

CHAPTER 1

KNOW YOURSELF, SO YOU CAN KNOW OTHERS

*Become more aware of how you and
“persons of interest” in your life tick.*

Before you can master the art and science of hacking other humans, you must first hack yourself. That is, you have to understand your own communications patterns, so that you can adjust for tendencies that might not be working to your advantage. As you become more self-aware, you can take your communications to the next level by considering others’ personalities and the communications styles they favor. Tailoring what you say to each particular “person of interest” in your life—your boss, your spouse, your kids, strangers you happen to meet, anybody at all—maximizes your chances of success, no matter what your objective might be.

In 2018, a scammer convinced Marian Simulik, the treasurer of the city of Ottawa, Canada, to wire almost \$100,000 to a phony vendor. The scammer deployed a phishing attack, sending an email that

purported to be from Steve Kanellakos, the city manager and Simulik's boss, asking her to wire the money. Actually, this was a particular kind of phishing attack, one that individually targets an important person inside of an organization—what we call a “whaling” attack (get it? Whaling?). Here's what the email said:

Okay, I want you to take care of this for me personally, I have just been informed that we have had an offer accepted by a new international vendor, to complete an acquisition that i have been negotiating privately for some time now, in line with the terms agreed, we will need to make a down payment of 30% of their total, Which will be \$97,797.20. An announcement is currently being drafted and will be announced next week, once the deal has been executed, for now I don't want to go into any more details. Until we are in a position to formally announce the acquisition, I do not want you discussing it with anybody in the office, any question please email me. Can you confirm if international wire transfer can go out this morning?¹

Would you have fallen for this scam? The email was well conceived, deploying a number of powerful techniques we'll discuss later in this book. Before we get to those, let's consider how adroitly this message was framed with Simulik in mind. If you had to guess, you'd probably assume that a city treasurer responsible for handling millions of dollars in taxpayer money would be a diligent, conscientious person—very private, disciplined, systematic. It's a stereotype, but most stereotypes contain at least a kernel of truth. If you're a scammer, a kernel is all you need.

In this case, the scammer wrote this message to appeal to a diligent, conscientious person. The language is precise, conveying relevant and believable facts about the apparent deal. The tone is serious and

businesslike—no chatting about the kids or LOLs here. The scam’s pretext—that Kanellakos has been “privately” negotiating a sensitive deal—is something a precise, restrained, private person would readily “get.” The first line asks Simulik to “take care of [the wiring] for me personally,” suggesting that the matter at hand is extremely sensitive and requires discretion and judgment. That Kanellakos is making this request at all suggests that he trusts the treasurer and her judgment over that of other team members. Later in the message, the scammer asks Simulik to show discretion and not discuss this very sensitive matter “with anybody in the office.” He *knows* she’s conscientious and appreciates that about her. Although the scammer (impersonating Kanellakos) says that Simulik can feel free to email him, he indicates that he doesn’t “want to go into any more details”—precisely because he, too, is precise, professional, and conscientious.

The scammer probably didn’t *know* that the treasurer was a particularly conscientious person. Chances are, he had never met her or otherwise interacted with her. The FBI actually caught this scammer, who turned out to be some guy living in Florida, thousands of miles away.² This scammer probably had met treasurer types before and taken an educated guess about *this* city treasurer. If he had been wrong, and this treasurer had not been especially conscientious, private, or diligent, the email likely would have rung false, and she would have spotted it as a fraud. As it turned out, the scammer was right, and she fell for it.

Think about the power of this kind of attack. Simulik wasn’t a newbie on the job. She was a twenty-eight-year veteran and a “highly respected senior manager,” as a newspaper account reported. Also, not long before receiving this email, Simulik had received another email asking for money that appeared to be from the head of the city library, and that they recognized was fraudulent. And yet this time Simulik had still fallen for it. The scam was only discovered promptly because the scammer got greedy. Days after Simulik had wired the money, she

received another email asking for even more money. That subsequent email prompted her to chat with the city manager and learn that she'd been scammed.

There are important lessons here for us all. First, and most obviously, *don't automatically send a wire transfer when requested by email*. Always follow up personally. And second, when making a request of someone, *always consider their communications style and preferences and tailor what you say accordingly*.

KNOW THYSELF

Actually, if you think about what was likely going through the scammer's mind, there's a third piece of wisdom here for us: *Know your own personality and be sure not to let it impede your communications goals*.

My company was launching a new conference for people in the security industry—a big deal for us. We had months to prepare, but I needed my people all in, especially Shayna, my assistant. My natural inclination when interacting with others is to be really blunt with them and order them around, drill sergeant-style. I tend to just blurt out thoughts, not considering how others around me might feel. People have called me forceful, confident, blunt—and they were being charitable. I've heard words like “jerk” leveled at me, too. In this instance, I might have gone up to her desk and said, “Hey. We need this conference to succeed, so like everyone else, you're going to have to work your butt off. That means staying late when we need it and working weekends. Do it, okay? Don't disappoint me!”

For most employees, a request proffered in this way wouldn't be terribly motivating. On the contrary, it would be off-putting. Fortunately, I didn't ask Shayna in this way. About a decade ago, I became more aware of my own personality and communications style, the good, the bad, and the ugly. I was giving my first-ever week-long train-

ing on social engineering, and true to form, was leading the class like a drill sergeant—shouting at people, ordering them around, projecting authority. It was exhausting for me, and probably annoying for my students.

My friend Robin Dreeke, bestselling author and former FBI behavioral expert, was co-teaching this class with me, and afterward he pulled me aside and said, “Dude, you’ve got to change your training style. You’re just barking orders out left and right.” I disagreed with him at first, but because I respected him, I took his advice and stopped barking out orders. What a difference that made. Students actually smiled as they sat in class. They participated more. They seemed more eager to absorb the material. Wow, I thought, this is powerful.

Over time, I adjusted my communications style, ditching the drill sergeant persona and becoming much more outgoing, jovial, and light-hearted. I also became much more aware minute to minute of what I was saying, how I was saying it, and how it was coming across. I started to focus more intently on understanding other people’s personalities and crafting my communications accordingly. Did I become far more effective as a hacker of humans? Heck, yeah!

Instead of ordering Shayna to put in her best effort, I thought about her personality and the communications style that would likely appeal to her, just like the Ottawa scammer had done for his target. I had an advantage in that I knew Shayna quite well—I wasn’t taking much of a guess. I knew she was conscientious, very organized, and private, like the scammer assumed his target was. She liked boundaries and preferred to stay out of the limelight. So, a very private, personal gesture on my part would likely prove most effective—certainly more so than my lavishing public praise on her, say, and then asking her to please put in her best effort.

I bought Shayna a gift card for a store I knew she liked, attaching a personal note thanking her for all the professionalism she has brought

to our company, and telling her what a difference it has made. I mentioned that our conference was coming up, and that I really needed her to continue doing the great job she had been doing.

Shayna *loved* it. The gesture touched her and inspired her to keep working hard. By all appearances, I could have handed her a million-dollar check and she wouldn't have been as motivated. All because I had been aware of my own worst impulses, had resolved to bypass them, had taken into account the personality of my "subject," and had shaped my communications accordingly.

You can't become an effective hacker of humans unless you've developed at least some awareness of your own communications tendencies—your strengths and weaknesses—and have developed the habit of uncovering relevant personality traits of those you need to influence. If I were trying to break into the headquarters of a big company, and I deployed my blunt, drill sergeant style (for instance, pretending that I was a senior executive from another office, and ordering the guards to let me in even though I didn't have a badge), that might resonate with some security personnel who react well to that style. But it would almost certainly backfire with many others who don't. So I would instantly be limiting my chances of success to just 50 percent (or less). In addition, by jumping in and communicating in my own style, I'm not giving any thought to crafting the interaction to my benefit, using the tools I'll share later in this book. I'm increasing my chances of making a dumb mistake.

In our daily lives, our obliviousness to how we naturally like to communicate leads to untold problems. A former employee at my company—I'll call her Camilla—and I worked together closely for years. For much of that time, we struggled to get along with one another, and I wasn't sure why. It turned out that our communications styles were completely different. Because I was so direct with people, Camilla often saw me as a complete jerk. Meanwhile, she preferred to

communicate more deliberately, thinking her ideas through first before speaking. Because she didn't react quickly and decisively to what I was saying, I often viewed her as being completely apathetic about her work and our business.

Day after day, we talked at cross purposes with one another. On one occasion, when we had to choose a health care plan for our company, I did some research and was pretty sure about which plan I wanted us to go with. I sent her a short email outlining my logic and asking her what she thought. A few minutes later, I called her up and asked if she got the email. "Yep," she said, "I'm reading it now."

"So what do you think?"

Pause.

"Okay," I said. "I'm going to go this route, okay?"

"I guess you can . . . [pause] . . . if you want to be a jerk about it."

"Great, thanks, that's all I need."

Click.

Later that day, I learned that she was upset at me. I couldn't understand why—I had asked her opinion, and she had said yes. When I asked her, she explained that I hadn't given her any time to read the email and make a thoughtful decision. "I said you could, if you wanted to be a jerk."

"I didn't hear the 'if you wanted to be a jerk part,'" I said.

"You never hear that part."

She was right, I didn't. And I also didn't get that she really did care about our company and making the right decision—she just needed more time to think before speaking up.

You might have the best of intentions when you have an encounter with a spouse, colleague, friend, or someone else in your life. You might be trying hard to communicate well and have an awesome conversation. And yet, you might find that you're failing to connect, that the other person isn't quite getting what you said, or that they're becoming

upset. Perhaps this other person is in a bad mood, and it's coloring what they hear. Perhaps you lack some context about them or their experiences, and you inadvertently offend them. But perhaps the *way* you are communicating with them doesn't conform well with how they're inclined to communicate. In so many cases, such mismatches make our relationships more difficult and cause us untold angst and pain.

Failing to understand our own communications tendencies also leaves us vulnerable to being influenced by others in unfortunate ways. When I was fifteen, my family moved from upstate New York to Pennsylvania and then down to Florida. I was pale as a lightbulb but, like many teenage boys, eager to impress the ladies. Picture me and a bunch of girls lying on the sand one cold January day by a fire. All of the guys are out surfing in the water. "Ahhh," I think to myself, "this is paradise. I've got all these babes to myself." Then one of the guys comes in and says to me, "Hey, Chris, you gonna sit there like a wimp, or are you gonna paddle out like the rest of us?"

Now, the water on this day isn't just frigid, but rough—six- to eight-foot seas. I haven't surfed before, not even a little bit. If I say yes, I'll open myself up to likely humiliation. "Some other time," I say. "I don't have a bathing suit."

"You have underwear on?" the kid says.

"Well, yeah."

"Go in that."

Turning away from the girls, I strip down to my underwear and make for the water. I grab a board, strap on its leash to my ankle, and hit the water. In addition to being freezing cold, it's rough as heck—the waves slam into me, knocking me around. I can barely make it out thirty feet, and I even feel like I might drown in the shallow water. I know that in my awkwardness I'm humiliating myself in front of these girls. Finally, one of the guys swims over and tows me out, causing me even more embarrassment.

Farther out, the waves are coming in bigger than a house. There is no way I should be out there. But, egged on by the other guys, I paddle for a wave. I manage to stand up, but just for a second, before losing my balance. The churning water pummels me and smashes me down hard on a sandbar. When I manage to surface, I'm gasping and can't find my underwear—the combination of wave and sandbar has ripped it off me. I look around for my board and find it smashed to pieces. So, picture me now having to make the walk of shame, buck naked, freezing cold, pasty white, past all of those girls I've been trying to impress.

It was an epic fail—not only was I humiliated, but I wound up catching pneumonia from the cold water. I allowed this unpleasant situation to unfold for two reasons. First, I was a testosterone-laden teenager who didn't have any friends and was eager to make them. But second, and just as bad, I lacked any sense at all of my own communications proclivities. As someone who favors a dominant, aggressive style of communicating, I tend to respond well to challenges. If someone dares me to do something, I'm going to take the bait and accept the challenge. The guy who convinced me to jump into the water dared me—was I “tough enough,” he implied, or was I a wimp? If he had asked me in a quieter way, I probably wouldn't have gone in. If he had levied the challenge, and if I understood myself well enough to know that I was susceptible to that kind of appeal, I also probably wouldn't have gone in—I would have made a smarter decision and found a way to decline the invitation. Since I utterly lacked self-awareness, this other guy was able to trigger a favorable response in me. I paid the price.

FOUR TYPES OF COMMUNICATORS

When I train people to become security experts, I introduce them to a classic psychological profiling tool called DISC, which they can use

to analyze their own communications behavior, and which they can deploy before and during conversations to quickly size up how others prefer to communicate as well. Although DISC has both fans and critics, many companies use it when hiring employees and assembling teams, and experts in professional fields like dentistry have advocated for its use as well.³ There's a good reason: research suggests that DISC is both reliable and helpful, increasing people's performance and making workplace interactions easier.⁴ My students and I agree. When it comes to the hacking of humans, both professionally and in everyday life, DISC is invaluable and even transformative, regardless of whatever imperfections or limitations it might have.

DISC is based on the pioneering work of the psychologist William Moulton Marston, who, during the 1920s, came up with the idea that we can separate people into four distinct "types" based on how they tend to express their emotions.⁵ Generations of psychologists have since developed and commercialized tests based on Marston's model that people can take to determine which type best describes them. My team buys one such test and incorporates it into the social engineering courses we teach, allowing our students to obtain a scientifically valid assessment of how they communicate. As I tell my students, DISC isn't a personality test like the better-known Myers-Briggs assessment. Rather, it helps us understand our communications tendencies, which might reflect elements of our personalities. (Our personalities, after all, are defined by way more than our self-expression. They encompass other kinds of behavior on our part, as well as how we make sense of the world.)

I can't reproduce the specific test we use in this book (our provider would sue me!), but I can draw on my general knowledge to give you the gist of DISC. That should be enough to help you understand better how you communicate and how you might better interact with others. In particular, let's take a closer look at those four types, so that

you can begin to see how you and others around you might map onto them. I'll emphasize right up front that the DISC model is value neutral. No one type among the four is better or worse than any other. You're not smarter or more skilled or possessed of a certain set of values just because your communications fall into a given pattern. You just communicate in a specific way that has advantages and drawbacks, depending on the social context and the people with whom you're interacting.

Some people are Dominant (D) types—they're confident and focused on bottom-line results. Others are oriented around Influencing others (I)—they're enthusiastic, optimistic collaborators. A third group of people are known for their Steadiness (S)—they're sincere, calm, and supportive of others. Finally, you have your Conscientious types (C), people like my assistant Shayna who are known for being organized and very factual. "D"s and "I"s tend to favor more direct communications styles, while "C" and "S" types favor indirect styles. Individuals who are "I" or "S" tend to focus on connecting with people more, while "D" and "C" types are more focused on getting things done in their communications.

To help people understand these four types, I find that it helps to connect them with celebrities. Foodies out there will be familiar with celebrity chef and television personality Gordon Ramsay. Now, that dude is *definitely* a "D" kind of person: he's direct, sharp, forceful, task focused—and that's putting it mildly. (Oh, how I love that guy!) At times, "D" people seem to not care about others and their feelings. That's not necessarily true—they might care very much, but they focus so much on results that other considerations fade into the background as they interact with others. They come across as overly harsh, severe, abrupt, pushy, or domineering, especially in stressful situations. Other celebrities who exhibit strong "D" tendencies are Simon Cowell from the TV show *American Idol*, CNBC personality Jim Cramer, and

former GE CEO Jack Welch. In the workplace, Dominant types tend to gravitate toward leadership and managerial roles—careers in which they can be in charge of others.

The prototypical Influencer type might be someone like former president Bill Clinton. He is a natural with people—expressive, exuberant—as Influencers tend to be. They love to be the center of attention. If you're not laughing at their stories and enjoying yourself, there's something wrong. Influencers also like to talk about themselves, and they tend to do it in ways that get them noticed (by speaking loudly or in an animated fashion, for instance). Other well-known people whom I'd classify as Influencers include Jimmy Fallon (and a good number of other television hosts), Tina Fey (and many other comedians), and quite a number of salespeople I've met during my time. Many motivational speakers, teachers, and courtroom attorneys are also natural "I" types. And yet, "I"s can sometimes struggle to connect with certain types of people. Sometimes Influencers are so enthusiastic and outgoing that they seem fake, superficial, or manipulative, not to mention egotistical. To other non "I"s, they might come across as impulsive or excessive, speaking too spontaneously and throwing too much information or emotion at you too quickly. And because they're so cheery, "I"s can often seem overly optimistic.

Actors like Tom Hanks or Hugh Jackman are steady "S" types. Like Influencers, they're people-oriented, but they tend to exude a quieter presence, standing out of the limelight and serving instead as supporters or wing people. They're happy for others to shine, and they tend to talk about others in their lives. Many people in helping roles—nurses, therapists, teachers, counselors—tend to be "S" types. They come across as agreeable, reliable, and accommodating—the person on your team who would fall on their sword for you. Their goal is for *everyone* to succeed, and they take pleasure in having the team

get credit and feel good about what they've done, not just them. But because they stand back so much, "S"s also can come across as apathetic and slow. They don't like to rock the boat, so at times they can seem stubborn and unwilling to change. They can also appear overly passive-aggressive. You know they're feeling something, but they just aren't coming out and *saying* it.

The final DISC type, Conscientious, or "C," tends to be more reserved, but also more detail oriented. An actress like Meg Ryan, who is very private and has professed to hate the spotlight, might be a "C," and famous recluses like the authors J. D. Salinger or Harper Lee might have been, too. Conscientious types are discreet, and they also tend to be orderly and methodical in how they communicate. "C" types might naturally gravitate toward careers as accountants, researchers, doctors, or pilots, since these roles reward people who attend to the details and remain oriented to completing the task at hand. The challenge: "C" types can come across as nerdy, aloof, awkward, distant, or hard to know. If you ask them a question and don't happen to like detail, they might bore you with a long-winded answer, giving you way more information than you feel you need, because they revel in the details. They might struggle in fast-moving situations that require spontaneous disclosure of information, or situations when openness and spontaneity with others is a plus.

In describing these types, I'm broadly generalizing about people and how they interact with others. In truth, all of us express all four of these communication behaviors to varying degrees. When I say I'm a "D," what I mean is Dominance traits tend to come out most strongly in me. I also have some "I" and "C" traits, but they're not as pronounced, and I'm really weak on the "S" trait, but it's still there. Also, we tend to bring out more or less of these traits depending on the situations we're in. Someone who comes across most strongly as an extroverted "I" type

might express those traits in a public setting like a cocktail party. Get them with their family, and other behavior might emerge, even if their communications overall still remain pretty strongly in “I” territory.

GET YOUR DISC ON

When I teach DISC, students often rush to apply it to others around them—their spouses, bosses, and so on. “Whoa, calm down,” I tell them. “Let’s first use this to figure out *YOU*, because that’s going to let *you* become much more powerful in the social situations you encounter each day.”

I invite you now to perform the following exercise:

Take a moment to think about your own communications tendencies, using the DISC cheat sheets located in the Appendix at the back of the book. Do you tend to be more people oriented, or do you focus on the task and obtaining specific results? Do you tend to adopt a more direct communications style, or indirect? Asking these two questions can help you locate where on the grid you roughly are. Once you’ve identified your dominant type, think about its strengths and weaknesses. How does your behavior serve you well—or not so well—in specific situations and with specific people (at home with your family, at work with your colleagues, during the weekend with your friends)?

As you understand the strengths and weaknesses of your primary communications style, pay special attention to the weaknesses. When might your style risk alienating others that you might otherwise wish to attract or feel close to? Here’s another exercise to try:

Over the next few days, notice times when you accomplish something in collaboration with others, and times when you come into conflict with others. In the moment (that is, right after the experience), think about how your communications tendencies just contributed to the win or the disagreement. If you're like my students, you'll find yourself coming up with small epiphanies, saying to yourself, "Oh, that's why that conversation ended in an argument," or "That's why that email didn't get the reaction I'd hoped."

As you become attuned to how you operate socially, the next step is to exert more control over your behavior. Understanding tendencies of yours that rub others wrong, you can work on softening those "rough edges." As a "D" I know I'm often overly direct and abrupt with people. In the past, when I received an email that upset me, I tended to fire back and tell the sender what I *really* thought. That behavior ticked people off, which meant that they were less inclined to go along with my requests and felt more distanced from me emotionally. I challenged myself to take a breather every time I received a challenging email. "Chris," I told myself, "get up and walk away." That technique didn't work for me—I wound up stewing about the email. So I tried something else: when I received that challenging email, I let myself write the email response I wanted to write in my moment of anger, but then I told myself to walk away before clicking send. That worked: I got my emotions off my chest, but I didn't respond in a stereotypically "D" kind of way. After my break, when I reread the email I was going to send, I usually found myself editing 90 percent of it.

My advice for people with other communications profiles would be similar: find a way to get outside any emotional response that is

triggered in you, and to avoid the baseline communications behavior to which you'll automatically revert. If you're an Influencer type, you might wind up alienating others by talking too much about yourself in the course of a conversation—how you feel, what you think, how you reacted. To smooth out this “rough edge,” take a step back, and then challenge yourself to let others talk more and to practice active listening. Resist the urge to think about what you'll say next, and refocus yourself (repeatedly, if necessary) on what others are saying. If you're speaking in person or on the phone with another person instead of via text or email, you might have to do more than simply walk away. Explain to the other person that you need a few moments to calm down or take a break, and that you'll then be happy to continue the conversation.

If you tend to behave along the lines of a Steady type, passive-aggressive responses might pose a problem. The next time conflict arises with someone in your life, step back and practice active listening just as an “I” type of person might but focus on understanding the other person's viewpoint rather than winning the argument. “S” types are extremely people oriented, so they tend to find it disturbing when someone raises an issue with them. It's hard for them not to react defensively, and as a result they often can't process another person's perspective. Focus on stepping past your emotional response, putting yourself in the other person's position, and really “getting” what they're saying.

If you're a Conscientious type and you're in a confrontation with someone else, you're going to feel tempted to blast the other person with a million and one reasons why what they did sucked. If you lay it all out there, you presume, you'll win the argument by sheer force of logic. If you're in a real-time conversation either in person or on the phone, challenge yourself to take a break for a few minutes to get outside of the emotion. Upon returning to the conversation, focus on

actively listening rather than talking. If you find yourself resorting to a litany of facts, stop, take a breath, and focus on listening once again. Ditto if you find yourself spewing a litany of facts into an email or text.

Think about three specific and recurring social situations (conversations you have, situations in which you receive certain kinds of email or text messages, and so on) in which your dominant behavior type causes you to behave in ways that others don't like. For each one, think of a more specific strategy for how you might compensate for the unhelpful parts of your communications profile. Over the next several days, deploy your strategies and see what happens.

The point here is to make a habit of thinking about the weaknesses of your dominant communications style, so that you can correct for them consistently and in the moment. You want to behave more *mindfully* in social situations, and you want to get to the point where you're doing it automatically. That takes time and practice. It's like learning a foreign language: you must focus on it daily for weeks on end, maybe longer. But becoming a master hacker of humans requires nothing less.

TAKING DISC TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Once you've got a better handle on your own communications tendencies, you can enhance your behavior further by applying DISC to other people and adjusting your own communications to better match their needs. When you're about to have a significant conversation, or if you need to write someone an important email or letter, prepare in advance

by creating a DISC profile of that person. I have every member of my company take a formal DISC assessment when they come on board, and I make these available for everyone to see. Before a big conversation with an employee, I'll look up their profile and on that basis generate a strategy for the conversation. You can do something similar for key people in your life. Based on the description of DISC provided above and the DISC worksheet provided at the end of this book, sit down before your big conversation and think about how the person—whether it's your spouse, your teenager, someone on your team, your landlord—tends to communicate. Run through the four types—can you more or less identify one of them as that person's dominant type?

Once you do, use the DISC Cheat Sheet to think more closely about the other person and his or her inclinations and needs. You don't want to speak to a "D," say, in the same way as you would an "S." A "D" wants you to speak directly to them and to focus on results, while an "S" wants you to try to get along with them and validate them in a more relaxed, easygoing way. Since you're preparing in advance, you can craft what you'll say with this difference in mind. If you're planning a conversation with an "S," make sure you mention some reasons (truthful, of course) why you think they're important. Take your time with the conversation—don't rush to get straight to the point. Don't get too excited or impassioned in making your argument. Listen carefully to what they say and validate it. The DISC Cheat Sheet provides advice about what people falling into each type want out of social interactions, how they tend to communicate, how you can best communicate with them, and how you can help them communicate better with you.

You don't have to wait for a big conversation before performing a DISC analysis. When my student Brannon took my course in 2013, he had never heard of DISC. He found himself getting goose bumps as he read through his own profile, and was, as he remembers, "shocked because there were things in there that I wasn't prepared to admit to

myself.” Looking around the room, he saw “person after person, row after row, having the exact same reaction to their test results. It was really astounding, an almost surreal experience.” Learning that he rated strongly for the “D” and “I” types, he realized that he had been “a bull in a china shop” for his entire life.

At the time, Brannon was having trouble with his marriage—he and his wife were constantly arguing and angry at one another. Learning about DISC, he realized that his wife had a different profile than he did—she was a very strong “S” type. Talking about it together, they realized that their differing communications styles accounted for a good part of their conflict. As an “S,” his wife tended to shrink away from direct confrontation, while Brannon favored it. When issues arose, she just wanted peace, while he wanted to talk the issue to death until they reached some sort of resolution. Understanding her communications style allowed Brannon to spot occasions when it was better to let his wife cut a conversation short instead of pushing through until it was “over” in his mind. Brannon and his wife eventually split up, but understanding one another’s profiles has allowed them to get along better as they co-parent their kids. “Now we can talk more objectively about the things I’m doing to tick her off,” Brannon says, “and the things she’s doing to tick me off. It makes life easier.”

Applying DISC can also help you when you’re dealing with people you don’t know all that well, or whom you’re encountering for the first time. As you work with DISC, you might find yourself spotting behavior that “seems like something a ‘C’ would do” or that is “very ‘I’-like.” No, you’re not performing a scientific analysis. Yes, you’re coming to a superficial conclusion. But superficial conclusions, while they can often prove wrong, are sometimes correct. When you’re dealing with people you don’t know well, a superficial conclusion is better than having *no* insight into those individuals. At least you have something to go on, even if you wind up having to adjust your behavior midstream as you

discover more about them and the kinds of communications behavior they prefer. See the DISC Cheat Sheet for some quick pointers on how to spot people matching the four types “in the wild.”

With practice, you can become adept at quickly classifying people you meet and adapting your speech and action accordingly. To make it second nature, start by jotting down notes immediately after conversations. Given what the other person said or did, how might you best classify them? Did they use a lot of detail? Were they direct? Did they talk about themselves a lot? Did they direct attention toward others, to the exclusion of themselves? And so on. Again—I can’t emphasize it enough—active listening is *so* important. When you first start dabbling with DISC, don’t think about classifying someone during a conversation. Listen as intently as possible, soaking everything up, really engaging with what you hear. Once the conversation is over, take a few moments to recall what you heard and analyze it while it is still fresh. Over time, you’ll find that you don’t need this extra few minutes of deliberation—you’ll naturally perform the analysis in your mind at the conclusion of the conversation. And with even more practice, you’ll find yourself instantly and unconsciously doing it during the conversation, even as you actively listen.

Imagine being able to approach someone and know immediately what is more likely to resonate with them, and what isn’t. Your quick analysis might be off, but even if you assess correctly 20 or 30 percent of the time, that makes a big difference. I’ve gotten to the point where I can determine a person’s communications profile with at least some degree of accuracy within seconds of meeting them. When I’m approaching the reception desk of a corporate headquarters and trying to break in, I concoct a running theory of the receptionist’s type based on how they greet me, what kinds of pictures are on their desk, their body language, and so on, and I frame what I do and say accordingly. It’s quite amazing—and I’m even more accurate if I have gone online in

advance and reviewed the receptionist's social media postings. Which brings me to our next exercise.

Look up the Twitter accounts of three of your favorite celebrities. Closely review their postings. What can you discern about their communications style? For example, Bill Clinton's postings are those of the classic Influencer. He talks about himself a lot, speaking in the first person and highlighting people whom he likes. In general, his postings are quite energetic, exuberant, and "loud." Bonus points: for each of the four DISC types, see if you can come up with five celebrities other than the ones mentioned in this chapter who evoke that type.

And here's another exercise you might try:

To practice quick DISC analyses, go to a crowded public place and people-watch for an hour. Watch groups of people, and see if you can figure out which individuals fit under each category.

SUMMARY

Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher and founder of Taoism, once said, "He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened."⁶ This chapter has been about being both enlightened and wise: knowing yourself better, and also your people of interest. As I think you'll find, communications profiling is amazingly powerful when it's fully developed, underpinning anything else you do to hack humans.

Although most bad guys probably don't use DISC, they do use their own versions of quick-and-dirty profiling to choose their victims and make their approach. Terrorist networks are known to scrape social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook, searching for people who are expressing hostility toward Western governments. In particular, they're looking for individuals who feel a certain type of disillusionment and frustration, and who likely harbor a specific set of emotional tendencies. The extremists tailor what they say and how they say it to lure these people in. Young people become vulnerable, as they have no idea of the sophistication of the seemingly sympathetic people they're encountering.

You can use profiling for good, deploying it to improve the quality of your relationships and interactions. In essence, profiling works because whether we're classifying ourselves or others, we're directing attention away from where it usually is during social encounters—on ourselves, our needs, our desires—and onto where it should be: onto other people. We're trying hard—maybe for the first time in our lives—to think deeply about others and how they're approaching and experiencing a conversation. We're developing empathy for other people, so that we can begin to connect with them on *their* terms, not just ours.

Empathy truly is fundamental to human hacking, but as we'll see, it goes far beyond profiling. Con men, security experts, and other professional hackers of humans draw on empathy to frame conversations from the very outset so that their victims are more likely to do what they want. If you're sitting at your desk working, and a stranger calls you up and says, "You don't know me, but I want you to wire five hundred dollars to the following account number," you're not going to do it. But if a caller identifies himself as a representative of your energy company, says that your bill is past due and that your service will be cut off if you don't pay five hundred dollars within an hour, you just might (and even more so if you looked at your caller ID and the call

seemed to be coming from your energy company's number). This scam is extremely common,⁷ and it works because many people feel anxious at the thought of losing their power. The scammers know this—they've made that empathetic leap—and have developed that insight into a compelling "pretext" for holding a conversation with you. Conversely, it's very difficult to win friends, influence people, and get what you want if you haven't mastered what we might call "the art of the start." Let's explore how to initiate conversations more deliberately, so that you're evoking positive emotional responses in people that will make them *want* to engage further with you.