



# How I Survived Working with General Patton: Using the DISC Profile to Better Connect with Others

BY BILL JAGROWSKI

## FIRED UP!

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“Sandy\*” I started, “I want to hear what you have to say, but before we get to that I need to share something relevant. Thomas, the team member responsible for this and two previous outages, has been fired. The team is taking steps to restore service. I’m happy to elaborate on the plan if you’d like, but I thought you’d want to know about the dismissal. You and I have talked previously about my efforts to change this team’s culture. Other methods have failed and our current results aren’t acceptable, so the team leaders and I concluded that this firing needed to happen.”

Five Seconds. Ten seconds. Nothing. Total silence. That wasn’t like Sandy. She always had something to say and got her points out quickly.

“Sandy? Are you still there?” Two of Sandy’s direct reports were on the phone, but they wouldn’t dream of interrupting. From personal experience we all sought to avoid drawing any attention when her anger went looking for a target to sight.

“Well, Bill.” she started, “I know how hard you and your team are working to turn things around. I’m sorry it had to come to this, but I know how committed you are to better results. I understand and appreciate the update. Please email me the status and the steps your team is taking to restore service. Thanks for joining the call.” She was gone. Outage reviews with her usually lasted at least 20 minutes. She ended this one two minutes after the 2:00 a.m. start.

## DOMINANCE PERSONIFIED

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When considering how to approach Sandy, I sometimes found it useful to imagine I was dealing with George C. Scott in the movie “Patton.” In my career I’ve found behavior profiles, such as the DISC profile, very useful in better understanding personality styles. But I also found that the specifics of the model were sometimes hard to remember. Occasionally I pick a memorable movie character to personify a certain style and consider how to approach that character. So Sandy became General Patton.

To be fair, unlike Patton she’d never slapped anyone that she thought was a coward (though the thought had probably crossed her mind). However, she had the same competitive drive and pace. Sandy was tough, but fair. She had a desire to solve problems and get things done, with a no-nonsense demeanor. Her expectations were always high, but not unrealistic, and they helped make those around her better. And it was always better to be part of her army than to be seen as her Rommel.

Under the DISC system, both Sandy and George Patton would fit the Dominance behavior: extroverted, fast-paced, and direct. Their drive, ambition, and force of will make them good leaders. But sometimes those qualities come with an ego that can make them argumentative or poor listeners. They get results, but occasionally there are costs — especially if you are the German army.

\* Names have been changed.



“Now there's another thing I want you to remember. I don't want to get any messages saying that ‘we are holding our position.’ We're not holding anything. Let the Hun do that. We are advancing constantly and we're not interested in holding onto anything except the enemy!”

**George C. Scott** as General George S. Patton, Jr.,  
“Patton,” 1970

“You're fine. You are the most capable, qualified, trustworthy person I've ever met, you'll do great. Is it too much to ask? ‘Cause I really need your help here.”

**Robert Downey, Jr.** as Tony Stark,  
“Iron Man,” 2008

## OVERVIEW OF DISC AND BEHAVIOR PROFILES

Behavior profiles have been around for thousands of years. The first profile systems emerged in the 4th and 5th centuries B.C. out of Empodocle's writings regarding the influence of the external elements of fire, earth, water, and air. A few years later Hippocrates shifted the emphasis to internal drivers of human behavior represented by the four temperaments: sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. More recent examples include the Myers-Briggs profiling system, which emerged from psychologist Carl Jung's writings in the 1920s; and the four Social Styles Model derived from Dr. David Merrill's writings in the 1960s.

The DISC profile emerged out of Dr. William Marston's 1928 book “Emotions of Normal People.” Marston saw four profiles, Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Compliance, which were a function of both external factors and innate traits. These DISC profiles group behaviors and help frame how we can determine and respond to individuals in each group. This enables us to be more effective when interacting with them. Through Sandy we've already looked at the Dominance profile; now let's look at the other three DISC profiles.

## INFLUENCE

The second DISC behavior is Influence. People exhibiting this behavior style are enthusiastic,

optimistic, and influential. But they can also be impulsive and emotional. Influencers tend to be very creative and think “outside of the box,” but are not typically ones for too much attention to detail. Their charisma and decisiveness make them natural leaders who inspire others. Think Tony Stark as portrayed by Robert Downey Jr. in the popular “Iron Man” franchise. Fast-paced, but at times a bit disorganized, Tony pursues a big vision; sometimes creatively making it up as he goes.

My client Emily was an Influence behavior type. She focused on the big picture and was generally a very innovative thinker. When we met it was important to ease into a conversation by first talking about things like sports and our families instead of work. Over time we built a trusting working relationship. One day she confided in me that another vendor had been having a lot of problems and she was trying to figure out how to proceed. I asked her more about the problems and what she thought her options were. “We have to get rid of them! You and your team could do it. Please just take over; I can't deal with their failure anymore! Please help me out; your team would be great!” And that was pretty much the decision. While she didn't have Tony's Iron Man suit, she did have the same kind of confident charisma and optimism.

The subsequent transition required us to work through a number of complex details. While details weren't something Emily liked to emphasize, she did like to be kept abreast of the big picture and our progress. We provided a written status report and reviewed it when we met. The report, however, fit on

“We sat and drank with the sun on our shoulders and felt like free men. Hell, we could have been tarring the roof of one of our own houses. We were the lords of all creation. As for Andy — he spend that break hunkered in the shade, a strange little smile on his face, watching us drink his beer.”

**Morgan Freeman** as Ellis Boyd “Red” Reddington, “The Shawshank Redemption,” 1994

“Sir, the possibility of successfully navigating an asteroid field is approximately 3,720 to 1.”

**Anthony Daniels** as C3PO, “Star Wars,” 1977



one page because she needed to be able to find information easily and to prove to others that the problems were being solved and that the end goal was in sight. Ultimately our transition succeeded, Emily saw her vision fulfilled, and the world was saved from bad guys.

## STEADINESS

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Actor Tim Robbins played Andy Dufresne, the central character in the 1994 movie “The Shawshank Redemption.” In the movie, Andy ends up in Shawshank Prison for a crime he didn’t commit and proceeds to bring a sense of grace and hope to his fellow inmates through his steady leadership.

Andy exhibits many of the characteristics of the next DISC profile: Steadiness. He controls his emotions and looks for ways to serve the other prisoners; whether through the patient pursuit of a library, helping a fellow inmate learn to read, or the prohibited broadcast of Italian opera across the prison yard. His pace is measured and deliberate; after all he takes years to slowly dig his way out of prison.

Like other Steadiness profiles, Andy shows an ability to hold a grudge and has an emotional distance that he himself blames for alienating his wife. Earning his friendship and trust requires patience and a sustained connection over time.

Earlier in my career I worked for a boss and mentor who fit the Steadiness profile. Steve was very bright, but had a humble unassuming nature that sometimes resulted in people underestimating him at their own

peril. The project itself involved the building and implementation of a complex financial system that relied on emerging technology. As is typically the case in these projects, we had several issues and people who started to lose their cool. But not Steve. As one of the key project leaders, he would calmly go through issue after issue, working through them with a patience and stamina at which I could only marvel.

“How do you do this?” I asked. “How do you not tire of these issues? We close three, and two new ones pop up!”

Steve was patient and deliberate when he answered, “When I get up in the morning, I know my job is to solve problems. And to me, problems are like dead fish wrapped in newspaper. If I wait to deal with them, they won’t go away. They’ll just smell worse.”

Steve had a strong image and a great attitude that saw us work through those issues and deliver on time without the need for a dramatic jailbreak.

## COMPLIANCE

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The final DISC profile, Compliance, is centered on structure and data. Individuals exhibiting this profile like procedures and facts. They expect precision and logic, with information to support decisions. Compliance types tend to be objective and have a firm grasp of the details, but can sometimes suffer from “paralysis by analysis” and indecision.

C3PO, the robot from George Lucas’ “Star Wars” franchise, exemplifies the Compliance profile. Driven by facts he is able to help with an objective analysis,

Ultimately DISC is useful in helping to better connect and understand many of the characters we encounter at work ... and at the movies.

but is sometimes thrown off when things don't go according to plan, or when others improvise around standard procedures. While the robot comparison oversimplifies the emotional distance of a Compliance profile, they do tend to be less comfortable with a pat on the back or boisterous informality.

I once had a client who fit the Compliance profile. A fairly senior executive at a large multinational company, Mitch had responsibility for hundreds of projects. One of my goals was to strengthen the governance process for those projects. Given that Mitch was a key leader in our governance meetings, we used standard templates and metrics that would help keep the weekly reviews organized and on schedule.

It also meant lots of preparation time with the program directors to ensure they presented the right information and in the right sequence at the review sessions. I also worked with the program directors to present Mitch and other governance team leaders with the right "asks" to ensure bigger risks and issues could surface and get assigned appropriately. In those sessions and with that structure, Mitch was often impressively effective at connecting dots and ensuring the right level of attention was provided. And he didn't even have a light saber.

useful in understanding the different ways in which people approach situations.

By personifying the basic aspects of the DISC profile with movie characters, I've been better able to identify behavioral tendencies and limitations to bring out the best in others and myself. Ultimately DISC is useful in helping to better connect and understand many of the characters we encounter at work ... and at the movies.

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**BILL JAGROWSKI**

*bill.jagrowski@jabian.com*

*Bill is an Executive Director at Jabian with expertise in program and project management, organizational governance, and continuous improvement*

## ALL MODELS ARE WRONG — BUT SOME ARE USEFUL

Statistician George E. P. Box once said that, "All models are wrong but some are useful." The DISC profile model summarizes human behaviors into four types. It necessarily oversimplifies things; most people don't exhibit just one profile exactly, but are blends of the different profiles. But the DISC profile can be

# DISC SYSTEM SUMMARY

Profile Dimensions	DOMINANCE	INFLUENCE	STEADINESS	COMPLIANCE
They need to	Direct	Be liked and loved	Serve	Have order/procedure
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extroverted</li> <li>• Fast Paced</li> <li>• Direct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extroverted</li> <li>• People oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term relationships</li> <li>• Seeks stability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introverted</li> <li>• Task oriented</li> <li>• Procedural</li> </ul>
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to win</li> <li>• Loves change</li> <li>• Forceful</li> <li>• High ego</li> <li>• Driving</li> <li>• Ambitious</li> <li>• Does not like to waste time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trusts others</li> <li>• Positive sense of humor</li> <li>• Enthusiastic</li> <li>• Convincing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term relationships</li> <li>• Seeks stability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “By the book”</li> <li>• Needs proof or evidence</li> <li>• Cautious, not an innovator</li> </ul>
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self starter</li> <li>• Problem solver</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimistic</li> <li>• Persuader</li> <li>• Decisive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team player</li> <li>• Calming</li> <li>• Stabilizing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diplomatic</li> <li>• Objective</li> <li>• Technical</li> </ul>
Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor listener</li> <li>• Argumentative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impulsive</li> <li>• Too optimistic</li> <li>• Disorganized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resists change</li> <li>• Holds a grudge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis paralysis</li> <li>• Slow decision maker</li> </ul>
Things to emphasize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start/stick with business</li> <li>• Be clear and concise</li> <li>• Be efficient</li> <li>• Emphasize results and the bottom line</li> <li>• Genuine flattery</li> <li>• Ask for their opinion</li> <li>• Provide options, not opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let them talk awhile</li> <li>• Use testimonials</li> <li>• Provide a friendly environment</li> <li>• Spare the details and hit the high points</li> <li>• Provide recognition</li> <li>• Ask how they feel</li> <li>• Put details in writing</li> <li>• Be enthusiastic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break the ice with a personal comment</li> <li>• Earn their trust and friendship</li> <li>• Use a quiet manner and explain details</li> <li>• Give them time to think</li> <li>• Ask “how” questions</li> <li>• Stress security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare in advance</li> <li>• Get right to the point with facts and figures</li> <li>• Present ideas in a non-threatening manner</li> <li>• Answer all questions</li> <li>• Be accurate, realistic, and consistent</li> <li>• Provide them time to absorb detail</li> </ul>
Things to avoid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being indecisive</li> <li>• Appearing disorganized</li> <li>• Talking about irrelevant topics</li> <li>• Win-lose situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being curt, cold or tight-lipped</li> <li>• Controlling the conversation</li> <li>• Driving too quickly to facts and figures</li> <li>• Leaving decision up in the air</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rushing into business</li> <li>• Being domineering</li> <li>• Forcing them to respond quickly</li> <li>• Hard selling or closing</li> <li>• Conversations too fast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pushing too hard or being unrealistic</li> <li>• Being giddy or casual</li> <li>• Over promising or making unrealistic promises</li> <li>• Touching or pat on the back</li> </ul>

