



# RELATIONSHIP INTELLIGENCE

How to Build and Rebuild Relationships at Work



## *Annie, Daniel, Jose, and Sara had just been assigned to a high-profile project.*

The stakes were high. The timeline was aggressive. Leadership had handpicked each of them because they were talented, experienced, and successful. What could go wrong?

When asked what would make the team successful, their answers sounded reasonable enough. Daniel said success would come from slowing down, asking the right questions, and thinking things through. Annie disagreed. Success, she argued, comes from making decisions and taking action. Sara wanted to hear the perspective of every team member. Jose believed success depended on helping the team grow.

Four smart people. Four sincere perspectives. Four completely different ideas about how the team should operate. But if you've ever worked on a team, you probably know what happened next—misunderstanding, bickering, and eventually full-blown conflict on how the project should get done.

The hardest part of working with people is other people. Not because people are always difficult. Not because people are always irrational. But often because each of us care deeply about different things.

One might see a person to be helped. Another sees a system to be optimized. Another sees a challenge to overcome. And when we don't understand what matters to one another, differences quickly become frustrations, frustrations become negative stories, and negative stories damage relationships.

The good news is that relationship problems rarely begin with bad people; they happen when good people misunderstand one another. That's where relationship intelligence comes in.

Relationship intelligence is the ability to notice what is happening and apply insights in interactions so you can build more effective relationships. We often think poor results are an execution problem—a strategy problem, a talent problem, or a process problem. But performance runs on relationships. If results aren't improving, it's often not just an execution problem; it's a relationship problem.

Building relationship intelligence helps us better understand our experiences with others, navigate our interactions more effectively, and anticipate the expectations of others to create stronger, more productive relationships.

In this ebook, you'll learn three practical skills to develop a greater ability to understand yourself and others, turn differences into collaboration, and use relationship insights to be happier, healthier, and more productive at work.

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*“One of the most robust predictors of job satisfaction, engagement and well-being at work is having strong ties with people.”*

**ADAM GRANT**

Author & Organizational Psychologist

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## SKILL #1:

# Learn What Makes People Tick



Think about the last person at work who frustrated you. Maybe they kept asking questions when you were ready to move forward. Maybe they pushed for a quick decision when you felt there were still more to discuss. Or perhaps they seemed more concerned about supporting others than solving the problem.

Whatever the situation, chances are you had a story about why they were behaving that way:

- “They don’t know what they’re doing.”
- “They’re naïve.”
- “They never think before they act.”

Most of us are quick to create explanations like these for other people’s behavior. The problem is that those explanations are often based on *what we can see* rather than what’s actually *driving behavior*. It doesn’t mean one of us is right and the other is wrong, it only means **we’re focused on different things**.

So how can we learn more about ourselves and others to see beyond just behavior? The Strength Deployment Inventory® (SDI®) is a personality assessment that does just that. The insights from the SDI help you understand what is driving and motivating you at your core and how those motives impact your behavior.

Dr. Elias Porter developed the SDI over 50 years ago and he believed that assessments should be for a person rather than about a person.

Relationship intelligence begins when we stop asking, ‘What’s wrong with this person?’ and start asking, ‘What matters most to this person?’ When we make that shift, we become more curious and less judgmental. We spend less time trying to fix people and more time trying to understand them and work with them productively.

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*“The more aware we are of what makes us tick, the more aware we are of what makes others tick, the more aware we are of the impact we make on each other’s feelings, the more empowered we become to control the outcomes of our relationships with others.”*

**ELIAS PORTER**

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Dr. Porter's work led to an important insight: behind every behavior there is a motive. People are usually trying to accomplish something they believe is worthwhile, even when their behavior isn't landing well with others.

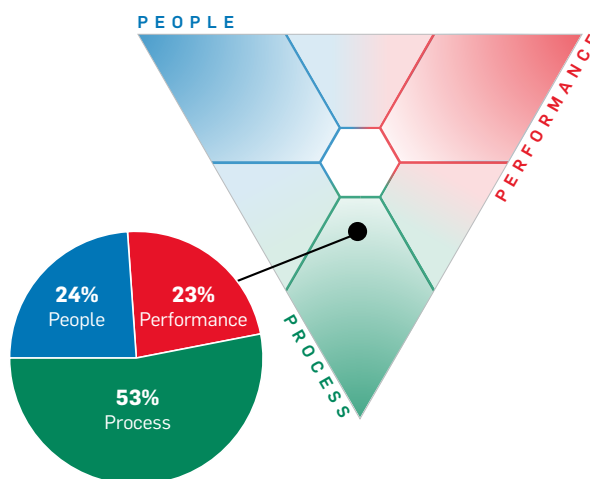
We all share a desire to feel good about ourselves and the SDI shows how we are each driven by the same three core motives:

|                                  |                                      |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Wanting to<br><b>help others</b> | Wanting to<br><b>achieve results</b> | Wanting to<br><b>establish order</b> |
| <b>PEOPLE</b>                    | <b>PERFORMANCE</b>                   | <b>PROCESS</b>                       |

What sets us apart is how these three motives blend in each of us, changing how we achieve our common goal to feel valued and worthwhile.

By completing the SDI assessment, each of us can discover how we prioritize and blend these three motives to form our Motivational Value System (MVS). For example, a person with the MVS in the graphic to the right is a Green MVS, meaning they are primarily motivated by meaningful order and thinking things through. This doesn't mean they don't care about people or performance; it means that process is the primary motive that drives them.

When we understand our MVS and others', we stop treating differences as evidence that someone is wrong and begin seeing their actions as information about what matters most to them. We choose a generous view of others.



**The next time you find yourself frustrated with a coworker, pause before judging their behavior. Ask yourself:**

- What is important to this person right now?
- What motive is driving them?
- What values are they protecting?

**SKILL #2:**

# Mind Your Wake

Nora was known for being decisive. Her colleagues described her as self-confident, ambitious, and quick-to-act. In the SDI, we call these behaviors strengths or “a behavior used in effective interactions between people”. But when she received 360 feedback, she was surprised to learn that some teammates experienced those same strengths very differently—they described her as abrupt, dismissive, and rash. Nora learned an important lesson: our intentions don’t determine our impact. Other people do.

Most of us know our intentions. We know why we’re pushing for a decision, asking another question, offering advice, or challenging an idea. But do your colleagues know your intentions? What we don’t always realize is that others don’t see what we see—and therefore sometimes resent the actions we’re taking.

Every strength can be overdone. Think of strengths like music. At the right volume, music creates energy and connection. Turn the volume up too high and the exact same song becomes distracting or irritating. Strengths work the same way.



**Strengths can be overdone. For example:**

|                |   |           |
|----------------|---|-----------|
| Loyal          | → | BLIND     |
| Self-Confident | → | ARROGANT  |
| Methodical     | → | RIGID     |
| Sociable       | → | INTRUSIVE |





Imagine a teammate who constantly asks questions. If your motives are primarily about moving quickly and achieving results, you might view those questions as unnecessary obstacles. Yes, moving quickly can often be a strength. But in this instance, your teammate may perceive that urgency and decisiveness as recklessness or carelessness.

So, when relationships become strained, it's helpful to ask not only why others may be doing what they're doing, but what impact our actions have on others, too.

We may have the best of intentions, but if our behaviors are perceived to be unhelpful and overdone, that intent becomes less relevant.

*The most important way to reduce defensiveness in others is often to eliminate offensiveness in ourselves.*



## SKILL #3:

# Find Value in Conflict

Conflict can be defined in many ways, but within the SDI, we define conflict as “a threat to your self-worth”—what you care most about.

Conflict is more than just a disagreement, it is when the disagreement turns personal and begins to impact relationships. And if this conflict goes unresolved, we begin to narrow our focus to defend what is most important to us:

### STAGE 1

You are focused on yourself, the problem, and other people.

### STAGE 2

Other people begin to fade out of focus and you are focused on resolving the conflict on your own.

### STAGE 3

You are feeling compelled to focus only on yourself. Protecting, defending, or preserving your identity.

The goal is to resolve conflict in Stage 1 when we are our most productive and before our focus narrows. When we address the threats to our self-worth and get back to feeling good about ourselves, relationships begin to repair and even strengthen.



#### STAGE 1



SELF



PROBLEM



OTHERS

#### STAGE 2



SELF



PROBLEM



OTHERS

#### STAGE 3



SELF



PROBLEM



OTHERS



# Relationship Intelligence Checklist

Use these questions when you want to strengthen or develop an important relationship. Remember: you may be seeing their behavior through your own MVS instead of theirs. Relationship intelligence helps you pause long enough to ask:

**01**

What am I assuming about this person's intent? Am I judging their motive, or only noticing the impact of their behavior?

**02**

What might be important to them right now? Are they trying to help people, achieve results, establish order, or preserve flexibility?

**03**

What strength might they be trying to use? Could what I'm experiencing as annoying, rigid, pushy, slow, or emotional actually be their attempt to contribute?

**04**

How is their MVS different from mine? Am I frustrated because they don't care, or because they care about something different than I do?

**05**

What value might feel threatened for them? If they're defensive, resistant, or intense, what are they trying to protect—people, performance, process?

**06**

How might my behavior be landing with them? Even if my intent is good, could my strength be showing up as overdone?

**07**

What would a generous view sound like? Instead of "They're being difficult," could I say, "They may be trying to protect quality," "They may be trying to move us forward," or "They may be trying to make sure people are heard"?

**08**

What small adjustment would honor both of us? How can I stay true to what matters to me while also making room for what matters to them?



## *Strong relationships are built one interaction at a time.*

Every conversation, every disagreement, every misunderstanding presents a choice. We can make assumptions about others, or we can become curious. We can focus exclusively on behavior, or we can try to understand the motives behind it. We can blame differences for our frustrations, or we can learn how to leverage those differences more effectively.

Relationship intelligence is the ability to look beneath behavior and understand what is driving it.

When we become curious about what matters most to ourselves and others, judgment gives way to understanding. Understanding creates options. And those options help us build stronger relationships, healthier teams, and better results.



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