



Case Studies

Name:

Vicki Simmons

Title:

Moving from the Professional to the Personal

The Results:

The couple knew their relationship was in trouble. Both had expressed how unhappy they were with the marriage. They fought often and had no rituals with each other. In fact, they were basically just grudging roommates who avoided intimacy.

But what does that have to do with *DiSC® Indraä*? Plenty, says Vicki Simmons, a therapist who describes herself as a “thera-coach.”

“I was the couples’ last-ditch effort to see if they could make it work,” Simmons says. “I thought *Indra* could help them learn about themselves and their relationship.”

It may seem odd to attempt to fix a broken romantic relationship by using an instrument that is traditionally applied to the corporate world. However, the principles of interpersonal behavior apply to any communication between two people. And Simmons says the insights that people gain through objective, scientifically based instruments can help them understand and appreciate themselves better in any setting.

“You have to respect yourself and your own style before you can comfortably stretch to another style,” Simmons says.

But neither partner in the troubled couple was doing any stretching. When problems arose, he would shut down and stonewall while she would become impatient and insistent. In addition, they were facing an issue that would strain any marriage: They had recently lost a daughter to cancer.

The fact that they had a surviving daughter to whom they were dedicated was the chief reason that they were still together. But when they approached Simmons for help, she saw that they needed more than that to salvage their relationship. For starters, they needed to reestablish intimacy and trust.

“They couldn’t say to their partner, ‘This is what I’m thinking, am I on track?’ because they weren’t sure how their partner would respond,” Simmons says.

Simmons noted that the underlying causes for the couple’s problems went beyond the tragedy of their daughter’s death. They had little knowledge of their own behavioral styles, let alone each other’s. Also, professional stresses had infringed on their personal relationship.

“He had recently been elevated into management, which meant he had to be more people interactive, and that’s very uncomfortable for him,” Simmons says. “She is a high-level executive, and she has to move away from her natural style daily.”

With no shortage of complications in the couple’s relationship, Simmons realized that improving their communication skills wasn’t going to be enough. So she planned a program that would simultaneously work on three levels of development.

Helping the couple learn to increase their self-awareness and to analyze their own behavior

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before acting upon it were goals on an individual level. In addition, Simmons wanted the husband and wife to take responsibility for their emotions.

“For example, he had low self-esteem and self-confidence, and he really was not taking ownership of that,” Simmons says.

On an interpersonal level, Simmons sought to teach the couple about each other’s style and how to respond positively to the partner’s behavior. She also emphasized the need to resolve past grievances that they had let fester.

“I told them that we have a past, but we are not our past,” Simmons says.

Finally, on a professional level, Simmons believed that the couple needed to adapt to their respective work roles. She also thought they should strive to conserve energy at work so as to avoid frustration and fatigue at home.

Accomplishing these goals presented a huge challenge, but Simmons relied on her own expertise and the power of *Indra* to keep focused. She says *Indra* was ideal for the situation because the instrument looks at interpersonal issues, not just behaviors within the individual.

Specifically, she used the behavior continuum on the couple’s Dyad Report to help them identify which areas they wanted to focus upon. She emphasized to the couple that they should take time to personalize the instrument.

“I said, ‘Of course it’s not you, but make it you,’ ” Simmons says. “The hope is that they’ll use the knowledge to improve communication and to build self-respect, self-esteem, and self-confidence.”

Simmons discussed the instrument’s results with the couple, which allowed the husband and wife to look at their relationship from a different perspective. They talked about how and when to stretch toward another style, and they gained insight into each other’s preferences and behaviors.

Indra also inspired Simmons to come up with a creative exercise to illustrate how different styles relate to one another. She asked her clients to imagine placing the circular *Indra* map on the floor of her office. Then the husband and wife took turns walking around the imaginary circle while giving their gut reactions to the styles.

“Depending on the style described, they might say, ‘I feel like I have a weight on my shoulders’ or ‘I feel a lot of energy,’ ” Simmons says. “It showed how the different styles affected their behavior.”

The concept of the *Indra* vector was the starting point for another exercise. Simmons drew two circles, one labeled “Spouse” and the other labeled “Marriage.” The couple then drew vectors that indicated their commitment to those concepts.

“At first, her vector was really short,” Simmons says. “So it allowed us to discuss the differences between their commitment levels.”

The couple wound up discussing almost every aspect of their relationship during the sessions. Throughout it all, Simmons emphasized the positive to keep the couple from getting discouraged. She also made it clear to them that the point of the sessions was to build skills.



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“Making clients feel good during sessions is not so important,” Simmons says. “In fact, we may not solve whatever their specific latest problem is. The focus is on skill-building and helping them learn how to communicate outside of the sessions.”

The couple did indeed learn how to communicate better. In addition, they gained knowledge of their own behavior and realized that each partner had legitimate stresses. They also saw that some negative behavior might have nothing to do with each other.

“She’s able to take a breath and say, ‘Oh, it’s not about me. It’s about him,’ ” Simmons says. “Now they both want to look at what’s happening and think about where they want to go next.”

Another breakthrough came when the couple analyzed their personal styles at work. This helped them think about their interactions with colleagues each day, which aided in their efforts to conserve energy for home.

“They are now able to connect with each another at the end of the day,” Simmons says. “And there is less fighting and more compassion for each other.”

As a result of their improved interaction and communication, the couple has stepped back from the brink of divorce, something that seemed unimaginable before their sessions with Simmons. Of course, even as old issues become resolved or subdued, new problems often arise. For example, the couple started having more disagreements about the proper way to raise their surviving daughter. But Simmons says this too is a positive step, because the couple’s unexpressed child-rearing problems are now being addressed.

“Their focus is maintained on doing what’s best for their daughter,” Simmons says.

Along with improvements on a personal and interpersonal basis, the couple has seen a positive evolution in their professional roles. They are now more intentional about work and are more proactive at their jobs. The husband, in particular, reported more enthusiasm for his work.

“He volunteered for a guru role with his organization,” Simmons says. “In the past, he never would have done that. He came back full of energy that he’d done it successfully and was really confident with what he had accomplished.”

Simmons points out that *Indra* works on multiple levels because the essence of communication is the same, regardless of the specific relationship. She says that whether helping clients work on their personal lives or career roles, the instrument’s effectiveness is sound.

“You do not have to be a counselor or therapist to understand and use *Indra*,” Simmons says. “*Indra* works as well in the workplace as it does in our personal lives. Relationships are two-way streets, and this tool helps people develop awareness about how and where they show up in the communication process. Dialogue and Discovery gives us the why.”