The reluctant time manager

The biggest waste of an IT salesperson's time is the sale you don't win. Julie Hay and Nick Williams of A D International suggest how you can make best use of your time.

Time management systems (TMS) can indeed be valuable but it's critical to recognise the effect of individual working styles. There are five styles, each with particular strengths and weaknesses. Weaknesses often result from an overdose of strengths; we can have too much of a good thing.

**Hurry-up**

If we are Hurry-Up people, our motivation is to do things quickly and our energy peaks under pressure. We are seen as efficient because we respond well to deadlines and get a lot done in a short time. However, give us lots of time to spare and we wait until the job becomes urgent – then we start work on it.

This focus on speed can backfire because in our haste we make mistakes. Our need for speed may come over to the customer as impatience. We pack too much into demonstrations for the time available, we talk fast, look at our watch, interrupt the customer, don't listen – and then expect them to make a decision on the spot.

**Be-perfect**

Be-Perfect people are as unlike Hurry-Ups as can be; no errors, everything must be exactly right. Well organised, we look ahead, plan for potential problems and do our best to make sure everything will run smoothly.

We can be relied on to produce accurate work, although not necessarily on time. We miss tender deadlines because we are so bogged down in checking details. We pay so much attention to the process of account planning that by the time we are ready to talk to the customer, they've changed their IT strategy.

Our presentations cover every conceivable point. We include full details of product features, but we run out of time before we get to benefits. And the customer staggers away overloaded with data yet still lacking the information he needs to make a decision.

**Try-hard**

With Try-Hard, our energy peaks with something new to do and we like to follow up on all possibilities. We are noted for our enthusiasm and the way we volunteer to tackle new projects. However, our initial interest wears off when we spot new, even more exciting things to do.

Having started with a flourish, boredom sets in when we reach the less interesting parts of a project. So perhaps we volunteer to organise an exhibition but never quite finish preparing the items we need on the stand.

At customer meetings we are enthusiastic about their plans. We

---

**SPECIALIST SALES AND MARKETING CONSULTANTS TO THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY**

**FOR INFORMATION ON HOW WE CAN HELP YOU TO DEVELOP THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR BUSINESS WRITE TO US AT:**

SYSTEMS INITIATIVES
MILLBANK HOUSE, HIGH STREET, HARTLEY WINTNEY, HANTS RG27 8PE

OR CALL US ON 025126 4545
we get side-tracked on to something else and fail to pick up on the opportunities already identified.

Be-strong

Be-Strong people are calm under pressure and great to have around in a crisis. We feel energised when we have to cope. We are effective negotiators, good at closing deals and handling problems. We work steadily even at unpleasant tasks.

Our problem is that we hate admitting weakness — and we regard failure to cope as a weakness. So we get overloaded rather than ask others for help. We may dis­guise our difficulties by tidying work away. Or we work long hours, not because of poor time organisation but because we have failed to ack­nowledge realistic limitations on the amount of work we can do.

It may mean we are not as open with customers and colleagues as we might be. Although a project may be slipping, we don’t ask col­leagues for help, so the project slips even further behind. Because we delay, problems grow — and will eventually take even more time to put right.

Which is your style?

Although you may have recognised bits of yourself in each of the styles, one or two probably fit more closely. How can you obtain the advantages of your preferred working style(s) without the potential problems? Here are some tips:

Hurry-Up — don’t just put meetings into your TMS; add in time slots for preparing, for checking important items. You will spend less time cor­recting mistakes after the event.

Be-Perfect — sort out priorities. Allocate your time accordingly. Show this clearly in your TMS — and use the system to discipline yourself to keep to your deadlines.

Please-People — learn to say no appropriately. Use this skill to deal with potential interruptions. Iden­tify those customers who raise low priority requests and encourage them to solve their own problems.

Try-Hard — check you can pro­gramme time for all aspects of a project before volunteering. Block the time needed in your TMS and don’t accept any commitments that would use the same time slots.

Be-Strong — calculate more accurately how long a task will take and accept only a realistic workload. Recognise that others will be pleased to help you if asked.

Whether you have a TMS or not, you can identify ways to be more productive that will fit with your preferred working style. And if you do have a TMS, a little self analysis can unlock major benefits that you may have overlooked.

A D International offers consultancy and in-house programmes for assessment and training of sales staff. Julie Hay is chief executive. Nick Williams, a former IT salesman, is senior consultant. Phone 0923-224737.