



History and Evolution of the DiSC[®] Assessment

In 1920, **William Moulton Marston** developed a theory to explain people's emotional responses to various stimuli. Marston wanted to study "normal" people because research had been done on the mentally ill, but not on the emotions of normal people. In 1928 he wrote a book called [Emotions of Normal People](#) - a 428-page book which is no longer in print. Marston's book is very technical and not easy to read. You can read the first three pages and view the entire Table of Contents at the link above.

In his book, Marston identified what he called four "primary emotions" and associated behavioral responses, which today we know as **DiSC[®] - Dominance, Influence, Steadiness** (originally *Submission*), and **Conscientiousness** (originally *Compliance*). Although Marston never actually created a DISC assessment, it was his work that laid the foundation for the instrument that was later developed.

An interesting aside about Marston: he was also the creator of the systolic blood-pressure test, which led to the creation of the polygraph (lie detector). Because of his discovery, Marston was convinced that women were more honest and reliable than men and could work faster and more accurately. During his lifetime, Marston championed the causes of women. He was the creator of [Wonder Woman](#), the cartoon character he created to empower women.

In 1940, using Marston's model, **Walter Clarke** developed a tool called the **Activity Vector Analysis**. It measured *how one perceived themselves* and *how one thought others perceived them*. Participants took it twice with these two response focuses. The combination from these two focused responses described behavior with these four dimensions: Aggressive, Sociable, Stable, and Avoidant.

In 1950 **John Cleaver** created a 24-question forced-choice instrument from the Activity Vector Analysis. This instrument required the participant to select two words from four choices -- the word that was the MOST and LEAST like them.

In 1970, two professors from the University of Minnesota -- **John Geier** and **Dorothy Downey** -- created the **DiSC[®] Personal Profile System**, which took the responses from Cleaver's 24-question forced-choice instrument and identified a total of 15 classical patterns that emerged. They created a company called **Performax Systems International** to promote this assessment. In 1984, Curt Carlson (also a graduate of the University of Minnesota) purchased Performax Systems International and created **Carlson Learning Company**.

In 1994 the Personal Profile System was revalidated. Since the meaning of some words had changed over the years, some of the words were changed in the forced-choice instrument, and four more tetrads were added. Today's DiSC[®] assessment includes a total of 28 tetrads.



After Curt Carlson died, his company sold the DiSC Personal Profile System to **The Riverside Company** in 2000, which soon thereafter became **Inscape Publishing, Inc.** (*Inscape* is a hybrid word created from *internal landscape*.)

Today, more than 50 million people around the world have benefited from using the DiSC[®] assessment. Inscape Publishing has trademarked DiSC[®] with a small "i". The DiSC model itself cannot be patented because Marston never developed a product to patent. He created the model and theory behind it, but never created an actual product that could be sold. Therefore, a number of companies have since created profiles based on Marston's model. The original assessment tool is the one created by what is now known as Inscape Publishing, Inc. You can always tell if you have the original assessment by looking for the small "i" in DiSC[®].