

# Out of character

*In May, IT Opportunities carried an article describing five working styles, and explaining their effect on our management of time and our use of time management systems (TMS). Now Julie Hay and Nick Williams take this a stage further and suggest practical strategies for capitalising on our strengths and side-stepping our weaknesses.*



the styles, although we may show some characteristics from each. Knowing our preferred styles means we can capitalise on our strengths and borrow from the other styles.

The strengths of Hurry Up come from the inclination to work fast. This means we spend less time preparing presentations, get to meet more customers and complete projects quickly. To avoid appearing impatient, we may need consciously to slow down so that other people have time to absorb the information we are conveying so rapidly. And we must stop interrupting them and resist the temptation to finish their sentences for them. This means concentrating on listening to people, asking about their needs instead of assuming, and paraphrasing back to check our understanding.

To avoid mistakes, we need to plan sufficient time for tasks, especially preparation which we are inclined to skimp. A simple discipline of scheduling appropriate slots in our TMS is what is needed.

*Being more assertive will enable us to qualify effectively, so that we recognise more rapidly when a sale is unlikely*

If we are Be Perfect, our strengths are our reputation for accuracy, our attention to detail and our thoroughness. To make sure we meet deadlines, we need to prioritise in several ways. Decide which tasks really need perfection

and save it for them. Recognise when a "quick and dirty" solution would do. And operate between these extremes as appropriate too. We also need to understand that deadlines are important to others and to keep sight of the task. We need to plan to finish on time instead of using too much of the time to plan.

Let other people set the standard sometimes. Check how much detail is enough for them. Give the key information and then stop before you bury them in facts and figures. Focus on benefits, don't swamp them in features.

Those of us with Please People characteristics are nice to have around. We like to be liked so we pay attention to the feelings of those around us. To avoid being dumped with unrealistic requests and unimportant tasks, we need to learn to say no skilfully. It's important that we set our own limits, our own priorities, if we are to be respected by others. How much credibility will our "yes" have if they never hear us say "no"?

Basic assertiveness techniques will help us to handle customers and colleagues – a firm refusal, said politely, is often all that is needed to maintain reasonable boundaries. Being more assertive will enable us

to qualify effectively, so that we recognise more rapidly when a sale is unlikely. We can spend the time saved on better prospects.

*When we want to make changes to the way we behave, we need to remember that our boss, colleagues and customers may like us just the way we are*

Try Hard people are valued for their enthusiasm. We consider all possibilities and put energy into getting things off the ground. We need to control our tendency towards boredom with the later stages of projects. We, even more than the other styles, can benefit from positive programming into our TMS of all aspects of the task. Once we finish a project, we can usefully

spend time enjoying the feeling of success so that we will want to repeat it.

Sometimes we can find creative ways of making mundane tasks more exciting. Sometimes we simply need to get on with them in spite of our boredom. Our TMS can help us maintain a balance between necessary but routine tasks, and enticing new things to do.

Be Strong is often the hardest working style to identify in ourselves. Because we are so good at staying calm and dealing with all that the job throws at us, we are seen as consistently reliable, steady workers. Our potential weaknesses may be well hidden. We need to recognise that there is nothing wrong with asking for help sometimes. Others may well have relevant skills, knowledge, time or enthusiasm for the tasks we are doing, and will welcome the opportunity to contribute. All we have to do is ask.

Before we take on new tasks, we could sensibly review the poten-

tial requirements and check we have access to the appropriate resources – without assuming that we must complete the entire project unaided. Sensible delegation is a strength and not a reflection of an inability to cope.

## Making changes

The above are just some of the strategies for change available to those of us who want to use our time more effectively. What is needed is a conscious choice of options, followed by a period of practice as we become competent with the new techniques.

A word of warning, however. When we want to make changes to the way we behave, we need to remember that our boss, colleagues and customers may like us just the way we are. And we get lots of recognition for being like that. When we change we can help ourselves by being aware that we may miss some of the recognition

we are used to. Others may resist our changes so we need to plan to deal with these barriers. We need to make sure that we get our new behaviours reinforced by ourselves and other people. Here are a few tips:

Hurry Ups get praised for being quick, so set out to get recognition for accuracy as well.

Be Perfects get praised for accuracy; look for recognition for meeting deadlines and appropriate levels of detail.

Everybody thinks Please People are nice; aim for recognition for being assertive.

Try Hard people score points for enthusiasm; get recognition for finishing tasks – successfully.

Be Strong people often get low key recognition for not needing help; watch how relationships improve when you let people help you. ■

Let's start with a summary of the working styles we discussed in the last article:

**Hurry Up** people work quickly, respond well to deadlines, get a lot done – but we make mistakes in our hurry or cut it too fine and miss target dates.

**Be Perfect** people, on the other hand, like things to be exactly right first time. We plan ahead, produce accurate work – but too late or in far too much detail.

**Please People** go for harmony. We are intuitive and aim to get on well with everyone. Our tolerance plays havoc with our time management because we hate to say no.

**Try Hard** people are enthusiastic and enjoy varied activities. We volunteer often – but then get bored and want to move on to new things, without finishing what we started.

**Be Strong** people excel at coping. We stay calm in a crisis and often work steadily for long hours – but this may be our way of hiding the fact that we've accepted an unrealistic workload because we don't want to appear weak.

## Using your style

Most of us operate in one or two of