



Behavioral Sales 101

A primer on identifying and leveraging your prospect's natural behavioral style

Background

No two sales prospects are the same. Based on how the human mind is wired, our neural networks and our behavioral preferences, every single person on the planet has their own unique way of thinking, acting and making decisions; including buying decisions.

There are, however, common patterns that can be found that help to place prospects into similar categories based on the natural behavioral styles. One of the most comprehensive and utilized models that studies these categories was created by Dr. William Marston of Harvard. His research into the natural behavioral styles led to the development of the DISC Behavioral model and the associated DISC Index Behavioral Profile developed by Jay Niblick at Wizehire.com.

While the information that can be measured through a DISC assessment is enormously helpful in personal development, hiring and teambuilding, it is also incredibly valuable in sales. Knowing a person's DISC profile helps you understand how they prefer to make buying decisions. Do they like to decide quickly, slowly, are they risk averse, open to change, prefer to lead or be led through the sales process, enjoy a lot of detail or to stick to the high-level picture only?

All of these things are influenced by a person's behavioral profile, and all of them are equally as important to your success in selling to them effectively. The better you know your prospect, the better your chances of making the sale become!

The only limitation is that it isn't very feasible to get your prospect to complete a personality profile simply because *you* would like to be better able to make the sale. Thankfully, the behaviors measured in Marston's model are observable enough that you can at least determine one of four general classifications of buyer from simple conversations with the prospect alone.

This short guide will show you how to read that style in your prospects through just a few minutes of interaction. It will teach you what those four core behavioral types are, how to identify which primary type your prospects are and how to most effectively communicate with them.

Enjoy this new super power and happy selling!

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The Four Unique Buying Styles

Here are the four cardinal buying styles, according to the DISC Theory:

The first buying style is titled Dominant (D).

High D's tend to be direct, driven and decisive. D's are strong-minded, strong-willed people who enjoy challenges, taking action, and immediate results. Their focus tends to be on the bottom line. Dominance is summarized as the factor of control. People with this factor prominent in their behavior tend to focus on the need to achieve and maintain a measure of authority and power over other people and, more specifically, the environment in which they live and work. Competitiveness and ambition are also associated with the D factor, and people showing this element will struggle to achieve their aims in life against great odds. Indeed, they seem to enjoy challenge, and rarely back away from a difficult or risky situation. Dominant individuals are not naturally trusting of others - they will seek to attain success on their own merits without asking for or expecting help or support from those around them. Should a situation arise where the assistance of others is an unavoidable necessity, they will tend to issue orders directly, rather than asking for cooperation.

The second buying style is titled Influencer (I).

High I's tend to be influential, social, optimistic and outgoing. High I's are "people people" who prefer participating on teams, sharing ideas, and entertaining and energizing others. Influence is associated with a sunny, friendly and extroverted approach, being warm and open to other people, sociable and gregarious. As you might expect, high-I's often possess well-developed social skills and an urge to meet and talk with other people. The hardest thing for a High-I to accept is rejection. They need to interact positively with those around them, and their friendly, open style usually helps them to maintain relationships. The socially active nature of the highly Influential person is often an important factor in bringing other less gregarious styles together. By their nature, High-I's are extremely trusting and disingenuous. Their desire to be open with other people can lead them at times to reveal information or express feelings that more staid types might prefer to keep hidden. For this reason, they are sometimes seen as lacking in tact. Nonetheless, their natural communicative abilities often permit them to talk themselves out of any difficult situation resulting from their lack of diplomacy.

The third buying style is titled Steadiness (S).

High S's tend to be steady, stable, sympathetic and cooperative. S's tend to be helpful and team players. They prefer being behind the scenes, working in consistent and predictable ways. They are often good listeners. As the name suggests, those who show a high level of Steadiness take a measured, steady approach to life. They are patient and undemanding, often showing sympathy for and loyalty to those around them. At least in western countries, Steadiness is relatively rare in comparison with the other three factors. While Dominance, Influence and Compliance are evenly spread throughout the population, Steadiness tends to appear less frequently. This is perhaps because the unassuming, amiable behavior associated with this factor tends to be less valued by society than those connected with the other three factors. When Steadiness does appear in a profile, it is more common to find it accompanied by high Compliance than standing alone. Despite this, there are a number of strengths linked to the Steadiness factor. People of this kind are patient and sympathetic listeners, with a real interest in the problems and feelings of others, and are particularly capable of fulfilling support roles. They also have a persistent approach, with powers of concentration that allow them to work steadily at a task. While other profile types might become bored or distracted, the person with high Steadiness will continue to work until they complete an assignment. High-S's are resistant to change, and will prefer to settle into a predictable and constant environment. They have an intrinsically passive approach and work best when given clear instructions and a high level of support. Because of this, they avoid conflict or confrontation if at all possible, and will instead seek to adopt the role of peacemaker if a dispute should break out.

The fourth buying style is titled Compliance (C).

High C's tend to be compliant, conscientious, concerned, cautious and correct. C's usually focus on quality. They plan ahead, constantly check for accuracy, and seek systematic approaches. This is perhaps the most complex of the four factors. Traditionally, High-C's (people showing a high level of Compliance) were categorized simply as 'rule-oriented'. Recent investigation, however, has shown that this is only part of the story, and that the factor represents a far more sophisticated element, as we shall explain in this section. The root of this complexity lies in the combination of Control and Passivity. It is the factor of structure, detail and fact, and those displaying high levels are interested in precision and accuracy. Because they are naturally passive and reticent to speak out unless called on by others, it is often imagined that High-C's are lacking in ambition. In fact, this is not the case - in this specific sense, they are similar to highly Dominant individuals in their desire for control their environment. Because of their passive style, however, they will try to achieve this control using structure and procedure, insisting on rules and defined codes of conduct to achieve their ends. This is the root of the 'rule-oriented' style we mentioned above. Individuals with high levels of Compliance dislike pressure and will tend to adopt an evasive style when confronted with difficult circumstances. In extremely difficult situations, they are prone to disregard problems or delay actions until they become completely unavoidable. The rule-oriented aspect of the High-C often takes in wider aspects of life than simply corporate rule-structures or established procedures. Individuals of this kind usually have personal codes of behavior, and tend to regard etiquette and tradition as important. Because of their inherent desire for fact and detail, it is also common to find that Compliant styles have a relatively broad general knowledge, or specific knowledge or skills. This interest in the way things work means that Compliant individuals are often drawn to technical work or jobs involving the organization of information, situations in which their personal talents can come to the fore.

These are the four buying styles. Next, let's learn how to read your prospect to determine which of these four behavioral types is their primary style. By understanding this, you will be able to communicate with them in the way they prefer. This will increase their receptivity, help them listen more to what you have to say, and put them in a buying mode.

The “Tell”

In poker, players look for what they call the “tell”. This is a unique sign that people make when they have a good hand. Some people touch their hair, while others starts tapping their toes or clearing their throat. If you can learn what a person's “tell” is you can know when they have a good hand and bet accordingly. In behavioral sales, each style has its own “tell”. Learn to see them, and you learn how to communicate with your prospects in the most effective way. To become a real pro at this requires some time and effort, but we're not seeking to make you professional behavioral analysts, just give you some pointers that can help you see a person's behavioral tell.

High D's Tell

In a sales call, high D's are usually:

- Straightforward and up front
- Confident, secure and comfortable speaking out
- Unafraid to confront difficult issues or ask sensitive questions
- Prefer to get straight to the point (no fluff)
- Not big believers in lots of data or specifics
- Want to stick to the 30,000 foot view, not get mired in the minutia

- Interested in practical results you've helped past customers achieve
- In charge, likes to control the process
- Perceived as aggressive
- Hurried or impatient
- Easily distracted
- In a rush

High I's Tell

In a sales call, high I's are usually:

- Very talkative
- Sunny
- Emotional
- Animated
- Open
- Energetic
- Very social and expressive
- Seeking approval
- Not well organized/Timely
- Smooth, good talkers
- Likely to talk more than they listen

High S's Tell

In a sales call, high S's are usually:

- More quiet than D's and I's
- Softer but warmer/friendly
- Less confident, more reserved
- Slow or unhurried, steady
- Unemotional
- Patient or willing to listen
- Ask lots of questions
- Want to know if there is a system or process to follow
- Will want to think about an offer before making a decision

High C's Tell

In a sales call, high C's are usually:

- Very deliberate
- Exacting
- Unemotional
- Somewhat cold or impersonal
- Very specific
- Interested in lots of detail
- Quiet and reserved, and business-like (no social fluff)
- "Perfectionistic" or very accurate
- Analytical
- Methodical

Reading the prospect's style

In the first 5-10 minutes, you should pay specific attention to how people act. Even before you meet them, you can watch their behavior as you approach and see if they are the upright, confident D or I, or the reserved somewhat quieter S or C. This should help you eliminate two of the four and then you can work to narrow it down to the final type.

After you meet them, try to pay attention to how fast they jump right into the questions. High D's and high C's will get there fast, while High I's and S's will talk a lot more. The high D's and C's will not stop to get to know you like the high S's or I's. High D's or C's are more likely to challenge you. The D's will do it because they are gruff and tend to doubt others. The C's will do it because they want so much detail and accuracy. High I's or S's on the other hand, are less likely to challenge you. High I's don't because they love interacting, and that's hard to do when you've pissed someone else off, and high S's don't because they like peace and harmony and dislike direct conflict.

How to effectively communicate with your prospect's behavioral style

Figuring out your prospect's behavioral style is only half the picture. Once you know that, then you have to deliver information in a way that is appropriate to their style. Learning to communicate with them in their language will help make your interview even better.

When selling to high D's:

- Get straight to the point; don't mess around with fluff and social formalities
- Have a sense of urgency; they are usually in a rush
- Leave the jokes at home; it's all business with the high D
- Don't challenge them personally, but be confident and competitive
- Show some competitiveness
- Exhibit a real "go get 'em" attitude, but not over the top because high D's don't like flamboyance
- Keep it simple
- They are open to innovative and novel approaches
- They accept risk better than the other styles
- Be practical, demonstrate how you get results or have won competitions
- Talk business because high D's prefer professional relationships
- Show them how you can take charge when you need to, but they are ultimately in charge
- Demonstrate that you will be the decisive soldier for their cause, representing their best interests aggressively

When selling to high I's:

- Be social, sunny and happy
- Feel free to talk, but not more than they do
- Discuss the prospect and make it personal
- Feel free to lighten things up
- Focus on your ability to communicate with others and understand them
- Show them that you understand people and have diplomacy
- Demonstrate that you will help keep things organized, so they don't have to
- Keep it light, they don't like dark and gloomy
- They are open to innovative and novel approaches

- They aren't risk averse by nature and open to more of it

When selling to a high S:

- Be calm, reserved and don't get too emotional
- Be kind and show respect to everyone you talk about
- Show them how dependable and consistent you are
- High S's will appreciate if you are someone who takes a slow, steady approach and can always be depended on to stick with it to the end
- Don't challenge authority
- They are risk averse by nature, minimize it for them
- Slow and steady wins the day
- Do not push them
- Reinforce how established and reliable you are
- They are not early adopters, tried and true is preferred

When selling to a high C:

- Provide lots of detail and supportive evidence for what you say
- Don't skimp on the specifics
- Show your methodical side, if you have one
- Make up a methodical side, if you don't have one
- Demonstrate accuracy and attention to detail
- Talk about rules, structure and systems in a positive way (e.g., "the regulations are for good reason!")
- Feel free to get analytical
- Respect they are not early adopters and will want time to crunch the numbers and consider the angles before making a decision
- Never be late or forget to deliver something once promised
- Don't tell them they are wrong without a metric ton of evidence; and even then just don't

Start looking for these tell-tale signs on those you're selling to today. It takes practice, and it takes patience, but soon you will realize that you're seeing people in a slightly different way. In the end, however, it will be well worth the effort because understanding your prospect's preferred buying style will help you communicate your value proposition much more effectively.