Dealing with challenging personalities: through emotional competency

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What do we know about human behavior?

- Human behavior is a science and an art.
- Core emotional need is to feel valued and valuable.
- We avoid stressful situations or conversations.
- Behavior is due to the environment you are in.

Inevitably people’s attitudes will affect you, so how we understand their behavior, in addition to understanding our own behaviors and reactions.

Emotional awareness
Emotional Awareness

- One's psychological make-up, their “temperament”, “style”, or “type”, influences one's judgment and establishes one's relationship to the world.

- Research shows:
  - That recognition of one's preferred behavior and preferred environment influences the challenges one accepts and the decisions one is most likely to make.
  - That positive transfer occurs when learning in one context improves performance in another context.
  - Learning, leadership, conflict resolution and communication are natural extensions of personality and emotional awareness.

Emotional Awareness

- Know yourself! This helps you maintain your own personal power
  - Increase your self-awareness.
  - Know your triggers.
  - Know your vulnerability, then you can improve your response.

Personal mastery is, “Learning to expand our personal capacity to create the results we most desire, and creating an organizational environment which encourages all its members” (Jones & Hartley, 2013, p. 460).

DISC
The “Four Temperament” Model of Human Behavior
**DISC**

- Developed by William Marston - a lawyer and physiological psychologist in the 1920's and 1930's.
- Most widely used assessment used by business organizations.
- Proven to be reliable and consistent.
- Easy to administer and interpret.

**Task Oriented vs People Oriented**

- **Task Oriented**: Want to make tangible progress on projects
  - Dominators & Conscientious
- **People Oriented**: Focus on the relationship between people
  - Influencers & Steady

**Reserved vs Outgoing**

- **Reserved**: Keep to themselves, private, thoughtful, will not take risks.
- **Outgoing**: Forthcoming, takes initiative, extroverted.
Internalizing or Externalizing Processor

Internalizing: Will process information quietly and completely before speaking.

Externalizing: Needs to talk outside of their own mind to work through ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISC type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Direct, Driver, Demanding, Determined, Decisive, Doer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influential</td>
<td>Persuasive, Inspiring, Improving, Inspiring, Interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Submissive, Stable, Supportive, Shy, Status quo, Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientious</td>
<td>Assuring, Dependable, Considerate, Calculating, Considerate, Cautious, Consistent</td>
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Curious about where you may fall?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEFT</th>
<th>RIGHT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You generally approach situations with a task and detail-oriented approach.</td>
<td>You generally approach situations with a people and relationship-focused approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You are generally more active, fast-paced and bold in approaching new problems.</td>
<td>You are generally more thoughtful, moderate-paced and careful in approaching new problems.</td>
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**Environmental Preferences**
- Freedom
- Authority
- Varied Activity
- Difficult Assignments
- Opportunity for advancement

**Opportunities for Growth**
- Relativization is not a crime
- Some controls are necessary
- Everyone has a boss
- Verbalizing conclusions helps others understand them better
Interacting with D

**MOTIVATIONS**
- Challenge
- Choices
- Control

**COMMUNICATION STYLE: ASK, "WHAT"?’s**
- Provide direct answers.
- Stick to business.
- Stress goals.

Environmental Preferences
- Prestige.
- Friendly relationships.
- Opportunities to influence others.
- Opportunities to inspire others.
- Chance to verbalize ideas.

Opportunities for Growth
- Time must be managed.
- Listening is important.
- Tasks must be completed.
- Accountability is imperative.

Interacting with I

**MOTIVATIONS**
- Recognition
- Approval
- Popularity

**COMMUNICATION STYLE: ASK, "WHO"?'s**
- Is a democratic leader and friend.
- Provides recognition of abilities.
- Creates an atmosphere of excitement.
Environmental Preferences
• An area of specialization.
• Stability of situations.
• Consistent, familiar environment.

Opportunities for Growth
• Change provides opportunity.
• Discipline is good.
• It is all right to say "No"!

Motivations
• Security
• Appreciation
• Assurance

Communication Style: Ask, "How?"s
• Be relaxed and amiable.
• Allow time to adjust to change in plans.
• Allow people to work at their own pace.
• Clearly define goals and means of reaching them.

Environmental Preferences
• Sufficient time and resources to accomplish tasks.
• Assignments that require planning and precision.
• Limited risks.
• Team participation.

Opportunities for Growth
• Total support is not always necessary.
• Thorough explanation is not always possible.
• Deadlines must be met.
• Taking calculated risks can be profitable.
• There are varying degrees of excellence.
Interacting with C

MOTIVATIONS
• Quality answers
• Excellence
• Value

COMMUNICATION STYLE: ASK, “WHY”?
• Be straightforward, do not adlib.
• Be detail-oriented.

Supervisees’ Perception on Supervisors’ Personality Traits

Agreeableness:
• Oriented to fostering well-being.

Extraversion:
• Creates a warm environment.
• Transformational leadership.
* Avoid being too bold in conversations!

Openness to experience:
• Become receptive to input from others.

Conscientiousness:
• Natural leaders and can create an ethical environment.
* Avoid micromanaging!

When identifying “difficult” people…

Do not label people as “difficult” or assume their intentions.

Avoid Biases
• Confirmation Biases: only look at information to support our ideas.
• Stereotypes: judging someone based on minimal facts, creates “us” vs. “them” mentality.
• Fundamental attribution error: deeming that something is intrinsically wrong with them when they behave a way, but when we have similar behaviors we deem it due to the situation or context.
“Difficult” People

- Focus on behaviors as tactics:
  - It can be a life-long personality pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting.
  - May be starved for empathy, attention and respect.
  - May have alienated everyone around them.
  - May use conflict as a way to get attention.

Conflict Resolution
In the workplace...

85% dealt with conflict in some way.

29% dealt with conflict frequently.

In the US, about 2.8 hrs. a week are spent on managing conflict.


Conflict comes from:

- From misperceived cues.
- A lack of clarity with expectations.
- Lack of clear jurisdiction.
- Personality differences.
- Changes in jurisdiction.

Employees say it comes from:

- Personality clashes.
- Stress.
- Heavy workloads.
- Lack of honesty/openness.
- Lack of role clarity.

CR

1. Task conflict
2. Relationship conflict

Conflict is neither good nor bad...

The way in which a conflict is approached determines whether it is constructive or destructive.

"Conflict is a process that begins when one party perceives that the other has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that he or she cares about" (Makhorje & Upadhyay, 2015, p. 203).
Conflict Resolution Styles

- **Avoidance**
  - Actively deciding to not engage
- **Accommodating**
  - Do not have own needs met
- **Competing**
  - Forceful, assertive
- **Compromising**
  - Negotiation
- **Collaborating**
  - Focused on finding a solution

CR

- High construal abstract thinking (focus on the “why”) is linked to preference for cooperation.
  - This was mediated by perspective-taking and empathic concern.
- Low construal thinking (focuses on the “how”) is linked to preference for competition.
  - This was mediated by impulsivity and aggression.
- Conflict Resolution leads to positive emotions
  - Found electrophysiological evidence to show that conflict resolution can cause positive emotions.

Before dealing with conflict

1. Do you address the conflict?
2. Determine exact nature of the conflict.
3. Understand your own perspective.
4. Understand own emotional reactions.
5. Create a safe environment.
6. Set ground rules and obtain agreement.
7. Rehearse in advance.
4 main listening skills in CR

1. Ask
2. Mirror
3. Paraphrase
4. Prime

Valued CR Model

1. Scoping: Understand what is happening, from each person’s perspective on the conflict and what is important to them.
2. Define the problem.
4. Create an action plan.
5. Reflect how to prevent conflict in the future.
6. Have a follow-up plan.

Conflict competence

“...the ability to develop and use cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills that enhance productive outcomes of conflict while reducing the likelihood of escalation or harm.” (Overton & Lowry, 2013, p. 260)
Active Listening and Communication

- Positive listening skills:
  - Visual/eye contact, vocal qualities, verbal tracking, attentive and authentic body language.
  - Mirroring
  - Clarifying questions
  - Paraphrasing

What would you do?

You have a parent who every time you call, with news about their child's progress, they seem to overlook everything you have said respond with an "okay" and then go on to tell you all the behaviors that happened this week with their child and begin listing back to you all the problems they see that their child still needs to work on. How do you respond?

"How are YOU doing??" What is the need of the parent?
Listening or problem solving?

Listening:
• Is this a problem that needs to be listened to, or needs a solution?
• Some situations just can’t be solved - and that’s okay.

Problem solving: Don’t focus on who is “right” focus on collaboration.
• 1. Issues that are pet peeves
• 2. Issues that can wait
• 3. Issues that must be prioritized

Mindful Communication

• Good communication: Clarity, neutrality, temperance
  • Use “I Statements”:
    I feel ____ when you ____
  • Use “AND” not “BUT”
  • Takes people off the defensive, allows for flexible thinking.

  • Saying, “I understand,” usually makes things worse.
  Instead say, “Tell me more so I can understand better.”

Empathy

FEELING WITH PEOPLE
EMPATHY

- The ability to share your understanding of a person’s experience and reflect that understanding to another to foster connection. The ability to feel what they may be feeling by stepping into their experience, although you have not experienced it yourself.

- NOT SYMPATHY: Sympathy conveys understanding because you have been in a similar situation.

Characteristics of Empathy

1. Perspective taking - understanding someone else's perspective as their truth.
2. Staying out of judgment - No “Should”, “Could”, “Good vs Bad”.
3. Recognizing emotion in other people.
4. Communicating that emotion to them.

We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know.

Carl Rogers
Let's put this into practice

“You feel _____.” “I can imagine that ____.”
(word for the feeling reported by the client or by identifying a feeling that is assumed to be accurate based on what is disclosed.)

“because___”
(experience.)

“I can’t read. I haven’t been able to since Kindergarten and now I’m in 4th grade. I’ve been trying but all the other kids can read so much better than I can and I think they can tell. I feel like an idiot. My teacher and parents get so frustrated with me I just want to give up.”

1. I’m sure if you just talk with your teacher and put in the work everything will be just fine.
2. You’re feeling discouraged because you are still unable to read since Kindergarten.

6. You’re struggling to read and it makes you feel like you are not good enough. Because of it, you avoid work in the classroom and now you feel there is no use in trying. You’re worried about how the other kids view you and it is on your mind constantly. It makes all the sense in the world to me why you wouldn’t enjoy being in the classroom.
35 y/o single parent

“I’m really frustrated with the school my child attends because they think all of his problems are about me.”

You’re angry because you feel the school is blaming all of the problems your child is having on you.

12 y/o boy whose mother and stepfather are constantly arguing.

“I’m sick and tired of my mom and stepdad fighting all the time. They don’t really care about me or my sister, they’re just determined to win a fight”.

You’re sad because you don’t feel your mother and stepfather care about you. All they seem interested in is arguing with each other.

16 y/o

“I am not doing very well in school, but honestly trying hard”

You must be proud of yourself for trying hard, and you should feel good that you are doing your best.
Anger Management

“Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.”
—Ambrose Bierce

And what about when we internalize our emotions?
Dealing with Distortions

Lens of realistic optimism
Is this helpful to me?

Reverse lens
View it through the person who triggered you.

The long lens
How can this help me grow?

Self-Care

- If you sigh at the end of the day, you have not taken enough time for you throughout the day!
- Mindfulness
- Play music... if you can
- Change Temperatures
- Go for a walk
- Deep Breaths
What would you do?

You're in a meeting and you have a coworker who tends to be more outgoing, assertive, and speaks over others. You begin to share an idea, but you are cut off and are overcorrected with your coworker's point of view. You feel dismissed and invalidated. This has happened frequently in the past. How do you respond?

Pause. Do not get defensive or take it personally. This says more about your coworker's personality type than whether you are right or wrong. Remember to understand the behavior. What is their need? Meet it. Reflect back their statements, mirror, paraphrase, then restate ideas.

Recommendations
Meetings

• Designate and know the goal of the meeting.
• Have an agenda with an allotted, set time for the meeting.
• Plan who/how the meeting will be documented.
• Decide who is going to say what.
• Have a plan to address potential pitfalls.
• Pick seating mindfully.
• Know what you can give to the family.
• Know how to close the meeting.

Parents

• Need to understand their emotions, feelings, understanding, perception and opinion before diving into a difficult conversation.
• 1/5 rule of positivity.
• Always have the parent speak first—Find sources of agreement.
• Clarify and restate your intentions.
  • Say "I can see how you took what I said that way. That wasn't what I meant. Let's try this again."
  • You are not the EXPERT, the PARENT is.
Be human

• If this was your child, how would you want it addressed?
• Be honest
• Apologize when wrong
  • Saying, “I’m sorry,” or, “I’m going to try to fix this,” can go a long way toward defusing many situations.

Conclusion

• Attempt to understand yourself through continual work in emotional awareness and competence.
• Employ skills to build connection, address conflict, and maintain boundaries.
• Be prepared with practical techniques.
• BE HUMAN

Follow-up Materials

• DISC ASSESSMENTS: https://www.launchableleadership.com/disc
• Dr. Tammy Lenski: https://tammylenski.com/archives
• Billy Eddy, LCSW: https://www.highconflictinstitute.com/billy-eddy
References


Lassiter, L. (2021). The triangle in the natural world including the human social world. [PowerPoint slides]


