a friend, I completed a profile called "The Personality System" published by The Institute for Motivational Living, Inc., in New Castle, Pennsylvania. This profile is also known by the acronym **DISC** profile, because it identifies four behavioral styles that begin with the letters **DISC**.

First of all, my profile results showed that I was under tremendous stress and pressure trying to be all styles to all people. That's what the ministry can do to someone

who feels the pressure to adapt to everyone's expectations, something I was trying to do to be a "good" pastor. The profile went on to show that I was a "C" style (which stands for compliant, correct, and conscientious) with a "D" style to back that up (the D is short for driving, determined, and dominant). I was a task-oriented individual who liked projects and tasks and the challenges that came with them.

The profile indicated that I was very low in the "I" style (which stands for influencer, a very verbal, relational style) and also low in the "S" style (which stands for steady, secure and one that likes routine and the status quo). In short, I functioned best in a situation that required strong administrative and organizational skills, and less so in a situation that required a lot of interpersonal contact and nurture. I wasn't cut out to be a pastor.

Armed with that information, I resigned the pastorate to take a job with Integrity Music, Inc. as director of their conference and educational division. That began three of the happiest and most fulfilling years of my life. Now that I'm back in church work, I'm more knowledgeable of who I am and who I'm not. Now I do pastoral things but I avoid being drawn into all the activities of the pastorate and maintain a good percentage of my time in the areas of administration, projects management, and team building.

That **DISC** profile caused me to look at who I was and wasn't. It's not a magic profile nor is it perfect or psychologically sophisticated. (If you would like to take this profile, you can go to the **Links** section of this website under the **Leadership** heading). It was enough to get me started on a path of self-understanding that has enhanced my leadership abilities. I stopped trying to be what I wasn't and began to strengthen and improve what I was. That has made me a better and more effective leader.

In one of his most recent books, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*, Peter Drucker addresses this very issue of self-knowledge. Drucker encourages leaders to develop a feedback analysis. This is done “whenever one makes a key decision, and whenever one does a key action, one writes down what one expects will happen. And nine or twelve months later one then feeds back from results or expectations.”¹

From this, Drucker summarizes three *action conclusions* from the feedback analysis:

1. **Concentrate on your strengths.** Place yourself where your strengths can produce your strengths.
2. **Work on improving your strengths.** The feedback analysis rapidly shows where a person needs to improve skills or has to acquire new knowledge. It will show where skills and knowledge are no longer adequate and have to be updated. It will also pinpoint gaps in your knowledge.
3. **Work to correct *disabling ignorance*.** This he describes as areas of weakness that undermine one’s strengths.¹

My profile not only helped me to identify my strengths but also to work on my own disabling ignorance. While my profile showed my task orientation, it also revealed how little I understood people who weren’t like me or where they were “coming from.” I realized how rough I could be working with people who were motivated by relationship and routine—that represented my disabling ignorance.

I began to work on understanding what motivated people unlike me and began to apply what I learned. I was still motivated by my strength of getting the job done, but I

was complementing that strength by learning how to motivate people and win their support. In this way I made my strengths of project management fully productive.

I had to improve my people skills if I was going to be fully productive because the projects I oversee all involve people. To not do that would be to render my strengths useless or less than they could be, and that wasn't acceptable to me.

In knowing myself, I've come to some other conclusions about who I am and am not. I've discovered that:

1. I love to travel, partly because of the challenge it presents that satisfies my "D" style and partly because it gives me uninterrupted chunks of time to read, write and work on projects that require uninterrupted time.
2. I can work with people, but when I do, I need to schedule some "down time" after that to replenish and recharge my "batteries."
3. I am a morning person, working best in the early hours on writing and projects. I need to leave busy work, phone calls, meetings, and follow up for the afternoon.
4. I like working for a big organization where there are lots of activities and opportunities.
5. I'm a city person. I like traffic, people and congestion. The mountains or nature hold no special inspiration for me. I work best when I'm in that setting.
6. I prefer to listen as a way to learn, but I don't mind reading. For me, it's not either/or.

I've included those few personal likes and dislikes to show that I've worked on who I am, worked on knowing myself. I'm still learning, but I've taken seriously Drucker's challenge to self-knowledge.

We will have to learn where we belong, what our strengths are, what we have to learn so that we get the full benefit from it, where our defects are, what we are not good at, where we belong, what our values are. For the first time in human history, we will have to learn to take responsibility for managing ourselves. And as I said, this is probably a much bigger change than any technology—a change in the human condition. Nobody teaches it—no school, no college—and [it] probably will be another hundred years before they teach it.

In the meantime, the achievers—and I don't mean the millionaires, but rather the ones who want to make a contribution, who want to lead a fulfilling life, and want to feel that there is some purpose in their being on this earth—will have to learn something which, only a few years ago, a very few super achievers ever knew. They will have to learn to manage themselves, to build on their strengths, to build on their values.¹

That's what leaders will have to do more and more in the coming years. If you're going to be effective and have people follow you, you must know yourself and not try to be everything to everyone. You will also have to release followers from the same pitfall. If you insist on trying to be superhuman, however, you will find that you're all too human as the wheels of your leadership vehicle come off due to stress, failure or lack of followers.

Do what you must do to learn about who you are and aren't. Build on your strengths and minimize your weaknesses. Don't rely on charisma or special talents to prop up your leadership position. Work to know yourself and then improve from that base of knowledge.