

DISC and Whole Person Dynamics™



A Modern Look at an Ancient and Very
Powerful Model for Understanding People



**Resource
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Managing the Human Side of Business SM

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Note: the US Navy's Center for Naval Leadership is already utilizing our model in their leadership development programs with our permission.

For a more in-depth look at the Seven Elements of High Performance™ model and how it can help drive performance in organizations we invite you to read our new book **Leadership Lessons From the Medicine Wheel: The Seven Elements of High Performance** (ISBN 978-1-59932-111-0).

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DISC and Whole Person Dynamics™: **A Modern Look at an Ancient and Very Powerful** **Model for Understanding People**



Putting People at the Center of Everything You Do is the first step and most important Element in the Seven Elements of High Performance™. But people are often hard to understand and even harder to motivate to give that extra discretionary effort that leads to greater organizational performance. What is needed is a simple, yet robust, model that will allow for understanding and reaching the whole person, engaging them heart and soul. We offer that DISC is that model.

By Gary Lear, President and CEO
Resource Development Systems LLC

In 1928, the world was introduced to a new model to describe behavior in the book “The Emotions of Normal People” by Dr. William M. Marston. The new behavioral styles model was called DISC, which stands for the four behavioral styles that he “discovered,” and which we now call Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. While there are a large number of assessments and profiles out on the market today, Marston never created an assessment to accompany his model. Perhaps he never saw the need. It would be almost 50 years later before the precursors to some of the current assessments would hit the market. Today it seems that there is actually more emphasis placed on the profiles rather than on what the model has to offer all by itself.

Initially trained as a lawyer, and then as a medical doctor and the inventor of the modern lie detector, Marston was fascinated with the combination of physiology and psychology, and particularly how they were manifested in what he called “normal” people. Of course, the focus of psychology at that time was more on the study of abnormal people, and many of these theories came to dominate a new field of study that tried to emulate its cousin, medicine, in its scientific approach. After all, medicine was all about healing people who were ill or sick, and so, the same seemed to be the focus for psychology at that time. Little did anyone know that psychology would end up having a huge impact on how we would run so much of our normal lives, including raising children, education, and how we run our businesses and motivate employees. Marston’s theories seemed to get lost in all of these neo-classical approaches to psychology.

But perhaps the approaches that we’ve taken in the past weren’t the right approaches. We seem to be learning that so much of the reward and punishment approaches don’t seem to work to get the best out of our employees. Works such as Alfie Kohn’s “Punished by Rewards” and recently Dan Pink’s “Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us” are showing us that the often used practices of operant conditioning aren’t the best approach to getting the best from others. And it isn’t any wonder why. If so many of the neo-classical approaches towards psychology were based in the curing of mental illness, then the Skinnerian crowd was totally focused only on the behavior of people and not on what actually was behind that behavior. Both

models seem to be lacking, and both seem to be really focusing on the physical and mental aspects of people. Yet, we are all much more.

In American Indian teachings, there is a concept known as the Medicine Wheel. It is a rich, complicated model; yet, almost contradictory, it is also very simple in its approaches to helping us better understand ourselves, others, and how we relate to each other and our environment. In the teachings of the Medicine Wheel we learn that there are four aspects to all of us. These aspects include the Physical and Mental, but they also include the Emotional and the Spiritual. Of course, in the business world, it isn't surprising that we tend to focus only on the Physical and the Mental. After all, we are interested in what people know, what they can do, and how it can help the organization perform. But as the Medicine Wheel teaches, and as the research is revealing, Emotions play a huge role in engaging both employees and customers. We are also learning that the understanding that someone is contributing to a greater good, a Purpose, is also a powerful motivator. In fact, Purpose is one of the primary components in Pink's model of what drives engagement (autonomy, mastery, and purpose).



Of course, in our review of over 1,000 research studies, and research-based articles and books, we have also found that same connection between the Emotional and the Spiritual in differentiating between great performance and mediocre performance. It is the inclusion of all four Aspects of ourselves that drives performance in the organization. In other words, it is paying attention to the Whole Person that unleashes the difference in performance.

This is where Marston and his DISC model come into play. Recall that Marston was not focused on abnormal behavior. He wasn't interested in understanding why people behave abnormally, but rather on why normal people behave as they do. He did use his knowledge of physiology to try to understand what was happening, even down to a cellular level, and, of course, much of this thinking was inaccurate; but recall, this was still the late 1920's and much of medicine was inaccurate, too. Even today we still don't fully understand the workings of the brain, personality, and behavior. But Marston was trying to understand what was happening inside of people to cause their behavior. In other words, while he was studying behavior, he rejected the "black box" of the Skinnerians. He acknowledged the existence of the emotions and their impact on behavior based on the person's perceptions.

So Marston rejected the mental illness model of the neo-classical approach, and he rejected the black box model of the modern behaviorists. As a result, he created a model that, based on modern research, just might be one of the most powerful models to help organizations understand how to put this modern research into action, and give managers tools to engage employees, and employees tools to better work together in teams and engage customers. But did he really create this model, or was it simply "re-discovered?"

Ancient History of DISC

Dr. Pamela Cole, a noted research psychologist and developer of several DISC-based assessments, has spent her professional lifetime working with the DISC model. She has amassed a wealth of information on the history of DISC and related models, and we hope to see a book

published by her in the near future. She has shared with me that we can trace the roots of the DISC model back to the time of the ancient Greeks and their four humors, which were based on the four elements of Fire, Water, Earth, and Air, which are the results of two axis: wet or dry; and hot and cold. Out of this sprang temperament models that have evolved into a variety of approaches today, including the DISC model. While Marston and those following him may not have been trying to base their work on the ancient temperament models, the similarities are still there, perhaps, because the observations of behavior, then and now, are pretty accurate.

Yet, for all their accuracy, we can only trace the Greek's Temperament model back about 2500 to 3000 years ago. I believe that there is a model that goes back even further, to about 10,000 years ago: the American Indian Medicine Wheel. As I've followed in Pamela's footsteps reviewing the Temperament model, there are a lot of similarities between the use of the Four Elements (Fire, Water, Earth, Air), as well as the colors (red, yellow, black, white) that are used in the Medicine Wheel. While a formal model was never built by American Indians, there was certainly an understanding of how people behaved based on where in the Medicine Wheel they might be residing. Based on the Medicine Wheel beliefs, we might visit the various areas of the Medicine Wheel, but our "home" is supposed to be in the Center, where we will find balance and harmony with all of those about us.

However, as I share in *Leadership Lessons From the Medicine Wheel*, achieving balance isn't about achieving equality. Instead, we have a variety of things happening in our lives that impact upon us. As we learn and grow we develop approaches based on how well we have been successful in dealing with those things that impact us and our environment. As we learn and grow we tend to find that we have a certain way of viewing the world about us, as well as our relationship to that environment.

Marston also noted this, and made this the basis for his DISC model. Essentially, he said that we tend to either see our environment as a Challenge to Overcome, or we see the environment as Comfortable and Providing for us. Those who tend to see the environment as a challenge don't necessarily see the environment as a bad place to be, just that it offers challenges, and perhaps even opportunities. They don't mind change, and, in fact, might be an agent of change. On the other hand, those that see the environment as comfortable are happy with how things are, and are not in any hurry to see change happen. Of course, American Indian beliefs teach us that change is a constant, and that we should always expect change. But the comfort level for the pace of change is considerably different for those who find their environment as being comfortable versus those who find the environment as a challenge.

The second component to the DISC model is in how people view their relationship to their environment. The concept of Personal Power is a central belief in most American Indian philosophy systems. It is a central component to Personal Responsibility, one of the Seven Elements of High Performance™. Dan Pink has also shared in his recent book, *Drive: What Really Motivates Us*, that Personal Responsibility is one of the primary ingredients in what he calls Motivation 3.0, which is really just another way to describe employee engagement; he refers to Personal Responsibility as Autonomy. Pink's other two concepts, Mastery and Purpose, align with two more elements of the Seven Elements of High Performance™: Strengths and Vision, and a fourth element, Trust, completes what we call the *Diamond of Engaged Performance*™, all working with Personal Responsibility to motivate and engage employees.

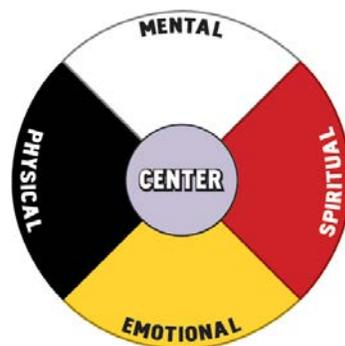
While we want everyone to retain their Personal Power, some people perceive their Personal Power as being more powerful than their environment, while others view their Personal Power as being less powerful. This doesn't mean that those people who view themselves as being less powerful than their environment see themselves as being weak. It simply means that they have a different perception of their role within the environment than those who see themselves as being more powerful.

It is the combination of these two perceptions, our environment and the relationship of our Personal Power to that environment, that gives us the four DISC Dimensions of Behavior. Someone who sees the world as being challenging yet their Personal Power is greater than the environment will tend to exhibit D or Dominance behaviors, using their Personal Power to accomplish their goals in the face of those challenges. Someone who sees the world as being accommodating and comfortable but who also sees themselves as having greater Personal Power than the environment will tend to exhibit I or Influence behaviors, using their Personal Power to influence others to accomplish their goals. Someone who sees the world as accommodating and comfortable, but who sees themselves as having only adequate Personal Power will tend to exhibit S or Steadiness behaviors, working with others to accomplish their goals. Finally, someone who sees the world as being challenging yet does not perceive their Personal Power as being greater than the environment will exhibit C or Conscientiousness behaviors, working within the parameters of the environment, without trying to change it, to accomplish their goals.

This is a very simplistic explanation of the four behavioral styles. In actuality, we can not be described as either D, I, S, or C, but instead, we are D, I, S, *and* C. We have all four behavioral styles within us, as we do have the ability to find balance within ourselves. We have simply become comfortable with our world view and how we tend to react to the world. But it is those people who are able to recognize the subtle and sometimes not so subtle changes in their environment and adapt their behavior to those changes by utilizing their other dimensions that truly master the understanding and the power of DISC.

Whole Person Dynamics™

In American Indian teachings, each person is comprised of four aspects: Spiritual; Emotional; Physical; and Mental. It takes each of the four aspects to make a complete person. Yet, often we tend to focus on the development of just one or two of these aspects. In fact, some will even relish in the development of a single aspect, working on it diligently until that area of their life is perfected, leaving the other areas of their life to languish. We can not reside in any one of the aspects of ourselves, but rather only at the Center. This is where we find true strength and balance as we develop all of the gifts that we have been offered in each of the four aspects.



Balance is not the same as being equal. When two things are equal it means that they are the same. But when we talk about Balance we learn that sometimes we have to address issues not in an equal fashion, but in a manner to offset other forces that might be in play. If you think of a plate that is balanced perfectly on your finger, the balance point might be in the center of the plate. But if you put an item on top of the plate to one side, then the balance point changes. It

has to shift from the center to the edge where the item is in order to counteract the item's forces and keep the plate balanced on the tip of the finger.

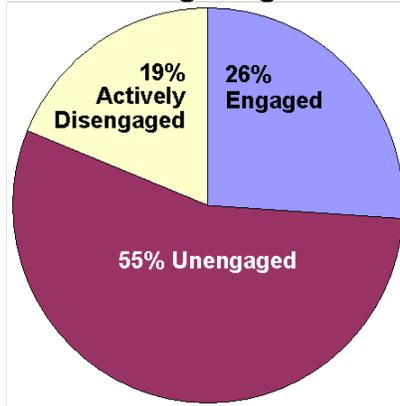
The same thing is true when we deal with issues in our lives, whether in our personal lives or at work. While we strive to achieve Balance, sometimes we have to put more effort or resources in an area that is in need of attention because of other forces that are in play. The trick is to not allow other areas of our lives to suffer in order to regain our balance. If this occurs, then rather than progressing in our lives through continuous growth, we become stagnant, or worse, deteriorate.

So as we address people and things in our lives, Balance teaches us that in order to be fair that we should not treat people or things equally, but in a way that is necessary to bring about harmony and to achieve our goals. I believe that this is a key concept regarding Balance, as too often we try to be fair by treating everyone equally, and in the end we just end up making a situation worse.

The Importance of the Whole Person

Too often society, and more specifically, the workplace, places more emphasis on some things than others. After all, most organizations are more interested in what their employees know and what they can do for the organization, and usually aren't too interested at all in the Spiritual or Emotional aspects of their employees. Management just does not want to deal with the messiness of their employees' emotions, let alone even begin to think about delving into the issue of spirituality.

Employee Engagement Levels in the Average Organization



Yet, research seems to indicate that this might be a strategic error by management. There is a huge amount of research that supports the concept of employee engagement. In essence, the more the employee is committed to the organization the more they will give of their discretionary energy and exhibit behaviors that are beneficial to the organization. According to the research, in the average organization over half of all employees are just doing what they have to do to get by, and another one-fifth of employees are actually upset with the organization and may be involved in activities that will end up hurting the organization. These employees are actively disengaged. In fact, we will tend to find that these employees are also impacted by emotions, only those that are negative towards the organization.

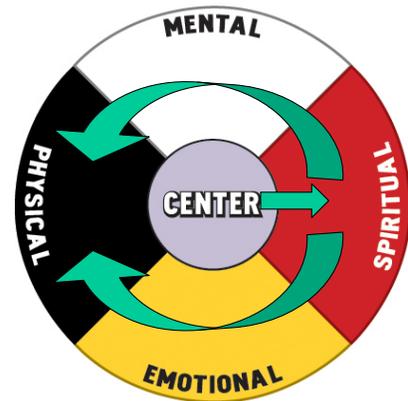
The remaining employees, about one-fourth, are actually committed to the organization and are trying their best to insure that it is successful and are engaged employees. What sets these employees apart from the rest of their co-workers is that these employees are emotionally connected to the organization in some fashion. Usually it is that they feel that they are doing something in their jobs that is important, that others also recognize their importance, and that what they are doing, that important "something," actually does make a difference.

If management wants to take advantage of this engagement, then they need to create an environment that allows for employees to become emotionally connected to the Vision of the organization; its Aligned Purpose, Values, and Goal. At the same time the organization needs to eliminate the emotional things that are hampering actively disengaged employees from becoming engaged. Employee engagement is not a straight-line continuum, but rather circular in nature. As such, it is just as easy to move actively disengaged employees to engaged, as it is to move unengaged employees to become engaged employees. However, in both cases we are dealing with employees emotions, those emotions that are so often ignored by most managers because they are just too messy to be bothered with.

Behavior and Whole Person Dynamics™

At the center of every individual are our Dreams, Desires, Needs, and Intentions. While we might recognize and understand these for ourselves, others can not see what lies at our center. All they can judge us by is the behavior that they see us exhibit, and which resides in the physical. But our Dreams, Desires, Needs, and Intentions do not just emerge from the center and go directly into our Physical aspect and result in behavior. Instead, they take a circuitous route through the rest of our aspects before being exhibited as physical behavior.

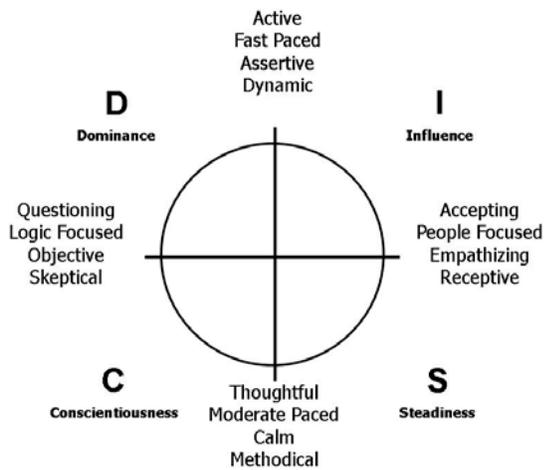
Residing in the Center, our Dreams, Desires, Needs, and Intentions first emerge in the Spiritual aspect area. This is where our actions and behaviors are filtered by our Values and our Beliefs. Our Values and Beliefs place a limit on just how far we will go in achieving our Dreams, Desires, Needs, and Intentions. We may be hungry, but instead of stealing, we may go to a charity for assistance. While we might have a need to be highly successful at work, our Values and Beliefs might prohibit us from doing so in an unethical fashion, such as stealing a co-workers' ideas and passing them off as our own, or embezzling funds for our own gratification.



Part of the influence on our Values and Beliefs is our Thinking and Feelings about our Dreams, Desires, Needs, and Intentions in relationship to our Values and Beliefs. Both our Thinking and our Feelings are very powerful forces that influence our behavior, and it is pretty obvious that our Thinking will reside in the aspect area of the Mental, while our Feelings will reside in the aspect area of the Emotional. And while our Dreams, Desires, Needs, and Intentions will pass through both of these areas from the Spiritual to be put into action as Physical behavior, they don't pass through both areas equally. While every person has both of these aspects in them, and while each aspect is equally important, some people will tend to rely on one of the aspects more than the other aspect.

In the DISC Behavioral Styles model, we learn that those with primary D and C styles are more questioning and logic focused, objective and skeptical. Their focus is primarily on their Mental aspect. While those with primary I and S behavioral styles are still impacted by their Emotional aspect, others don't see this impact in their behavior. What others do see is behavior that tends to come across as being rather unfeeling and only focused on the facts of the situation or the end results of their behavior. On the other hand, those with primary I and S styles are more accepting and people focused, with an ability to empathize and be very accepting of others. Their focus is

primarily through the Emotional aspect. Again, while they certainly have the ability to think through issues, it appears through their behavior that they are far more focused on emotions and feelings, rather than facts and logic.



So while our Dreams, Desires, Needs, and Intentions are at the center of each of us and are the beginnings for our Physical behavior, they are modified through our Values and Beliefs (Spiritual) and our Thinking and Feelings (Mental and Emotional) before the behavior is actually demonstrated. As mentioned previously, we do not see what is going on inside the person as the Dreams, Desires, Needs, and Intentions are being acted upon by the other three aspects; all we see is the resulting behavior. But by utilizing the DISC Behavioral Styles model a manager can get a better idea of some of the things that are going on inside of the individual, and we can have a better

understanding of what are some of the things that are motivating them. If a manager understands and uses the DISC Behavioral Styles model, then they can unleash this motivation and engage employees, resulting in greater performance for the individual and the organization.

Of course, what has been shared here only begins to scratch the surface of DISC, Whole Person Dynamics™ and how to use both to increase performance in the organization. It is not enough to know the theoretical background of these models; managers must know how to use them in day in and day out interactions with employees if we really want to see a difference in performance. Managers must complete the **Diamond of Engaged Performance™** with their employees: Build Trust with every employee by exhibiting the Four Behaviors that Build Trust™ and ask others to also demonstrate those behaviors; Allow Personal Responsibility through individual decision making about their jobs; Focus on Strengths and help every employee Develop Mastery; and connect them emotionally to the positive performance outcomes you want for your organization to achieve its worthwhile Purpose.

Simply put, the DISC model is a powerful tool that managers can utilize to build that **Diamond of Engaged Performance™**, engaging their employees, and leading to an increase in the organization's performance. It is a primary tool that we teach our clients to utilize, and is at the heart of all of our programs. It provides for a common language about behavior that the organization can use as it builds its **Culture of Engaged Performance™**. It can work for your organization just as well.

High Performance Organizations:

Have a clearly defined Purpose, other than to just “make money,” that inspires employees
Have a core set of Values that they actually live by, and aren’t just wall decorations and nice talk.

Focus on building a culture of excellence, founded on Trust, and Personal Responsibility.

Spend an extraordinary amount of time insuring that they hire the “right” people.

Put faith in their people and actually believe in their ability to perform their jobs.

Have managers who focus on creating an environment where the organization’s culture can flourish and where employees are engaged; not on micro-managing people which leads to unengaged and actively disengaged employees.

If you are ready to stop being *good enough*, then contact **RDS!** We have the benchmarks and systems that have been proven to help organizations move from being just *good enough* to becoming an organization with a **Culture of Engaged Performance™**, which leads to high performance.



The Seven Elements of High Performance™

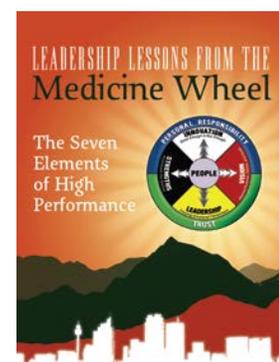
- ◆ Put **People** at the **Center** of everything you do; employees, customers, and community
- ◆ Build **Trust** as a **Foundation**
- ◆ Allow **Personal Responsibility** through **Individual Decision Making**
- ◆ Share a **Vision** of an **Aligned Purpose, Values, and Goals**
- ◆ **Create Emotional Connections** through **Leadership**
- ◆ Focus on **Strengths** and **Accentuate the Positive**
- ◆ Encourage **Innovation**, because **Good Enough is Not Enough**

For more on the Seven Elements of High Performance™ check out our book

Leadership Lessons from the Medicine Wheel: The Seven Elements of High Performance

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Gary Lear

About Gary Lear, President and CEO

Dynamic thought leader in the areas of organizational performance, strategy and leadership, Gary Lear combines the teachings from his American Indian heritage with the most modern business research to help organizations achieve results by more effectively **Managing the Human Side of BusinessSM**. His approach is to help leaders learn how to create the high performance cultures and make the connections that unlock the hidden potential of the people they employ. With over 20 years of experience working with culture change and leadership development, Gary has worked with thousands of managers in all kinds of industries. Challenging, yet practical, Gary takes a different approach to help his clients get the results they want because he understands that the best organizations don't just do things differently; they do different things.

About *Resource Development Systems* LLC

Founded in 1997, **Resource Development Systems** LLC is an organizational performance consulting firm dedicated to helping its clients increase performance by being more successful at **Managing the Human Side of BusinessSM**.

At **RDS** we excel in developing the new critical competencies organizations need to prevail in the global business environment - skills like trust building, collaboration, and innovation. These skills can never be outsourced, replaced, or made obsolete, and they are absolutely key to competing successfully in the world today.

Our development programs are always designed to align people's skills and behavior with organizational strategies to create high performing organizations. That means you have the ability to shape your workforce in alignment with your organization's Vision and its strategies, because our solutions give you a complete system for creating the results you want.

We know change begins with insight, takes shape through action, is intensified by focus, and is fueled by ongoing success.

*If you would like to learn more about how you can apply the **Seven Elements of High PerformanceTM** in your organization and help it create a **Culture of Engaged PerformanceTM**, where people want to come to work and excel; where the organization not only achieves its goals, but also achieves significance; then please give us a call. We will be happy to talk with you about your needs.*

Contact Resource Development Systems LLC for more information.

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