The CS Style – An Everything DiSC® Podcast

Narrator: The following podcast by Dr. Mark Scullard describes the CS style. It is an Everything DiSC® production brought to you by Wiley.

Dr. Mark Scullard: All right, so we're going to spend some time talking about the CS style, and if you have a CS style, I think what you'll find is that, you know, 70, 80 percent of what we're going to talk about is probably a fit for you. You know, some of it will be spot on and then there'll be parts that'll feel like, yeah, you know, that's not really me or, you know, well, maybe that was me when I was younger. But I think the value here is more about listening for those insights that really help you make sense of your past experiences, but also kind of help you see your thought processes or your habits in a new light.

And so, you know, we'll take a look at all of these different characteristics that are associated with the CS style, you know, things like being careful or self-controlled and moderate. And there are really kind of three themes that really tie them all together. And actually what I'll call them kind of psychological needs, core psychological needs. And, you know, just like in the sense that some people have a very strong need to be in charge and other people, they have a really strong need to get attention or to demonstrate how competent they are. You know, for the CS style, you know, it's a different set of needs.

And one of the major ones is this strong need for stability: to have their world maintaining, you know, a steady even pace where things are settled, where there are minimal surprises, where I can feel like I have things under control. I feel like I know what to expect in terms of problems that might come up on any given day. And, you know, and I'm not suggesting here that the CS style doesn't like to have any excitement in their lives. But in general, stability is, you know, it's not only the preferred state of

affairs, but when things aren't stable, you know, it feels like things are wrong, like I need to get things back to this state as quickly as possible.

All right, and then a second core need, which arguably is kind of an offshoot of the first kind of stability need, is a need to minimize my exposure, basically kind of minimize my exposure to threats, you know, social threats, for instance, like being embarrassed or humiliated, or threats to my lifestyle, threats to my position. And, you know, realistically, you know, no one is crazy about any of these kind of threats. You know, no one wants to be embarrassed, for instance.

But for some people, these threats feel—they feel much more looming or they feel much more likely to happen or the potential of them happening feels much more awful, right, than other people might feel. And so, naturally, if I'm more aware of these threats and if they feel more harmful to me, then I'm going to put a lot more energy into avoiding them compared to the average person. I'm going to minimize my exposure. And so I'll develop this idea a little more throughout the podcast. And hopefully you'll be able to see some of the kind of the potential implications.

And then finally, a third core need, which I think is actually a little less expected—it's this really strong need to be beyond reproach. And what I mean by beyond reproach here is that someone's actions are so justifiable that they can't be criticized. You know, the need to make absolutely sure that they're not to blame when things go wrong or if things went wrong. You know, and of course, no one wants to be blamed, right? But it's particularly strong for this CS style. You know, the idea that they might be the ones who are responsible for a screwup or for things falling apart, it's particularly crushing for people who fall in this range of the DiSC® map. And, you know, it's because of that they'll spend a lot of time and a lot of energy ensuring that they don't ever find themselves in that position.

And so one of the implications of all of these needs—you know, stability, low exposure, being beyond reproach—is a natural instinct to set up a comfort zone around myself,

you know, a situation with very predictable routines and relationships. And a lot of my energy then might go into securing this zone and making it safe. Spending my energy putting out fires or building structures or systems that can preemptively protect me against, you know, future problems or interruptions to this zone. And so it might be particularly stressful when I sense that something might disturb it, you know. Even if that threat is pretty abstract or pretty distant.

Or it's stressful when my space is invaded by someone and, you know, I'm forced to be "on," right—to make conversation or to make things go smoothly. And, you know, and the stress really it can be subtle, but it means I can't really feel like I'm truly myself. Like I can't let my guard down when someone else is in my zone. And then, of course, you know, there's not just the stress of people coming into my space, but there's also oftentimes even more stress associated with me going outside of that comfort zone.

And I think the picture is actually even a little bit more potent, you know, by comparison, when you compare it to people who are on the opposite side of the Everything DiSC® circle. You know, on that side, you've got people who have this very, like, this strong internal restlessness spurring them toward more and more stimulation. You know, these folks don't spend a lot of time creating a comfortable home base that's as resistant as possible to incoming problems and pressure. Their instinct is much more geared toward exploration and expansion than it is toward minimizing exposure.

And so, you know, there are some good things that come with this mentality, right? I think particularly in America, this more dynamic mindset is, it's really celebrated and rewarded. But there are some, also, some real virtues that come with the CS style that often don't get the same kind of fanfare that you necessarily see going on at the top of the DiSC® circle. So, for instance, leaders with the CS style, they're much more likely to be rated higher on things like being receptive to other people's needs or, you know, maintaining their composure during stress or being diplomatic, right.

There are always these kind of trade-offs that come in human nature. You know, for instance, I think the CS style both benefits from inertia and suffers from it. So, inertia, it's this principle in physics, right, that, you know, objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Objects at rest tend to stay at rest. So, with the CS style, there's this tendency when I'm already in motion, you know, I tend to continue moving steadily along that path. It's consistent, reliable, hard work, you know, follow through on things. There's a comfort in that. I'm, you know, I'm used to it. And, you know, even if it gets a little routine, unlike a lot of people, I'm inclined to stick with it.

And so, you know, that's certainly an upside of inertia. A downside, though, I think, is when it comes to initiating change, you know. If there's an outside force that comes in, you know, that might change my direction, but I'm much less likely to kind of muster up a lot of that internal energy that's necessary to kind of really push for a significant change on my own. You know, even if I see a problem or if I see a really good opportunity, I might wait for other people to initiate it. And instead, you know, I'll just stick to kind of dealing with what's already on my plate. And this is one of the reasons why people with this CS style often have very long tenure at their jobs, you know. They tend to stick around.

And for an employer, that's a really good thing. For the employee, you know—sometimes it's a good thing, you know, but also, you know, sometimes it can be a bad thing—and bad in the sense that sometimes they'll stick around in jobs that, you know, aren't necessarily very fulfilling for them or otherwise, you know, aren't great fits for them. And it's because it's really tough to overcome that inertia. If it's a choice between the devil they know and the one they don't, they'll often stick with the familiar, even if it's less than ideal—because that sort of big change, really, any time you make a big change, in a sense, you're really exposing yourself. There are unknown elements, you know. That represents risk.

Even within my current job, there's more of a tendency to kind of avoid the tasks where there's a reasonable chance of failure. You know, I'll refrain from doing something that

might possibly be beyond my skills and I'll inhibit any internal temptations that I have to kind of say or do something that might be unconventional or criticizable—again, minimizing exposure.

One of the strong instincts then is, you know, no matter what, to remain free of blame, you know, to not be the cause of trouble. You know, I may even find myself worrying about kind of vague, undefined or really nonspecific mistakes that I may have made, kind of, you know, checking over in my mind if I'm currently free of blame, you know, and maybe even to kind of the point of, you know, checking and rechecking something just to really ensure, kind of cement, that, you know, I'll have less to worry about. And so in this context, you know, adherence to rules that can really be a safeguard against blame. You know, if if I follow the norm or if I follow the expectation and things go wrong, well, at least I have a solid defense. And so following rules, that's a good strategy to minimize exposure.

Another strategy, another good one is keeping a low profile, not being too ostentatious, for instance. And legitimately, I think part of keeping a low profile is, for a lot of people, as you know, is because it feels classier, right? You know, bragging or tooting my own horn, you know, it feels a little garish, right? And it feels a little tasteless, you know, and on top of this, I think there's often, you know, genuinely little desire to kind of be the center of attention. You know, getting attention isn't necessarily a motivator for this style, the way it is for, say, someone falling at the top of the Everything DiSC® circle.

For people with the CS style, for instance, instead, they tend to be kind of, describe themselves as more soft spoken or modest or unassuming. To them, being loud and highly expressive, you know, it can be, it can be tacky on the one hand, but it can also be a social risk. You know, instead, I might tell myself if my ideas have merit, you know, or if my work is really outstanding, it should be able to sell itself. You know, I shouldn't have to brag about it or gin up all this excitement. You know, frankly, that feels phony. You know, I should let my ideas or my work stand for itself.

Or another strategy to minimize exposure, kind of on a little bit of a different track is is hedging, you know, not fully advocating for a position or not fully putting all of my weight behind a position, right. Because, you know, it could be wrong. And so even speaking up about a topic with absolute confidence, that can feel irresponsible because, you know, I can always see exceptions and, you know, I can see all the ways that I might not be, you know, getting things completely right or all the ways that someone else might contradict me.

And so as a consequence, it just doesn't seem right to speak firmly about something that I'm not 100 percent confident about. And in one sense, you know, that just seems responsible because really, you know, how often are we 100 percent confident about a decision? You know, not very often. On the other hand, the world as you probably, you know, recognize is full of people who speak very confidently, a lot of whom don't actually have a good reason for their confidence. And, for better or worse, I'm sharing the world with them.

And so, given my hesitancy to project certainty or that level of self-assurance, oftentimes my ideas or my needs or my insights, they're going to get a lot less attention than they really deserve, you know—partly because I'm not really willing to put myself out there, to kind of expose myself. Because really, if stability is my ultimate goal, then being inconspicuous, it's not a horrible strategy. It takes away a lot of the possibility for people to be angry with me or to be disappointed with me. You know, making myself small, I can tuck myself away from a lot of the expectations of the world from, you know, a lot of the possibility of not living up to those expectations. Yeah. And that takes a lot of pressure off and taking pressure off. Well, you know, that feels good.

And people with this style, they really do put a lot of pressure on themselves to live up to other people's expectations. And I think even more than that, there's a pressure not to disappoint people. You know, I know personally, you know, I can watch one of those movies. I don't know if you know the type of movie I'm talking about, but there's seems like there's a whole genre of movies where everything is falling apart for the

protagonists. You know, like there's this normal person. And then due to some unfortunate event, they're suddenly in danger of losing their job and the police are after them. And, you know, maybe there's a gang chasing them and, you know, they're in all of this legitimate danger, right? And all I'm worried about, as the viewer—the thing that is most stressful for me—is that the main character is disappointing all of these people like his wife or, you know, his kids like you or like he's not going to get this project done on time, you know. And I'm pretty sure that's not what the screenwriter intended, but I think for a lot of people with the CS style, you know, failing other people can really feel like, you know, that's the ultimate failure.

But on the positive side, right, let's switch to the positive side a little. You know, a lifetime of worrying about that stuff, right? People with the style they actually do often become very reliable for other people because it's a core value. And so I'm particularly attentive to not inconveniencing others or to not being the source of another person's irritation or unhappiness. Part of why I really thoroughly research a decision before I make a call is because I actually want to protect the well-being of other people. You know, the thought that I may have led others in the wrong direction, that's really troubling. You know, compared to a lot of other people who have this ego that, you know, it won't allow them to fully admit even to themselves when they've made a mistake and, you know, they can ignore all of the harm that they've done to others, I have this feeling of guilt over that stuff and kind of and beat myself up over it. You know, that responsibility really weighs heavily on me.

And so I'm going to make absolutely sure that doesn't happen, even if that means that I have to make personal sacrifices. If someone puts their trust in me, I'm honored that they've done so. And I take that responsibility really, really seriously. And so with this style, we do often see that there is really good follow-through and there's a real tendency for people to make good on their promises, you know, being reliable because letting someone down is really just this huge source of guilt and even further, kind of sometimes even a big source of shame.

All right, so I do want to kind of pull back here a little bit and talk about another topic that's related to the CS's strong need for stability. And that's this kind of real gut instinct to avoid conflict whenever possible. I mean, because, you know, conflict that's just, that's a natural threat to stability, you know, interpersonal stability at the very least. So it makes perfect sense that, even if there's a vague potential for conflict, that can be stressful.

And the CS style, you know, it's not, they're not going to only avoid the things that cause conflict, but they'll often find themselves avoiding the things that cause the things that cause conflict. Like, for instance, you know, generally avoiding argumentative people. And, you know, when they find themselves being forced to work with an aggressive person, for instance, they might be inclined to cave in in the moment, but then they'll go out of their way to work around that person in the future because, you know, having to argue for every point or to, you know, get your perspective across—I mean, that's exhausting, you know, and it's particularly exhausting for this style.

And so when things get really heated, there's also sometimes with this style, a tendency to really just kind of shut down and, you know, silently wait for the tension to pass. And on the surface, what it looks like is it you know, it usually looks like the CS is really calm and they're not too bothered by the whole situation. But underneath, there can be a whole lot of stress going on. In fact, in general, the CS style has this real tendency to internalize their stress, to put a lot of pressure on themselves to mentally figure things out, but to not burden other people with the weight of their problems.

And actually what sometimes happens is these two opposing strategies on conflict. On the one hand, there's a lot of ruminating, and on the other hand, a lot of kind of glossing things over in their minds, you know, putting things out of their mind, pretending everyone's just fine, maybe even sometimes bordering on and denial. And both approaches can be adaptive at times, but they can also both have their downsides, obviously. Ruminating, like, for instance, fretting over a problem or playing that problem over and over again in my head. In essence, what I'm trying to do there is, it's an

attempt to reduce tension, to get harmony by replaying the incident in my head over and over, hoping that, you know, this time I replay it I'm going to get some resolution, I'm going to get some closure. But of course, I rarely actually do get a sense of closure by ruminating. I just end up stressing myself out.

Now, if you do have a CS style, as you've gotten older, hopefully more mature, maybe not, but hopefully more mature, you may have developed more comfort with other strategies for dealing with conflict, maybe more direct strategies. But that instinct for harmony is oftentimes always going to be kind of pulling us back from the fray a little bit, telling us to just end this thing as quickly as possible with as little bloodshed as possible. And so there's always that temptation to either withdraw or cave in just so we can have peace again.

Now, at this point, I want to pull back a little and introduce this idea of driving assumptions. These are unspoken belief systems that each of us has, beliefs that are usually well outside of our awareness. But they're assumptions that we have about how the world works. And because they're assumptions and because they're unconscious, we don't question them. We just assume they're true. So for the CS style, one of the assumptions is if my world isn't completely stable, things are bad. And I call it a driving assumption because this little belief that we probably came up with when we were three or four, it drives a huge amount of our behavior and it drives a lot of how we interpret the different events in our lives.

So for the rest, this talk, I want to discuss some of these assumptions and, you know, I think if you have a CS style, you might find yourself a little bit torn. You know, on the one hand, you might find yourself saying things, you know, like that assumption is just plain stupid, you know? I mean, embarrassed to admit something, I believed something like that. At the same time, though, there might also be some part of you that kind of actually does believe it. You know, you don't necessarily always really want to admit it, but you kind of know what's there. And I think the thing you should know is that this is true for everyone.

We all have these unspoken beliefs about the world that on the surface they're kind of ridiculous or even embarrassing. And if you examine them in the light of day, it's like, you know, this is how a child sees the world, not an adult. But to the degree that these assumptions are legitimately there, going on in the background of our mind and we go on not owning them or refusing to acknowledge them—they have that much more power to shape our lives and guide us toward decisions that aren't always in our long-term best interest.

All right, so here's another driving assumption. And if you have a CS style, try it on. You know, ask yourself if maybe there's some part of you that believes this even in a small way. So here it is: I should never be the source of someone else's unhappiness. And it's a very simple statement, but it can have a really powerful influence on our behavior. And this statement can take on a variety of different forms, like: I should never burden other people. Nobody should ever think I'm selfish. If someone is displeased with me, I've done something wrong. But the basic theme is not making other people unhappy, not troubling them. So think about all of the ways this assumption would affect someone's behavior if they had really, really incorporated it into their worldview.

So one of the implications is something we just talked about, not burdening anyone else, keeping things inside, internalizing problems, not asking for favors, not asking for help, you know, being willing to take on immense workloads by ourselves, dealing with frustration internally rather than upsetting a relationship. Or not telling people that were unhappy with them and even to some degree, putting the blame on ourselves, worrying about situations where we may have offended someone. And in fact, it may not occur to you just how much of your energy is actually being consumed by trying to understand and cater to other people's feelings. You may not realize just how much more efficient it would be to just tell people what you're thinking without filtering it and, you know, and adjusting it for their emotional response.

Often with the CS style, when they're talking with someone, they're used to running through a variety of different ways to phrase something so that it's least offensive. But

there's a, you know, there's a downside to this, which is that it can also make them appear more hesitant or more unassertive when they're talking. But that's part of making sure I don't say something that hurts another person.

There's also almost an unconscious assumption that they should live up to other people's expectations. So if, for example, someone's showing impatience in a conversation, I see that and now I work extra hard to speed things up in the conversation or to get the information they want to them more quickly. Basically, I internalize this pressure to attend to the other person's expectations of how the conversation should go.

And so in social situations, one potential consequence is that sometimes people with C S style unintentionally give off small cues that they give away their social power, you know, things like asking questions rather than making declarative statements. Or making a point to laugh whenever someone makes a joke, no matter how bad the joke might be, because they're trying to make the other person feel comfortable. Or nodding a lot to make sure the other person feels accepted. Maybe focusing on the other person's topic rather than their own topic. Maybe turning away eye contact first. Making themselves physically smaller by, for instance, putting their hands in their pockets. Or taking on a more gentle, quiet tone, looking down, matching the other person's pace and tone rather than asserting their own pace and tone. Qualifying their statements with things like "kind of" or "sort of" or "this is probably a bad idea" or going out of their way to agree with the other person's statements, sometimes smiling awkwardly again with a purpose of communicating acceptance.

And all of these gestures really do come from a good place, but socially they can slowly hamper a person's ability to influence or even really just to get credit for their abilities. And a large part of this is because these gestures can often mistakenly send a message that says, I'm unsure of myself. And even more than that, they unconsciously send the message that I'm trying to please you. And this translates into, you have more power in the relationship.

Now, for most people with the CS style, they're not particularly power hungry. They want to work with people rather than above them. Power for a lot of them can actually feel uncomfortable, like, for instance, even delegating can feel uncomfortable. Like I'm telling someone, here, you do this instead of me. And there's a number of reasons for this. But one of them is having power over someone can feel like you're controlling them or even harming them, like you're violating someone's rights by having dominance over them. You know, it's not a rational thing. It's more of an instinctive thing, almost like being allergic to showing dominance. And it's something that can show up in a lot of different ways, for instance, a lack of comfort in defeating someone or clearly outperforming another person. People with this CS style, they want to make sure the other person feels good about their performance, too.

Okay, and we'll get back to this whole issue of power in a second, but the point I want to emphasize here is more about influence and to some degree about getting the credit they deserve. Basically, all of these cues that I was talking about earlier can slowly erode their ability to get their needs met, to have their needs prioritized by other people, or sometimes to really even have their rights respected. And so if you take that a step further, the idea of being outright aggressive is pretty hard for someone with a CS style. After years of training, the brain is now telling them, aggressiveness, that's the behavior of a bad person. It violates this core principle of do no harm. And so even showing forcefulness in smaller ways is avoided.

And if you work with a lot of strong personalities and you find it exhausting to use force, your needs and your ideas are unfortunately going to get dismissed a lot. And most people with the CS style actually do recognize this and in fact, can be very self-conscious about being seen as timid. On the other hand, mustering up the energy and force necessary to get their say in those environments can be really exhausting, especially in the long run. You know, generally, they really just don't want to be in one of those environments where they constantly have to fight.

But to a less extreme extent, even regular social interaction can feel a little draining at times for the CS style. I think a lot of it can be traced back to this belief that I should keep people happy. That is, if we're expending so much unconscious energy to make sure everyone is happy and to make sure other people are enjoying our company, we can sometimes eventually find ourselves unconsciously wanting to avoid those social situations, because processing all of that information, that's that's draining. Thinking about other people's needs, not being able to let our guard down, that's draining. And because of that, alone time can seem like a particularly attractive option.

Now, I do want to pull back again to the big picture, because, again, all of these tendencies I've been talking about, they can be traced back to this driving assumption: I should never be the source of someone else's unhappiness. And so if you have a CS style and if you've really internalized this belief, it really, really, really makes sense that you wouldn't want to be aggressive, that you want to please people in a conversation, that you don't want to impose on anyone and even that you're going to be slow to push back against someone or stick up for your rights. And in this light, all of these habits make absolute, perfect sense.

OK, so there's another few driving assumptions that I want to introduce, and again, if you have a CS style, these may or may not fit you, but it's worth trying them on, asking yourself if you can see at least some part of you that believes these statements. All right, so here's the next one: I'm half pretending that I know what I'm doing. And, you know, in some sense, I think it's almost a little bit comical how blunt it is. On the other hand, it's something that we can all feel at certain times. But I think for people in the CS region of the Everything DiSC® map, they might find that this script is playing in the back of their heads, maybe even a little bit more often than the average person. And, you know, I think there are some other related assumptions, things like my opinions are only half-baked or other people's opinions must be more informed than mine.

In essence, these beliefs stem back to this hyperawareness of how incredibly fallible I am, how many possible ways I could go wrong, how often I make mistakes. And it's not

that people with the CS style make more mistakes than other people. It's that they're more aware of them. But more importantly here, they're more aware of the potential that they can make them in the future. And it's this hyper-awareness that can have a lot of implications for how they live their lives and how they manage their relationships. So modesty is often one of the first characteristics that comes to mind for the CS style. There's not a lot of self-promotion that goes on here. And so, again, their contributions can sometimes fly under the radar because of this. And this isn't to say that they don't appreciate recognition. They really do. But there's also an embarrassment about it.

Oftentimes, there's an assumption that when we're given a compliment, we have to play it down, say it was no big deal or that the idea was just common sense, even though we do actually take pride in the compliment. And compared to a lot of other people, the CS style tends to be OK working in the background. They really want acceptance in the group. They don't necessarily need to be adored or admired or to have the limelight. They're OK with a supporting role. And in some respects this is about realism. It ties back to that hyper-awareness of their own limitation, but also a hyper-awareness of other people's needs, which they really realize are just as important as their own.

There was this short story that I read in high school, and for whatever reason it stayed with me all this time. The story is about this teenager, a guy, and his buddy's girlfriend has her friend coming into town. So the buddy asks our guy to do him a favor and go out on a double date with this visiting friend. So the guy is dreading the date and being stuck with this girl for the whole night. But it turns out the girl is absolutely stunning. She's gorgeous. He's smitten. So he spends the whole night putting the moves on, you know, but he's not getting anywhere. She's shy, right?

Finally they're on the train coming back from the city and he tries to put his arm around her. And as she moves away from him for like the third time, he has this lightning bolt of a realization, he says to himself, oh, my gosh, I am the blind date. He realizes that he's the nuisance, that she, in fact, is the main character and he is just some passing extra in her story. She's the one doing the favor for her friend. He's just some creepy guy who

can't take a hint. He sees himself through her eyes and realizes how unimportant he is in her life. It's, you know, it's crushing for him and it's humbling. He feels, you know, utterly marginalized.

But the truth is, most people that we come in contact with, we really are just extras in their story. The CS style has a much better grasp of this truism than the average person, because for most of us, it feels like we're always the main character. Things revolve around us for the CS style. There's this hyper-awareness of other people's needs and priorities, sometimes so much so that our needs get pushed to the background.

And while other DiSC® styles are inclined to maybe overestimate their rights, the CS style is inclined to underestimate their rights. And so, well, people who think very highly of their rights, they get angry very often. The flip side of that is people who have a diminished sense of their rights, they're less prone to get angry. People with the CS style, they're much more likely to put themselves in the other person's shoes and realize, hey, you know, I can understand why she's acting like that, or even just assume that the other person has a good reason, even if they don't know what it is.

Now, at this point, though, I think it's worth asking if something even more foundational is going on with this inclination toward modesty. And admittedly, this is pretty speculative, but I think sometimes there's a connection between modesty and a need for safety. And let me explain this a little. If we think about the opposite of modesty, arrogance. Well, what do arrogant people do? They brag. They throw their opinions out there when no one's asked for them. They seize power. Basically, they expand themselves. They make themselves bigger, more noticeable. But one of the consequences of making yourself more noticeable is that you're more exposed, you're more of a target. More people are going to realize when you screw it up or when you don't know what you're talking about.

And so one of the benefits of being modest is that you make yourself less noticeable. You're less of a target. You have more safety. And sometimes there's even an instinct to attach oneself to someone who projects more strength or confidence or competence. There's a safety and a security in that. Again, you know, we come to this overriding priority, which is stability, wanting things to be smooth and steady and secure, even if it means less power or influence. Now, again, part of this desire for security is because there's such an acute awareness in the CS style of their own limitations and all of the unknowns in the world.

As a means of contrast, you know, take someone with a super high-power, domineering-type personality. They're much more likely to have a narrow focus on their goals and disregard for any information that might hinder their accomplishment. You know, the accomplishment of that goal. They're going to brush off the warning signs that their judgment might be flawed. People with the CS style, on the other hand, tend to overabsorb information and danger cues.

And there's this indecisiveness that comes with not being too narrow-minded, being too aware of all of the endless choices and all of the possible ways that it could screw up. So, as an analogy, imagine our hard-charging dominant person crossing a tightrope. Her attention is purely focused on the goal, and the goal is the platform at the end of the rope. And therefore she's confident she's going to reach it. She doesn't look down. With the CS style, they're all too aware of the surrounding dangers. They look down, side to side. They test the wind. Their confidence is lower because they're overprocessing. And a lot of cases, they're really better off just focusing on the goal and tuning out all of those dangers, even if it can feel a little reckless.

Compared to other people, the CS style really feels this full weight of responsibility for being a lone agent in the world, you know, entirely responsible for making choices among an almost infinite universe of possible options. It's kind of an existential thing, to be honest. This realization, like, you mean I alone am responsible for my fate? Seriously? I'm the only one keeping myself from falling off a cliff? Who am I to know the

answers? And I think this is most pronounced as kids, as children, this overbearing weight of responsibility. It's almost as if the CS style was put alone in the cockpit with no one else to rely on to land the plane. There's no expert. Somehow they're supposed to know how to do this task with this infinite number of ways to fail.

And so in cases like this, it's very tempting to turn the wheel over to an expert, whatever form that might take. There's this huge sigh of relief. And sometimes you do need to do that. But it's about how often we're tempted to turn over the wheel. And with the CS region of the map, the temptation can be particularly strong, especially when we're young. And it can undercut the belief that I can do these things myself and that things will be OK even if I truly am the only one that's at the wheel.

And so one of the things people with the CS style sometimes do to overcome this is to spend a lot of time developing expertise in whatever area before they present themselves as being ready for prime time. Only with that expertise do they feel confident enough to really put their weight behind their arguments. And it might even be as simple as presenting a specific idea in a meeting, for instance. Whereas other people might have an idea and they they blurt it out, people toward the bottom of the Everything DiSC® map, like the S style and the C style, they'll work through an idea in their heads until they're absolutely sure they can defend it, until they're sure there are no holes in it. Only then do they wait for the right opportunity or a lull in the conversation to make a pitch. And even then, it's likely to be done in a kind of a tentative, more qualified way.

Again there's this desire to minimize exposure, and it's very much related to this idea of minimizing mistakes, you know, almost as if there's this core belief that it's borderline unethical to be wrong. You know, if I produce something and I put my good name on it, it absolutely must be of high quality. If I make a statement, it must be true, preferably with information to back it up. Anything else is almost morally wrong. And so it's not that everything needs to be perfect, but the things that I can commit myself to, the things that I put effort into must be unassailable and refined. Maybe I'll allow some flaws in

things that I haven't poured myself into, but if I identify with a project or an accomplishment, it must be flawless.

But I do want to make sure that I'm not painting a picture of the CS accuracy as being purely a defense mechanism. That the only reason this style wants accuracy is because it doesn't want to be blamed for mistakes. It's broader than that. People with the CS style, also, they take a lot of pride, a subtle kind of joy in producing something of great quality. They like knowing that they've done a truly excellent job and like having control over all aspects of it. There's a satisfaction that comes with stepping back and looking at the work that I did and admiring how well it matches up to some standard. There's a sense of completeness and closure and purpose that comes with getting things just right. It's a little like slipping that last piece of the puzzle in place. When things fit just perfectly after a bunch of hard work, there's wholeness and stability. And I think most people can appreciate that, but particularly the CS style.

But there is still that other more defensive motivation for precision, which is to avoid mistakes. And if someone wants to avoid mistakes, one of the best tools humans have available to us is logic. It's knowable and predictable. It's also incredibly stable, like math. If you put certain variables in, you're going to get certain variables out. Each time it's the same. So the CS style learns to rely on this tool and sometimes they over-rely on it. And then another practice that helps people avoid mistakes is information gathering. The CS style typically wants a lot of information before making a decision and sometimes wants an unrealistic level of certainty before making a decision. So this can translate into being very slow to act or being very risk-adverse or frankly, not even recognizing opportunities where it might be worth taking a moderate risk. You know, it's just not on the radar. And, of course, we all want some certainty before we're taking a chance.

It's just that the threshold is particularly high for the CS style. Now, one of the unexpected areas where this avoidance of mistakes and the, you know, avoidance of exposure that, you know, where they really play a large role is in the area of leadership.

When I become a leader, I can't really rely on the security of a low profile. Now I'm exposed to the judgment of all of these people who expect that I know what I'm doing. There's this lingering danger that they'll call me out for any misstep and say, who do you think you are? You know, it's that danger of being found out, of having other people realize that I don't actually deserve to be in charge. And like we mentioned before, I might already kind of have that belief that I only half know what I'm doing at any given moment already. Not only can I make mistakes that ruin things for me, but now I can ruin things for other people. I'm responsible for other people's well-being.

So one strategy the CS style might take on, for better or for worse, is to avoid speaking or acting authoritatively, because if I act authoritatively, I take on the full responsibility for making a bad choice. But if I democratize our decisions, we share the weight equally.

Likewise, I don't want to criticize the people I lead because if I push them too far, there's that elevated danger that they're going to call me out for not being, you know, a real leader. Better to keep myself in check than to have someone else do it for me. I might even look for ways to give power away, you know, monitoring my words to make sure that I don't come across as a dictator. And then as a little bit of an aside here, as a manager, sometimes people with the CS style are also slow to manage up for their teams, to push to get the resources that their teams need, or to stick up for the teams rights. Again, it's because this style really doesn't want to push or pressure anyone. But understandably, it can be frustrating for the members of the team, the people that they lead.

Or a slightly different issue, even when they are in an official leadership role, people with the CS style often can have trouble pushing for change or pushing back against the status quo, because in an organization when you want things to change, you're often going to meet resistance, which is the opposite of harmony. So there may be times when I, as a CS leader, sometimes let problems persist way too long or where I don't really speak out against them because this is usually the kind of stuff that causes

tension. All right. But having talked so much about limitations here, I do think it's important to note all the truly amazing things that the CS style does bring to leadership, because there really are a lot of them. And it comes back to this modesty and this attention to other people's needs.

And so, actually, let me step back for a second and talk about some general aspects of human nature, particularly as it pertains to leadership. There have been a number of studies where we find that people who are given power are much more likely to exploit or objectify others. It's a quirk of human nature. It probably doesn't surprise you. If you're put in a position of power, you quickly begin to feel that, you know, you just don't need to put as much energy into reading other people's actions or emotions. So the average person stops spending so much energy on this stuff. We become less attentive to the internal experiences of other people, what's going on in their heads, what, you know, what their priorities are. You know, think about it: Do you spend more time thinking about your boss's mood or does your boss spend more time thinking about your mood? Probably the first one.

Power reduces perspective taking. That is, when we're feeling powerful, we put less effort into seeing things from someone else's point of view. We're also less likely to see other people's contributions. There's a whole field of research on this. So the great thing about the CS style then is there's much more immunity to these negative influences of power. And our own research actually shows that compared to other leaders, the CS style gets significantly higher ratings from other people on things like staying open to input, showing diplomacy, facilitating dialog. And these are really important leadership qualities.

And I think for most people with the CS style, maintaining and fostering power, you know, it's much less of a priority and it's much less important than maintaining and fostering their credibility. In fact, you know, this can often be one of those other driving assumptions, you know, the assumption being that I must always maintain my credibility. And if you have a CS style, you know, try this on. You know, ask yourself if

there's some part of you that believes this statement, even in a small way. And this is a deceptively powerful little statement. In fact, the key words here are probably not what you would expect them to be.

Again, take this sentence: I must always maintain my credibility. I would argue that the key words here are "must" and "always." "Always" is powerful because it's an absolute. It puts a tremendous amount of pressure on a person to live up to this standard at each and every moment in time, with no exceptions, no room for screwups. And human beings, you know, we just can't do that. The other key word, "must," is one that you might not expect at all, but here's what "must" does. It elevates this statement from a mere preference or a goal or a nice-to-have, and it elevates it to a moral imperative— that this speaks to our very character, whether we're a good person or a bad person. I must guard my credibility at all times because this is a reflection on my worth as a person.

Now, granted, I'm using language here that's a little grandiose, and very few of us think in these terms consciously. But for all of us, there are times that our brain makes these absolute, completely irrational assumptions about life that guide our perceptions of the world around us. So let's say this assumption is in play. It's operating beneath the surface, maybe even just to a small degree, maybe to a large degree. Maintaining self-control then is one of the first things a person is going to do to protect their credibility. Even if I can't necessarily control the situation, I can control myself. So there's a certain amount of pride that I take in my ability to control my desires.

Self-control also assures that I won't make a fool out of myself by making a mistake or doing something inappropriate. There is therefore a strong instinct to avoid all forms of vulnerability, not to show weakness to others, especially in areas that I think matter. So I'll go off and do research on my own rather than letting people see me in a vulnerable position of not knowing something. I keep my insecurities to myself and find it frankly, you know, bordering on humiliating when those insecurities might show because a credible person is strong. I'm using quotation marks here, but, you know, the credible

person is strong. They're in control. They can handle the problems that life throws at them in a composed, disciplined manner. At least that's what should happen—"should" being another one of those very loaded words.

Now, a much more proactive way to ensure my credibility is developing expertise. Expertise ensures my competence in whatever area we're talking about. It's not about getting attention or approval or power. A lot of the times it's about accomplishment. But a meaningful amount is also about, if I develop expertise I've got this competency in my back pocket. As long as I know I have that I'm good. And this is core—you can take everything else away and I'll still have my competency. Expertise helps cement my worth. It closes up the vulnerability that I could be exposed. Here I have the chance to be on the offensive rather than the defensive. This is where I can get my pride needs met. Pride feels good, you know. Other people get their pride needs met by being top dog or by getting a lot of attention or by having status.

Being an expert allows me to dip into that well of pride in the same way. And like anything, it can be taken too far. It can be tempting for a person to hide behind their expertise, to build their self-concept around it to the point where it's like a safe fortress to take shelter in and withdraw into, where wandering outside their areas of expertise becomes even more unattractive compared to the warmth and the safety of their comfort zone. But of course, there's very much a healthy side to this instinct to build expertise as well. Once I have it, I can do things that very few other people can do. I can solve problems that very few other people can solve. It's because very few other people are driven toward mastery the way I am, and they're not willing to put in the hard, sometimes unrewarding work that's necessary to develop that mastery.

OK, so I definitely want to make sure the healthy side is acknowledged because the world would be much different, a much worse place if we didn't have people who were driven in this specific regard. All right. The unhealthy side—I mean, a lot of the time it's more useful to talk about the unhealthy side of our instincts, because that's the information that we can use to help us grow. So to the degree that there is this

unhealthy instinct to use expertise as a shield, or to avoid putting myself in a position where I might fail, to maintain credibility all times, to ensure that I'm not the origin of mistakes, there's a deeper impulse here to make sure that flaws are not exposed.

Sometimes people with the CS style, if they've really allowed themselves to dig deep, to be really honest with themselves, recognize this association between their flaws being exposed on the one hand and a really deep sense of humiliation. And it's almost an unspoken association. But to the degree that in the back of my head, I believe that the exposure of my flaws would be awful—people seeing those flaws would be awful—I make sure that those flaws take on complete lockdown. I make sure that my output, whatever it is, if it comes out of me, it's very controlled and very measured. And the CS style does tend to monitor their output very closely, which I think is often true of introverts in general.

In fact, the vast majority of people with CS style really do tend to identify themselves as introverts. And, you know, this is really, oftentimes a big part of their identity. You know, in fact, this trait of introversion/extroversion, it's probably one of the most pronounced ones that we have. You know, if you just had a conversation with someone for, you know, let's say a minute, and then I asked you to rate their personality on a number of different dimensions, the dimension that you would probably be most accurate on is introversion/extroversion. You know, it's just because this dimension has some pretty powerful implications for all of our interactions in life.

So there was this you know, this kind of this definition that I heard of introversion, that in particular I thought was really clever. And it was that when you're an introvert, social interaction is just really expensive. It requires a lot of energy. So if I'm introverted, I'm going to be very selective about where I spend my energy and who I spend it with. I'm going to limit that stuff. But for someone else, someone for whom interaction is cheap, it doesn't cost them much energy at all. They're going to look at me and think I'm standoffish or shy or insecure.

It is frustrating fighting those assumptions, particularly in America where there's such a strong bias towards extroversion. I remember talking to my uncle about my daughter. She was three at the time and my uncle is this really dominant, forceful kind of guy. And I said, well, I'm pretty sure she's going to be an introvert. And he says, don't give up on her yet. And I—and I think the assumption he was making, and that statement, isn't just unique to him. But one of the really interesting things that we see in the research is that there is on average a slight tendency for people to get more introverted as they get older.

On the other hand, there's also this tendency for people to have a stronger social presence and more social confidence as they get older. And so if introversion really was just about insecurity, we wouldn't see those two findings going side by side. There may sometimes be an element of insecurity driving a person to be reserved or private, but it's also that sometimes people are just more reflective, that they thrive in the internal world and can find external interruptions to be a little jarring. And the internal world can feel much more knowable and controllable. You know, the external world, particularly the social world, the rules for what's appropriate and not appropriate in the social realm, you know, they're really ambiguous and often, you know, completely arbitrary. You know, the normal strategy I might take when I know there's going to be a stressful situation is to prepare, you know, to analyze and to study. But in social situations, there's—there's really no amount of preparation that I can do to ensure that I come across well.

And the people who are usually regarded as the most socially engaging are, in fact, the ones who usually do put themselves out there. They open themselves up. They throw themselves into the situation. They're speaking stream of consciousness, a lot of the times. They're not second-guessing what comes out of their mouth. The filter between what they're thinking and what they're saying is very permeable. You can see their passion, and they pull people into those passions. Now, these people may be very image conscious. They may thrive on attention. Their self-worth might be wrapped up in the approval of others. But their self-worth and their concept of dignity is probably quite different than the typical CS concept of dignity.

For the average CS style, my brain simply won't allow me to expose myself like that. I can't let go of those inhibitions because those inhibitions have been locked in place over the years to protect my dignity, to protect me from saying that ridiculous thing. Whatever it is, I've got this very intense internal monologue going on about the social dynamics and what's appropriate. But on the outside, it usually just looks like I'm a quiet person. And the cruel irony, of course, is that all of that quietness is exhausting. You know, it's all of that internal stress, analyzing the dynamics, looking for opportunities to jump into the conversation. But this can feel like, almost like, merging into traffic that's going 70 miles an hour when I'm standing still. It's exhausting.

And the need for emotional control, it doesn't just play out when, you know, mingling or socializing; you know, another area I think that you see this is in terms of emotional displays. And the general strategy here is really just, you know, to avoid them. I remember a friend describing to me how he sees it when someone loses their temper. He's this dyed-in-the-wool C style, by the way. And, surprisingly to me, what he described was being embarrassed for the other person.

And so, let's say someone with a really strong personality loses it and starts yelling. That person, the person yelling, may feel like they're showing power or strength through their aggression. But my friend's reaction was to just see this person as losing their dignity. They're losing control of the one thing you can have control over. They're creating a whole window into their flaws and shortcomings. When you get emotional like that, there's no telling what will pour out. And it's not just anger. It's really any sort of strong emotional display, maybe too much enthusiasm or too much sadness. Not to say that people with the C or CS or SC style don't experience strong emotions. They do, but they also have very strong instinct to control the display of these emotions.

And this is one of the reasons why conflict can feel like such a nightmare for this style. Even if it isn't heated, there's always this voice in the back of my head saying, "this could go there at any time." You know, that core need for stability is at risk. And this aversion to conflict can be such a dilemma for the CS style, because on the one hand,

they care passionately about things being accurate and fair and just. But on the other hand, confronting issues has this potential to throw them into this mess of emotion. And this can really—this tension can really pull them apart.

All right, but before I wrap up here, I do want to double back to one of those driving assumptions that I mentioned earlier, and it's because I think this one is particularly central to the CS style. It's this assumption that says if my world isn't completely stable, then things are bad. It's that stability and harmony thing. And so if I really internalize this assumption, then chaos is bad. I need to have things stable. Consequently, I'm going to tend to be careful. I've got to minimize the potential for mistakes. I prefer not to have unclear expectations. I want to know what I'm getting myself into. And sometimes I might need to have an unrealistic level of information before I truly feel comfortable making a decision or speaking out with an opinion. And that can seem hesitant or wishy-washy.

Now, on the other hand, I might be willing to stick with the status quo because at least I know exactly what I'll get out of the situation if I put in the required effort. And I'm usually persistent and conscientious enough to put in that effort, you know, and then I get steady, predictable progress. And so, generally speaking, there's much more focus on the downside of failure compared to the benefits of success. So working within the existing structure, that feels much more secure. I might get very attached to certain routines, procedures, a certain piece of equipment, even. I like having a steady rhythm that I can maintain and to do it tirelessly, even over an extended period of time, and turn out this remarkably consistent progress day after day after day.

And so if I've got a CS style, there's less of a tendency for me to get bored with routine compared to other styles. There's also less of a tendency for me to generate a lot of urgency or momentum without prompting, because having steady, established patterns really feels like my comfort zone. And so, obviously, it can be a little disturbing when I'm forced to give these things up, to change the routine or the world that's comfortable and secure for me. That security—it's like a friend. It feels good to have around me. And so

oftentimes when there's a major change in an organization, people with the CS style can feel a sense of loss or they can feel lost, feeling like everything's foreign. It's a surreal experience, like being completely uprooted. They don't necessarily speak up about it or complain about it.

But this foreignness can feel really lonely and really, not to be too dramatic, but almost kind of like the death of a friend. So one of the general strategies to maintain stability, for better or worse, is to minimize novelty, which means there's less of an instinct to scan our environment for new opportunities or to dream up how things could be different. You know, for some people, they constantly have their eyes open toward the future and the outside world. They have this open posture toward the outside world and new opportunities rather than one of reluctance. When a new or unexpected piece of information comes their way, they think, how can I make this work for me? You know, how can I take advantage of this? They simply don't see the constraints that other people see. People with the CS style? They're much more likely to see the value in what they already have in front of them, to get absorbed in the safety of their current world and putting out, you know, for instance, the day-to-day fires that come up.

And so on the social front, for instance, it's nice to have a small group of intimate friends that they know really well. And again, for better or worse, this can be a little bit insulating. They can take a little bit of comfort in being buffered from the unpredictability of the outside world. Now at work, particularly in a leadership or management or supervisory role, a resistance toward change—it can present a challenge, sometimes. Incremental changes, you know, they might feel OK. But drastic new enterprises, on the other hand, they can feel really jarring. And so if I've got a CS style, I might not even consider that these things are part of my role at work. There's much more of an emphasis on maintaining than there is on changing. And so in this regard, I might really not call myself ambitious or even super driven. And that doesn't even necessarily feel bad, at least partly because my self-esteem is a lot less tied to my accomplishments or my status. It's tied to other things.

OK, but, back to the steadiness and stability thing: the CS style, as a general observation, just tends to be more moderate in nature. They self-moderate, leaning toward, you know, middle-of-the-road approaches. They use words like peaceful or calm or serene to describe themselves. They stay away from extremes of being melodramatic or catastrophizing on the one hand, but also of showing excessive enthusiasm or being showy. There's a real modesty to this style, genuine modesty. And I think it's one of the things about them that people really are genuinely attracted to.

All right. So there's a lot of information here, a lot of dimensions that we talked about. So how do you make sense of it or, rather, how do you put it to use? Well, I'll just make one broad suggestion here, and it's about these driving assumptions. And I think a practice that's actually really powerful in terms of our growth as people is to simply monitor our behavior and our thoughts and start to notice when these assumptions are being played out in the background.

And so let me give you a reminder of some of these assumptions: "I should never be the source of someone else's unhappiness." "I must always maintain my credibility." "I'm half pretending that I know what I'm doing." "If things are not completely stable, things are wrong." The whole exercise is about becoming more aware of when these assumptions are driving our behavior, our thoughts, our emotions. Sometimes they're realistic; sometimes they're not. But the first step is just about becoming consciously aware of them so I can make my decisions and choices in a more deliberate fashion. If the assumption is realistic, you know, great run with it. But if it's not, then I learn to challenge it and replace it with a statement that's more accurate, more fitting for the circumstances. And it definitely takes some time and deliberate effort. But ultimately I end up having more control over how I see the world and really how I interact with it.

All right. Well, thank you, everyone, for your time.

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