

The Vintner's Guide to Selling

A study in self-discovery



Picture this:
You're standing in your own tasting room one Saturday, just before you open for business. You're ready—excited to give your customers a taste of your latest creation. You're supremely confident it's going to fly off the shelves. The doors open ... and you're horrified to see that your first potential customer is ... **you**. Suddenly, you realize that your tasting room staff has no idea how to talk to someone like you—a leader, a problem solver—and oh yes—impossible to sell to. You should know: Your past is littered with the bodies of salespeople who never had a chance selling to you, crushed by your impatience and irritation with their let's-not-worry-about-the-facts-just-do-it-'cause-it-feels-right approach.

And the nightmare continues. The next person to walk in the door is your winemaker—and if you thought you were impatient with sales types, this guy makes you look like an amateur. If your staff isn't ready with the exact chemical makeup of each and every bottle in that room, they're dead meat.

Following closely on the heels of your winemaker are your office manager—who knows more about your winery than you do (and WAY more than your staff), and your own sales manager—and how in the world do you sell to a salesperson?

It's going to be a very long day.

“Argument is the worst sort of conversation.”

Jonathan Swift

“Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood.”

Freeman Teague Jr.

“Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee, and just as hard to sleep after.”

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

One of the great mysteries that have stumped business owners for as long as commerce has existed, regardless of industry or market, is how to increase sales. What is the secret to knowing exactly how to reach winery guests that will inspire them to buy? At least part of the answer can be found in understanding the basic styles of behavior and communication of your winery guests: the way they behave, how they communicate with others, and how they like to be talked to. If you understand these styles and learn the keys to communicating with them, you're on your way to knowing how to sell to anyone who walks through your door.

One of the most respected behavioral assessment tools is the **DISC system**. Developed in the 1930s, "DISC" is an acronym for four basic behavioral styles.

- D** People who exhibit strong "D," or Dominance behaviors styles are characterized as very active in dealing with problems and challenges, demanding, forceful, egocentric, strong willed, driving, determined, ambitious, and aggressive.
- I** Influence ("I") behaviors are shown among people who influence others through talking and activity. They are described as emotional, convincing, magnetic, political, enthusiastic, persuasive, warm, demonstrative, trusting, and optimistic.
- S** Individuals who show high "S," or steadiness tendencies are drawn to steadiness and security and don't handle change well. They are described as calm, relaxed, patient, possessive, predictable, deliberate, stable, consistent, and tend to be unemotional and poker faced.
- C** Finally, people with high Conscientious ("C") behaviors adhere to rules, regulations, and structure. They are careful, cautious, exacting, neat, systematic, and accurate.

"The newest computer can merely compound, at speed, the oldest problem in the relations between human beings, and in the end the communicator will be confronted with the old problem, of what to say and how to say it."

Edward R. Murrow

"Two monologues do not make a dialogue."

Jeff Daly

Generally, people don't fit specifically into a single category type, but once you've learned the DISC system, you'll begin to notice that most behavioral styles lean strongly towards one type—and you'll know how to sell to them.

The trouble is, teaching your tasting room team this system and how to sell based on it can be challenging—and frankly, boring. But there is hope: Using people you already know as examples of DISC can bring those behaviors to life, thus making it easier to figure out how to sell to them. And whom do you know better than the people you work with every day—your own employees? If you begin to pay attention to your everyday interaction with them, you'll begin to see differences in their behavior, their style of talking, even their approach to issues ... and their true DISC type will begin to reveal itself. After reading this article, you'll see patterns—and more importantly, so will your sales team. And that will put you on the path to effective selling.

"The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when someone asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer."

Henry David Thoreau

"The time to stop talking is when the other person nods his head affirmatively, but says nothing."

Henry S. Haskins

"Be sincere; be brief; be seated."

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

You, the owner: “Dominance” Bring out your best, and make it snappy

Strengths:	Comfortable in a leadership role, problem solver, can make tough decisions, not afraid to confront issues, sees change as a challenge, stays focused on the mission
Challenges:	Intimidating, insensitive, brusque, impatient, intolerant, unapproachable

As a business owner with a hectic schedule, it's doubtful you've ever taken the time for some self-examination. That in itself is a dead giveaway: You're a “D.” You are a leader, accustomed to making decisions, focused on your goals. But your strength can be intimidating; you are often impatient and brusque—off-putting in a sales situation. But you're not completely immersed in practicalities: As a leader, you're also image conscious. Admit it: Status is important to you.

When “D” personalities walk into your tasting room, they will step up to the bar first, ready for action. Don't waste their time with idle chit-chat and winemaking techniques. Bring out your best, your most prized vintage, and you'll have their attention. However, be sure to listen to them. They will very likely tell you exactly what they want—if they say they hate Merlots, whatever you do, don't try to sell them a merlot. Status is important to “D”s, so have them taste through the flight—so you can then bring out something exclusive and special that appeals to their image.

In short, “D”s want to be seen as your contemporary, as part of the inner circle. If you can show that it is exclusive, rare, expensive, and has status, they will buy. They can picture themselves hosting a dinner, pouring a vintage known only by a select group, demonstrating their superior knowledge of wine.

Top 10 Ways to Irritate a “D”

1. Engage in small talk.
2. Hand them a 50 page report on any subject.
3. Send them an e-mail with more than two sentences.
4. Share your feelings.
5. Explain everything and don't leave out any details.
6. Tell them about your weekend.
7. Make them wait.
8. Question their authority.
9. Offer them last year's model.
10. Give them a list of 10 things.

Your salesperson: “Influence”
Make a connection, dispense with the details

Strengths:	Always available for others, inspiring to be around, spreads positive attitude, praises others
Challenges:	Tasks fall through the cracks, projects don't get finished, lack organization

How do you sell to a salesperson? It's all about making a connection, making them *believe* in what they're buying. These folks are “I”s all the way. They're going to want to chat not only with you, but also everyone else at the bar. You will best engage them with anecdotes. Tell them stories about the history of the winery, interesting innovations in winemaking, and most importantly, about the *people* behind the wine. If they find out your winery is family-owned and has contributed in some way to your community through the generations, you'll make their day. They will be drawn to edgy, quirky, and innovative brands, so be sure to tell them your unique story.

“I”s will join the Wine Club and buy library wines, because they want to share their new discoveries with everyone. They will be interested in innovation in general, so be sure to share with them the newest blend, packaging, label, stopper—anything new and “cool” that will keep the crowd engaged. It's all about connections for “I”s, so keep them connected while they're in your tasting room.

“Never mistake legibility for communication.”

David Carson

“People say conversation is a lost art; how often I have wished it were.”

Edward R. Murrow

“Every improvement in communication makes the bore more terrible.”

Frank Moore Colby

Your Office Manager: "Steadiness" Do your homework

Strengths:	Good team player, empathetic to others' needs, methodical, good listener, easy to get along with, appreciative of others, praises
Challenges:	Indecisive, indirect, resistant to change, sometimes worn down by others' problems

If you know nothing else about someone who can keep a busy organization running smoothly on a day-to-day basis, you know this much: they are most definitely *not* wimps. They are "S"s, and their steady, consistent calmness helps them keep operations on track and handle crisis situations. When they walk into your tasting room, be prepared: these represent the one personality type that might just know more about your winery than you do. They are going to want proof, scores, and reliability, so know your facts. If you can earn their trust, they will feel confident in your recommendations. They will be drawn to best sellers and established brands. You can talk to them about unique offerings, such as a vineyard designate wine, but be ready to explain—in detail—what that means and why they should care.

If you can provide a detailed history and make-up of the source grapes, even better. Remember, these people are in the trenches every day; don't try to dazzle them with pretty labels and space-age stoppers. Oddly enough, however, they share a characteristic with "I"s. They will enjoy engaging in a certain amount of conversation, so don't be afraid to show them some warmth. If it won an award, it will capture their attention. They won't necessarily want cheap wine—they'll be willing to pay premium prices—but they'll want proof of the value of their purchase. Finally, keep this statistic in mind: roughly 40% of your customers are likely to be "S's," so you'd better know how to sell to them.

"The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate."

Joseph Priestley

"The right to be heard does not automatically include the right to be taken seriously."

Hubert H. Humphrey

"From listening comes wisdom and from speaking, repentance."

Proverb

Your winemaker—“Conscientiousness” Just the facts

Strengths:	Thorough, follows standards accurately, conscientious, diplomatic, accurate, fair (because following the rules does that)
Challenges:	Overly concerned with perfection, aloof, delay decisions, want more data, “fussy about minor issues”

Selling wine to a person who makes wine is like walking through a mine field. If you make just one misstatement, get one fact wrong, or give even the slightest hint that you're trying to sell something, you're toast. The cautious, systematic characteristics of a “C” require you to pay very close attention to everything you say. So, when you sell to “C”s, be ready to prove—with facts and figures—why your wine is better, and don't be afraid to talk about the science behind it. After all, these are types who split the atom. If you introduce a special characteristic of a wine, be sure to tell them *why* it's important: they will become suspicious of you if they think you're trying to dodge their questions. Don't bother with trying to get to know them; they won't engage. In fact, they'll suspect you of trying to divert them.

A “C” is what is commonly referred to as a “numbers guy,” so be ready to answer questions like, *How many bottles of wine per vineyard do you produce? How many acres do you have? Why do you charge what you charge?* With his penchant for numbers, they will be drawn to “economical” offerings and anything you have on special—and they will question your tasting fee throughout their stay at your winery. If they decide to buy, they will definitely not be interested in a library wine, and they will likely have to “think about it” before buying even a single bottle.

“Communication is everyone's panacea for everything.”

Tom Peters

“The greatest problem in communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished.”

George Bernard Shaw

“Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't, and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it.”

Robert Frost

Like “S”s, “C”s will buy when you can show them that a wine has been successful, has longevity, and is preferred by other “Cs.” If it’s been scored in the 90’s, they’ll *consider* buying it. If you’re a boutique winery, expect resistance. They prefer established wineries (they’re a safer bet), so if they are dragged along with a group, they will be tough to engage, and they are not going to buy. The more excited the group gets, the more they will resist—suspicious of “group think.”

It's all about communication

Armed with the knowledge of these four behavioral styles, you will not only see your employees in a new light you will also improve your rapport with customers and vendors. Start with the tasting room to gain new insights on selling; once you feel comfortable with that, you can move on to the rest of your organization. Regardless of where you go with your new-found knowledge, you and your team will be more effective in their sales efforts.

“To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others. ”

Anthony Robbins

About BDCo

BDCo is an an accounting and advisory firm with deep knowledge about the wine and hospitality industries, and a passion for putting people first. Grounded in knowledge of financial measurements, the firm’s services help companies achieve their goals and objectives by increasing the knowledge, awareness and understanding of everyone on their team.

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