Students
How the DiSC Assessment Can Help Build Better Relationships in Your Career
by Henry Sintim

Every year, the ACS Graduate Student committee organizes a number of sessions during the Society’s Annual Meetings. A notable one has been the Graduate Student Leadership Conference. At last year’s conference, Dr. Sherry Harsch-Porter, PorterBay Insight, was one of the key speakers. She uses an assessment tool (DiSC) to help attendees identify their leadership style and how they can harness that to build effective teams and positively resolve conflict. Following is a summary of an interview with Dr. Harsch-Porter.

Sintim: Tell us a little about yourself and how the PorterBay Insight came about?

Harsch-Porter: On a personal level, I have been married for 31 years to my husband, Keith. We have two sons, Zachary (28) and Alex (22). I am a first-generation college graduate, so education is very important to me. I have a B.S. in business administration, M.A. in human resources management, and Ph.D. in social science. I’m very attracted to people who are intellectually curious, which is not just about educational level or position. I love to work with scientists because intellectual curiosity drives them.

I started PorterBay Insight with a single mission: “to inspire conversations that make a difference.” We use many things in our work, one of which is assessments. Assessments give people insight into their own preferences and behaviors and help them understand how others may be motivated differently.

Sintim: How do you describe the DiSC assessment?

Harsch-Porter: The Everything DiSC learning series published by Wiley is a highly validated personality tool, which contains multiple role-specific reports. The one we have used in the Graduate Student Leadership Conference is called ED-Workplace. It is a general purpose report that can be used in almost any setting by people from different backgrounds.

Sintim: What makes the DiSC assessment unique from other assessment tools?

Harsch-Porter: The DiSC assessment is very user friendly and short, taking only about 15 minutes to complete. The results are highly personalized and accurate—most people feel that it describes them very well. It also provides specific strategies on ways to be more effective with people who have different styles.

Sintim: Briefly, what are the characteristics of each DiSC style?

Harsch-Porter: I need to start by saying that we are all a mix of all four styles, and we can learn to call upon the strengths of each style with practice. But here is a very high-level overview of various DiSC styles:

Dominance (D)—bottom-line results; enjoy competitive situations; like to win. They are assertive and like to keep things moving.

Influence (i)—open and enthusiastic. They like to build and work collaboratively with teams. They are very high energy and optimistic.

Steadiness (S)—team builders; dependable; sincere. They are great at reading people and evoke a high sense of trust.

Conscientiousness (C)—set very high standards for themselves and their teams. They prioritize efficient results and are great at using data to make good decisions.

Each style has the potential to be an effective leader, and the best leaders learn to borrow behaviors and traits from all four styles.

Sintim: How is the DiSC assessment beneficial to graduate students?

Harsch-Porter: The Everything DiSC assessment can help graduate students understand their own leadership style and how it affects their interactions with others. It can also provide insights into how to improve their communication and teamwork skills. By gaining a deeper understanding of their own preferences and behaviors, they can better navigate the complexities of leadership and collaboration, ultimately leading to more effective and positive outcomes in their professional and personal lives.