

Ask Dr. A. . . . Dr. Michael Abelson

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Dr. Michael Abelson is an internationally respected expert on human resources, assessments and leadership. His company assists organizations maximize their human potential through the use of face-to-face and internet based products, systems and processes. He has delivered seminar, speeches, and key-note speeches to over 800 audiences on four continents.

Click here to Ask Dr. A a question on human systems management and/or leadership.

Notable questions may be included in future Ask Dr. A columns.

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Managing Stress – Dealing With “C”s In The Workplace

With all of the stressors in today’s workplace, learning what to do to decrease stress and then manage that stress when present is exceedingly important. The first, second and third e-Letters in this four-part series examined how to deal with “D”s, “I”s and “S”s under stress. To read these e-Letters go to our website (www.TheAbelsonGroup.com). To read these and other past e-Letters, become a member of our Abelson e-Learning Center™ located on our website and go to the Center’s e-Letter archives section. Read the fourth and last e-Letter in our managing stress series now to see how to deal with stress of people with “C” behavior patterns.

Q *What is an “C” and how do they react to stress?*

A “C” stands for Compliance or Conscientiousness in the DISC behavioral system. The “C” is task oriented and has an internal focus when looking at others and their world. By internal focus we mean they look within themselves at their feelings and their thoughts. External focus people look outside themselves, at their environment and others to make judgments and decide on courses of action. Since the “C” is task oriented with an internal focus, they are very cognitive or what is sometimes called “heady” when they make judgments or decisions and take action. Expect them to be thinkers first and doers later. In some situations they think and think and think, taking action only when they are certain about the action to take. This means, left to themselves, they sometimes never make decisions or take action. The “C” tends to be detail and quality oriented, priding themselves in being accurate and exacting. They also tend to be pessimistic, asking question after question, and can be cynical. It is not unusual for them to take a long time to make a decision or take action and be cautious since they have the need to be so exact and precise in what they do. The more of these behaviors they have and/or the more intense they are in these behaviors, the more strongly they are a “C”.

Q *What can bosses do to help “C”s deal with stress?*

A When a “C” is stressed, they tend to be critical. The more stress, the more critical. Deci-

sions take even longer than usual. The questions can also be more intense and numerous. Their need for accuracy escalates. It is not unusually for their cautiousness to cause them to want to be 120% certain before making a decision or taking action. This can frustrate others around the “C”, especially those who are high “D” and/or high “I”. The high “D” wants quick action. The high “I” does not understand the need for the “C” to ask so many questions and be so detail oriented and slow to act.

The boss or manager can do several things when high “C” characteristics are present. First, they can attempt to make the task or decision less complex. Divide the situation into several smaller issues or projects. Second, define project deadlines and hold the “C” accountable to reach closure by the agreed upon deadline. Third, answer their questions quickly and clearly with confidence, so they believe you and feel more comfortable that their decision or action is correct. Finally, ask them for several options and when the options are shared with you, you make the final decision. That relieves them of having to be correct. You are the one who makes the final decision. If it is not correct, it is not their fault, it’s yours.

The “C” may also tend to be fearful in some situations. To most effectively help them deal with the fear, reduce the complexity of the situation and/or ask them to only deal with a subset of the issue or problem. This may “free” them of the need to be right all the time. Everyone makes mistakes and the “C” needs to be shown that it is OK if they may a few mistakes themselves.

Q *What can colleagues do to help “C”s deal with stress?*

A Colleagues can be less critical of the “C” when the “C” takes a long time to make decisions. Being critical only slows the “C”s decision-making process down more. Colleagues can also help the “C” set personal time limits to make a decision or take action, and then help the “C” hold themselves accountable to the time line involved. Another technique is to clearly define the situation and the needs of the situation so the “C” does not have to ask as many questions in order to arrive at a solution or feel certain about their decision. Or course, colleagues can do some of the same things bosses do to help the “C” take action and get closure. Revisit comments made in the previous section about what bosses can do to help the “C”.

Q *What happens when two people in a stressful situation are both “C”s?*

A When both or all parties involved are a “C” there is an increased need for information, precision, and exactness concerning actions. When two or more “C”s disagree on the outcome, the stress level magnifies, and all parties involved search for information of any kind to justify their position. Since they are task oriented there is less concern for people aspects of the situation and one or more “C”s can be brutally honest, forthright, and confrontational. In these situations it is helpful to have information that everyone involved will trust, since the “C” does not like to take risk or be wrong. All out “warfare” can occur if the “C”s are hard headed and/or unbending. The more you can get an expert that all parties respect, the more likely you are to resolve the differences, reach a decision, and take action.

There are, of course, other types of situations that can occur when two or more “C”s are involved. The above is a situation where all of the “C”s are very high on the “C” dimension. Since the number of situations we can discuss in this e-letter are limited, I chose to present an intense situation. People who are less “C” and more of the other styles will react differently. This is to be expected. After all, our on-line DISC examines 384 different profile patterns. We discussed here only the few patterns that are very high on the “C” style.

Q *Can I find hints on helping “C”s deal with stress in their DISC reports?*

A Not all DISC or DISC reports are created equal or are the same. Our DISC reports have several sections that help you deal with the assessment taker’s stress. Go to the “Perceptions” page, go to the “Keys to Managing” page and go to the “Checklist for Communicating” page to see specifics on how that person acts under stress and how to manage as well as communicate with them when they are experiencing stress.

Q *How can I learn more about dealing with stress for other major behavior styles?*

A Read our past and future e-Letters on the subject, visit our e-Learning Center™ which has more information that answers this question, and/or invite Dr. A to present a DISC seminar that includes handling stress to your group.

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