



Sales Leadership Lessons I Wish I Could Have Given to My Younger Self
"Your top sales rep may not be your best choice for promotion to sales manager"
says Kevin Davis

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Linda Richardson interviews best-selling author and international speaker Dr. Tony Alessandra.

Catch Lori Richardson on this week's Top Sales Academy



An Eye Opening Customer Tool

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Dr. Tony Alessandra is a best-selling author, international speaker, and entrepreneur in the field of sales and marketing. One of his areas of expertise is DISC, which he began to explore four decades ago. His passion to refine behavioral styles as a way to increase sales performance has never wavered over that time.

DISC is a personal assessment tool designed to help a salesperson understand his or her own behavioral selling style and the style and needs of customers. The initial model dates back to research at Columbia University in the 1920's. You may think that selling styles, especially with today's the

emphasis on research and business insights, may no longer be relevant.

Not according to Tony and he is conducting some exciting research to back that up. Certainly I feel that with customers becoming more and more sales independent that the relationship with the salesperson will be one of the main differentiators. Therefore, I was keen to understand how DISC fits into today's sales world."

Tony acknowledged that there is really nothing new at the core of DISC but that the research and data he has compiled has allowed him to maintain relevancy through new applications. He reinforced

that to build one-on-one relationships with customers and colleagues, it is essential to develop adaptability. Adaptability is a salesperson's capacity to change her approach/ style, depending on the situation or person with whom the salesperson is communicating.

For those of you not familiar with DISC, a brief recap. It is an adaptability tool made up of four basic behavioral styles that a salesperson encounters when calling on customers:

- **Dominance style (director, driver):** fast paced, wants to get to the point
- **Influence style (socializer, expressive):** idea-people who excel at getting others excited about their vision
- **Steadiness style (relater, amiable):** good planners, team players, and

good with follow-through

- **Conscious style** (thinker, analytical): requires documentation in writing, proof, slower paced

The goal of the tool is to give salespeople data to help them determine their behavioral style and understand the style of their customers so they can approach customers in the most effective way.

The big question is how to decode style. It would be great if customers wore style tags and in Tony's thinking they do to a certain extent. He recommends that salespeople looking at customers (and themselves) do so from three perspectives: (3 V's)—verbal, vocal, and visual and determine two things:

- Is the person *more open or guarded*?
- Is the person *more direct or indirect*?

The goal is to enable salespeople to understand their DISC pattern and adapt it to that of their customers. For example, if the customer is a D and a salesperson an S, in general the focus must first be on the desired outcome in a fast-paced conversation. Early rapport

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and relating efforts likely will not be as welcome as getting to the point quickly. But S customers are more open to relationship building and more of a challenge for D salespeople, who have to slow down their pace and focus initially on building trust. Salespeople must ask themselves what would they do *differently* in each of the stages of the sales process from prospecting to expanding based on the customer's style.

So how has DISC changed over the span of time that Tony has worked on this concept? Because Tony is in the [online assessment business](#), he has access to continuous current data, which he uses to analyze behaviors and refine the insights salespeople can gain from their style profiles. In his on-line assessment, Tony goes into greater depth with not only dominant styles but also secondary styles and these are often meshed with the values behind the behaviors. His goal is to insure the information given to salespeople is presented in clear, simple, and practical terms to help them be more successful and “read their customers like a book.”

We are living in a world not only of books but e-books and we discussed how to skew DISC to the shifts in how buyers buy and salespeople sell. We talked about the impact of the movement to phone selling which removes one of the three V's, visual. Tony feels that while determining style over the

phone is more difficult, a customer's voice, pacing, and choice of words give insight into his or her style.

We discussed how much more difficult it is to discern style in an email but again emails can be decoded if a salesperson takes the time to look. For example, D's answer in a more terse quick style of yeses and no's and often use capitalization and exclamation points. C style customers will go into great depth and include data and documentation, where necessary, I style customers are more likely to have more caps, italics, LOL abbreviations, and the S style will have longer, more personal and specific elements in their emails.

In selling to a group, it is vital to meet the needs of all the customers so they don't disengage. Taking into consideration the decision process and each style's pace and priority needs, meet the needs of the D first or you risk losing them, the I's second or they will start daydreaming, the C's third (not the S's), and the S's fourth because the S will stay with you all the way.

Tony is a self-professed D. If you are thinking about your style—Dominant, Influence, Steadiness, Conscious, you are not alone.

Tony's advice: “Don't give a presentation before you understand the customer's style. *Customer needs tell you **what** to sell. A customer's style tells you **how** to sell.*” ■

Dr. Tony Alessandra is a best-selling author and international speaker. Find out more [here](#).

