

Are You a Jupiter or



YOUR APPROACH TO TIME MANAGEMENT AFFECTS THE WAY YOU WORK—



There's only one enemy hovering silently in your life. What's that, you ask? Time! Watch people. They're totally overwhelmed trying to control their work and personal schedules. Trapped in the domination of Enemy Number One, they're sulking and huffing: "I have too much to do and no time to do it!"

During a frenzied day, you may feel like reciting the punch line from one of my favorite cartoons: "I don't have time to talk about this now. Can't it wait until we're dead?" Gripped in my own time-management style and sighing, I quickly glance out my window at the blue sky and billowy clouds. Then, in an instant, I'm back to work.

Understanding your approach to time management is one way to clarify how your time is being shuffled, misused, misunderstood, projected onto others, and even underappreciated. If you take the time, "soft skills" topics, such as communication styles, courage leadership, slowing to reflect, or dealing with change, can be the easiest to identify, the simplest and quickest to implement, and the

most rewarding. Regardless of your educational level, position on the organization chart, or personal family structure, learning how to give constructive feedback, how to communicate effectively, or how to appreciate your (and others') approach to time management offers an invaluable tool to use to diminish misunderstandings and increase compassion.

A WORLD APART

Once when I was leading a program called "Understanding Your Approach to Time Management," a participant named Tom shared a fascinating insight into what drove his business partner and him to break up their profitable small business.

It seems that Tom was the type who was spontaneous, flexible, easygoing, and reactive. Rather than writing down his schedule, he kept it in his head. If a client called and asked him to play golf, he dropped what he was doing and went. "I knew I would get the piles of work done soon," Tom explained.



a Pluto?

AND THE WAY OTHERS WORK WITH YOU. BY SANDRA FORD WALSTON

Tom’s ex-partner preferred a decisive, self-regimented, “just do it now” approach. Using the schedule he kept in his Palm Pilot as his daily guide, he followed the philosophy “Work first, and, if there’s time left, play.”

The partners’ perceptions of how their firm “should” be run were always colliding—as were their approaches to delegating work to employees and completing client projects. The eventual breakup was bitter. No one could understand how two high-ability professionals could allow their successful business to shatter. Tom eventually recognized the problem: Their approaches to time management were worlds apart.

In my years of business consulting, I’ve observed that most employees are competent and adept at their jobs and are essentially nice people. Yet I’ve witnessed hundreds of folks be judgmental, angry, intolerable, and sabotage a team member, colleague, or boss who misconstrued how they prioritized and executed their work schedule. As the misinterpretations escalated, so did the direct correlation between precious time being lost and productivity slow-

ing. At that moment in time, everyone lost.

The soft-skills applications here are simple: First, you need to recognize that time management is really self-management. Put another way: Don’t manage time; manage yourself. Second, you need to develop the following self-awareness tools to help you relate to others’ time-management styles.

WHICH TENDENCY APPLIES TO YOU?

What’s your approach to time management? I call two very distinct and innate preferences to time management Jupiter and Pluto (the names have nothing to do with astrology; they simply represent planets that are worlds apart). Below are brief descriptors of each. Responding as if it’s the weekend and you’re relaxing, check off the overall tendencies that apply best to you.

Jupiter-preferred tendencies:

- Strive to avoid stress
- Plan and structure your activities

- () Keep your desk and files (paper and computer) tidy
- () Make to-do lists (and relish checking items off)
- () Schedule your time
- () Work first, play later
- () Procrastinate about leisure and play
- () Rely on being organized to “control time”

Pluto-preferred tendencies:

- () Act spontaneously
- () Keep your plans open-ended
- () See structure as restrictive
- () Get motivated when a crisis occurs (and get started at the last minute)
- () Prefer to have options
- () Have an internal timing mechanism
- () See play and work as compatible
- () Lose lists; love or tolerate piles

LISTENING FOR PREFERENCE CLUES

Now that you have a brief insight into the two behaviors of time management, let’s see how this affects your time with the people who work with you (and those involved in your personal life). If you practice the skill of listening (the concept of two ears and one mouth), you’ll hear folks convey their preferred approach. The problem is that most people are unaware of these two styles, so misunderstandings begin to build.

Let’s say that a Jupiter delegates a project to a Pluto on a Tuesday morning and says, “This report is due Friday at 2 p.m.” Jupiter is really saying, “Don’t be late, there’s no grace period, and give it to me early if you can since I am giving you time to start early.” The Pluto preference hears, “Cool, I have plenty of time; today’s only Tuesday.” The Pluto may not start the project until late Thursday. Last-minute pressures energize them.

The problem is that for the rest of the week the Jupiter may be watching and judging the Pluto’s approach. The Jupiter muses, “How can anyone do a good job at the last minute? This person doesn’t really care!”

Conversely, if the Pluto gave the same assignment to a Jupiter, the Jupiter would reorganize his or her current to-do list and start preparing immediately. Jupiters appreciate getting the assignment early because they prefer “do-it-now” behavior and like to finish ahead of time. They want to avoid stress at all costs, even if it means staying late or working the weekend. Plutos may be oblivious since they don’t seek to control processes.

On the personal side, going on a long-awaited vacation can also paint a picture of how these two time-

Your staff suddenly uncovers a pot of gold. What would be their response?

Not sure whether your employees are Jupiters or Plutos? Before you finish reading this article, invite your staff to take out a pen and write down the first five things they’d do if they suddenly found a pot of gold. Below, in priority order, are the top answers culled from attendees in a variety of professions who’ve attended my time-management programs.

JUPITER:

- Pay off debts
- Sit down with a financial planner
- Give money to family members
- Buy real estate
- Buy “toys”
- Reevaluate career
- Give to charities

PLUTO:

- Retire
- Travel
- Shop
- Have fun
- Give to charities
- Drink and go with the flow

management approaches differ. If two Jupiters are going on a vacation, they mutually and easily plan the vacation. They like to have their reservations for hotels, restaurants, and transportation completed before they start their trip. Sure, there are “flow hours,” but Jupiters’ peace of mind comes with knowing they have a confirmation number. Two Pluto preferences on vacation will purchase their airline tickets to fly to the destination and maybe book a room for the first night, but after that it’s “Don’t tie me down to a schedule; that’s what I have to do at work. Let me flow through the day. After all, you never know what might come our way!”

Now picture the opposite preferences planning the desperately needed vacation. The Jupiter may feel anxious because concrete plans have *not* been made. If they lose the valuable window of opportunity to purchase theater tickets or if it’s too late to make a reservation at that special restaurant they’ve looked forward to, the Jupiter may become disappointed and even angry. At that point, the Pluto will start to feel restricted and frustrated at not being able to “put things out there and see what comes back.” The scheduling of activities hinders Pluto’s ability to evolve. The breakdown in perception occurs when the Pluto feels the Jupiter needs to shepherd and direct the vacation instead of flowing and the Jupiter perceives the Pluto as being too easygoing and lackadaisical. “After all,” says the Jupiter, “being organized is the name of the game.” The Pluto replies with, “Let the games take form!” Both time-management preferences consider their approach to have the greatest benefit around the use of time.

While there’s no one “right” way to approach time management to be successful, it pays to recognize your approach, communicate your preference, and adjust as needed to the opposite style. The two men who dissolved their partnership could have collaborated on their differ-

ences. Their business was profitable and growing, so they were doing *something* right.

LISTING THEIR ASSETS

While conducting a CPE program, I asked participants to write on a flipchart the answers to this question: What do you perceive are your preference's greatest assets? Below are their answers. Do you agree?

Jupiter folks consider their greatest assets to be:

- ◆ Neat and well-organized
- ◆ Diligent about proofing all work
- ◆ Believe that accuracy is more important than speed
- ◆ Efficient and good at planning
- ◆ Dependable and predictable
- ◆ Good with follow-through and follow-up
- ◆ Anal retentive
- ◆ Effective at prioritizing
- ◆ Love the motto: "Just do it!"

Pluto folks consider their greatest assets to be:

- ◆ Flexibility
- ◆ Adaptable attitude: "Don't worry; it will get done!"
- ◆ Full knowledge of what's in all the piles
- ◆ Enthusiastic about change
- ◆ Believe that multitasking is the key
- ◆ More well-rounded
- ◆ Able to make transitions quickly and easily to handle a crisis
- ◆ Believe their time is well spent doing something meaningful

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

Instead of going bonkers over partners, employees, clients, and family members who don't mirror your approach to time management, seek to communicate your preference, and then reach out to the opposite style. That way you can build bridges between Jupiter and Pluto styles.* All you have to do is watch, listen, or read about how people maneuver through their day. For example, former President Clinton's staff members and the media defined his approach as "Clinton Time." Translation? Usually late! President Bush responds quickly and is rarely late for press conferences. One style is not better, nor is the outcome. *The issue is the assessment you hold about the tendency.*

These tips will help you reach out to others:

- ◆ State specifically your request for turnaround time

and why it's important to you.

- ◆ Notice your frustrations as well as the actions of the opposite preference.
- ◆ Continue to ask if your directions and responses are understood and clear.
- ◆ To interact, speak the terminology of both preferences.
- ◆ Be aware of the judgment you hold about the opposite preference.

STAYING ON TRACK

To stay on track, continually ask these two questions:

1. What's the best use of my time right now?
2. What one adjustment in my time-management skills do I need to change to make the task at hand more...?

These two questions help keep me on track. I've been meaning to write this article for a few years, but earning a living and writing books took precedence. I just wish someone would have told me that writing a book, getting an agent, launching the public relations, and finding a publicist would take five years! Perhaps I would have started with a vacation. Now I'm too busy and too invested in the project to take the time. Perhaps I need to reread the two questions.

The moral of this article: There is no one "right" approach to managing time. Each preference offers gifts, and each has blind spots. And, believe it or not, neither has anything to do with the quality of skills needed to accomplish a task, such as degrees, IQ, age, or success.

One last note: You may have already guessed that I have a Jupiter preference. A dear friend recently sent me a dozen white roses with a card that read: "Roses! Smell them, damn it!" Whether you're a Pluto or a Jupiter, do take time for your life. So that I might "walk my talk," I am now going to give myself a one-minute break from writing this article and go smell the roses! What would you do? ■

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*By the way, if you suspect that Jupiter and Pluto relate to the Judging and Perceiving preferences applied in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, you're right.

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