

# EDM TODAY



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By EDM'ers for EDM'ers



# MANAGEMENT MINUTE

WITH JOE BALLEK, MBA



## BUILDING BETTER TEAMS USING DISC

Our industry has always embraced technology. We continue to change and innovate. Whether it is a new engineering design package, a tooling management system, or a robotic tool changer, we are always looking for ways in which to become more productive. It is true that automation has reduced our dependence on human beings and helped to minimize mistakes, but the success of a company is ultimately determined by the strategic decisions made by management and the ability of all departments to function as a highly cohesive team.

While we are quick to adopt new manufacturing technology, we may find it more difficult to employ technology to improve employee performance. However, that may be changing. Many progressive companies are looking to better understand human behavior and turning to the field of behavioral psychology to help recruit the best employees and build productive teams.

For this issue of Management Minute, EDM Today sat down with Dr. Susan Cain, founding partner of the Corporate Learning Institute (CLI). Dr. Cain, along with her partner and CLI co-founder Dr. Tim Buividas, has done pioneering work in the field of team building and performance improvement. CLI uses a tool called DISC. It is an assessment that measures behavioral tendencies through four personality traits: dominance, influence, steadiness, and compliance. The assessment takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. The results are available immediately.

EDM Today asked Dr. Cain the following questions:

**ET:** Why are companies turning to DISC to improve their teams?

**SC:** The workplace is changing, and one of the newest trends in recent years is the emphasis on workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Diversity is the recognition that our workplace consists of diverse contributors. Equity is the process of ensuring fair and equal treatment of all contributors. Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that all contributors feel welcome and a part of their workplace. The emerging emphasis on assuring DEI practices in organizations comes at a time when the workplace landscape is changing rapidly. Increasingly, we are dependent on technology, hybrid work models and disruptive market changes.



CLI Founders  
Dr. Tim Buividas and Dr. Susan Cain

**ET:** Can you explain a bit about the personality styles that the assessment identifies?

**SC:** Imagine yourself at work and think about how you react to your work environment.

Are you more:

- Direct and confident and like challenges and results?
- Persuasive and friendly and enthusiastic and collaborative?
- Calm and consistent and prefer to support others with a stable environment?
- Precise and detailed and like being accurate when faced by challenges?

Perhaps you are a combination of two styles, as many of us are. There is no best DISC style, and all styles bring value as well as challenges to the workplace.

**ET:** How does assessing a person's DISC style help to build a better team?

**SC:** DISC can help organizations open conversations about the natural diversity in their workforce. Through the DISC model, contributors learn that diverse styles, skill sets, and perspectives can create better workplace results. But the DISC assessment can be expensive and often requires certifications to use within an organization.

**ET:** This makes sense. It is similar to ISO-9000 continuous improvement programs. Having ISO certification does not necessarily mean that a company will build quality parts. Instead, it creates an environment that is conducive to promoting quality. If DISC can provide data to begin a productive dialog, perhaps that's the first step in developing strategies to improve team productivity. But talk to us a bit more about cost. You say it's expensive?

**SC:** I said that it can be expensive. DISC has been around for a long time. It is a behavioral model and self-assessment first created by psychologist William Moulton Marston in 1928. The DISC assessment has evolved to meet the needs of contemporary learning applications including leadership development, team development, hiring and onboarding and personal development. There are many companies offering DISC and components to the report.

To help combat the expense and barriers that confront users, our CLI team has created a new, affordable DISC assessment. We call our version the DISC Professional Styles Profile. I am proud to say it was created with intern power! It has taken us five years to develop and test the assessment and bring it to market at a fraction of the development cost normally incurred. Graduate interns from the Elmhurst University's Industrial and Organizational Psychology program were instrumental in bringing the assessment to market. Interns also helped create a team report which shows the diverse styles of each team member and a cumulative look at the collective profile of the team's strengths and challenges.

**ET:** EDM Today has thousands of readers within the EDM Industry. Some are part of huge multinational corporations. Others are part of a small company with few employees. Would DISC be used differently depending on the size of the company, or the size of the team?

**SC:** The DISC assessment is a tool you can apply within any size organization - across all industries. In large organizations, internal trainers or facilitators can become trained and can use DISC in training sessions or apply it to specific teams for team development purposes. In smaller organizations, external facilitators can offer customized training or coaching using DISC through most



DISC vendors. At the Corporate Learning Institute, we provide customized training to ensure that the training we facilitate is on target to fit the needs of our clients.

**ET:** Prior to our meeting, I did some research. There are many companies that offer DISC assessments. Many assessments are focused on individuals, not teams. Aside from cost, how do these versions differ?

**SC:** Our Professional DISC Styles assessment is one of the most affordable DISC versions on the market today. Our customers have access to a full-service console for ordering DISC assessments without a middleman. There is a tremendous amount of support materials available on our website. More are being added regularly. Perhaps the biggest difference is our focus on teams. We provide team reports with all member profiles, but most importantly, we list the combined strengths and challenges.

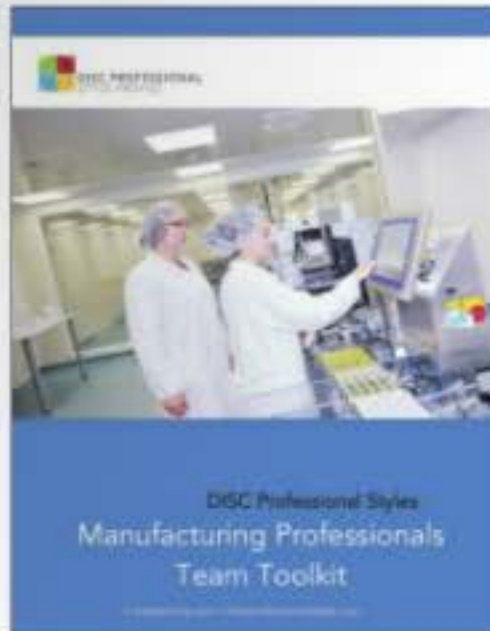
**ET:** What if we want to focus on a single individual. For example, if a company has only a single sales manager, could DISC help improve the effectiveness of the sales department?

**SC:** Yes. DISC is a helpful tool for individual coaching, leadership development, hiring and on-boarding, strategy team development, sales, managing change, conflict resolution, and, of course, developing teams.

**ET:** If a company were to try a DISC assessment, how would they know what to do with the results?

**SC:** It's best to use DISC with at least some knowledge of its intended usefulness. An external facilitator or consultant/trainer can help the assessment come alive. A PowerPoint presentation can also help the team grasp the core concepts and apply them in a team learning session. Team coaching sessions are the fastest way to learn and apply the insights taken from the DISC.

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CLI also makes a toolkit available to help companies interpret results and implement training programs. Just as an example, the DISC Communication Tips Table shows some training tips to train team members on how to communicate effectively. The tips are based on the individual behavioral tendencies (DISC Styles) that were identified by the assessment.

DISC STYLE	COMMUNICATION TIPS
<b>D:</b> Dominance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be friendly, but get to the point.</li> <li>• Be fully authentic – don't sugar coat.</li> <li>• They will be direct – don't take it personally.</li> <li>• Explain how this will allow them to speed up, rather than slow down.</li> <li>• D's may say anything to get out the door – they are busy!</li> <li>• Ensure full understanding and agreement.</li> </ul>
<b>I:</b> Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They like interacting with others – take the time to be personable.</li> <li>• Like to be fully involved – let them take ownership of the solution.</li> <li>• Creative and energetic – encourage this.</li> <li>• Don't mistake enthusiasm for understanding – clear action plans and timelines needed.</li> </ul>
<b>S:</b> Steadiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ultimate team players – make sure they are not agreeing just to please.</li> <li>• Listeners rather than talkers – give them a chance to speak.</li> <li>• Want to help – focus on empowering solutions.</li> <li>• Like detail and certainty – ensure a clear action plan on next steps.</li> </ul>
<b>C:</b> Conscientious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a need to be accurate and right – provide facts and data.</li> <li>• Use objectivity, rational thinking, and facts over emotion.</li> <li>• Let them find the right solution – they will be energized.</li> <li>• Give them time to process.</li> </ul>

DISC Communication Tips Table

The meeting with Dr. Cain was extremely interesting. I started my career at a time when very few companies in our industry utilized any type of quality programs, and employee training was limited to specific tasks. Over the years, we have seen the emergence of a global manufacturing marketplace and an increasingly competitive environment in which we work.

There is no doubt that the companies that will grow and flourish will do so by optimizing every aspect of their operations. It makes sense to employ the tools available to us to help train our people to work together as highly productive teams. The field of behavioral psychology is now helping us to do that.

EDM Today would like to thank Dr. Buividas and Dr. Cain for their contribution to this month's Management Minute feature.

For more information about the DISC Professional Styles Profile, or to contact Dr. Cain, please visit:

<https://www.corplearning.com/>  
and  
<https://team-assess.com/>



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