

DISC Behavioral Styles and Selling Confidence

By Kirk Wakefield, Ph.D.

What DISC behavioral characteristics best describe individuals who have an ability to sell? Who has the least confidence in their selling skills?

In our latest studies examining behavioral styles according to the DISC model (see [previous](#) article for background), we sought to answer these two questions. Responses from 150 professionals in the residential real estate business, including 120 in selling and 30 in administrative/support positions help supply the answers.

Are you confident in your sales skills?

How do you know if you are confident in your ability to sell? How do you know if someone else is? Individuals confident in their selling skills strongly believe that they:

- Know the right thing to do in selling situations.
- Are good at finding out what others want.
- Can easily get others to see their points of view.
- Have a temperament well-suited for selling.
- Have no difficulty putting pressure on others to do something.
- Have no problems convincing others, and
- Are *good* at selling.

If you are reading this and wondering if you really are cut out for a sales career, you are probably unsure what to do in selling situations, have a hard time figuring out what others really want, have trouble getting others to see your viewpoint, and don't like putting any pressure on others to take action. According to our research, this probably has as much to do with your behavioral style as anything else.

What DISC traits translate into confidence in selling?

Drawing from the 92 traits we use to measure one’s DISC behavioral style, the Top 10 DISC behaviors most related to selling confidence are displayed in order [below]. As you might expect, seven are Dominance traits and three are Influence traits.

Rank	Behavioral Traits Most Associated with Selling	Dimension
1	Very sure of self	D
2	Persuasive	I
3	Enjoy competition	D
4	Has a lot of energy & vigor	D
5	Decisive	D
6	A risk-taker	D
7	Self-confident	I
8	Convincing	I
9	Enjoys taking a chance	D
10	Assertive	D

Knowing that these are the best indicators of selling skills can guide hiring practices. Interviewers can observe the more obvious traits related to self-confidence (#1, #7) and communication skills (#2, #8), but also seek concrete evidence of a candidate’s ability to passionately compete (#3, #4), take risks (#6, #9), and assertively decide (#5, #10).

What DISC traits = no selling confidence?

In the same way, we examined which of the 92 DISC traits have the strongest negative correlation with selling confidence (see table below). The Top 10 traits least associated with selling confidence are related to Steadiness (four) or Compliance (six) traits. Interestingly, while our society seems to value traits such as being moderate (#1), modest (#2), tolerant (#4), or sensitive (#10), on an individual basis these traits are strongly associated with a lack of confidence in one’s selling ability.

The remaining traits largely describe individuals who appear to be calm, cool, and collected (#6-9) and unlikely to engage in debate (#3, #5). As most DISC fans have already guessed, our study confirms that the typical administrative staff (N=30 in this study) is high in Steadiness and Compliance traits. That’s a good thing, because someone has to be willing to put up with the high DI’s.

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Rank	Behavioral Traits Least Associate with Selling	Dimension
1	A moderate rather than an extreme person	S
2	Modest	C
3	Doesn't like arguments	C
4	Tolerant	C
5	Rather a shy person	C
6	Calm	S
7	Cautious	C
8	Controlled	S
9	Gentle	S
10	Is a sensitive person	S

Returning to the hiring process for sales personnel, interviewers should be wary of candidates who are unwilling to express or assert opinions and are slow to make decisions. Conversely, these are aspects of the High S and High C that makes an appropriate fit for customer service (e.g., not arguing with customers) and administration (e.g., cautiously following accounting rules).

Who performs well in sales?

How important is confidence in one's selling skills? Across our two studies including now hundreds of professional sales people and sales managers we find that those most confident in their selling skills are statistically more likely to be top sales performers—and these are more likely to be high D's and I's.

Top sales performers
DOMINANCE 64.9%
58.2% INFLUENCE
STEADINESS 41.7%
28.0% COMPLIANCE

In the current study, we find that among professional sales people in residential real estate, individuals with these two behavioral styles have much better odds of being among the top sales people in their realty group:

<u>Top Sales Performers</u>	
Dominance:	64.9% of High D's are top sales performers
Influence:	58.2% of High I's are top sales performers
Steadiness:	41.7% of High S's are top sales performers
Compliance:	28.0% of High C's are top sales performers

It's important to note that some proportion of High S's and High C's can perform well at sales, so we should be careful in making blanket statements or judgments. For instance, over 1/3 of High D's in this study do not perform well relative to others in their groups and over 40% of High I's are not top performers. Also, the combination of an individual's two highest behavioral traits matters. Those who are

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High DI's (i.e., their two strongest traits are dominance and influence) are significantly more likely to be top performers, but a High IS or High DC is no more likely than others to be top performers. In contrast, High SC's are significantly more likely to exhibit poor sales performance among sales people.

Summary

The key takeaway is that a clear sub-set of DISC traits predicts selling confidence. Selling confidence translates into performance. Show me someone who has self-confidence, communicates well, loves to compete, takes risks, and make decisions, and I'll show you someone who will be your next top sales agent.

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Dr. Wakefield's current research focuses on (1) valuation of sponsorships, (2) marketing of music & films, and (3) how fans process information and make decisions. His book on Team Sports Marketing and 50+ publications (including Journal of Marketing, Journal of Retailing, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Leisure Sciences, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Business Research, and others) involve conducting research in virtually every professional sport (NASCAR, ATP Tennis, anything with a ball or puck) and with teams such as the San Antonio Spurs, Dallas Mavericks, Texas Rangers, Houston Rockets, Houston Texans, and San Francisco 49ers.