CHAPTER 6

WORKING STYLES

Could this be you?

Chris gets through a lot of work, by doing everything very quickly. Chris moves fast, thinks fast, talks fast, and seems to do everything so much more quickly than most people.

However, every so often Chris makes a mistake through rushing so much - and then it takes twice as long to put it right - especially as Chris seems intent on finding a shortcut instead of taking time to work it through again.

Chris also has a bad habit of arriving late at meetings, and of needing to leave early to get to the next meeting! And during the meeting Chris is quite likely to be openly impatient and interrupt a lot, so that people feel pressured and hurried.

Pat, on the other hand, expects to arrive at and leave the meeting on time. Pat brings the correct files and makes sure that proper minutes are kept. Meetings with Pat progress slowly as everything must be considered in great detail.

Pat is meticulous. Laid down procedures are followed to the letter - even when you are begging Pat to make a minor exception. Everything Pat deals with is double checked and even insignificant errors are corrected carefully and painstakingly.

Other staff sometimes complain that Pat is nit-picking, especially when their own mistakes are pointed out. And Pat misses deadlines through taking too long to collect every single piece of information which could be relevant.

Vijay is nearly always willing and helpful; nothing is too much trouble. Vijay can be very pleasant to have around, making sure that everyone on the team is comfortable. Work gets accepted from just about anyone and sometimes Vijay does things without even being asked. However, this means that Vijay exercises little control over workload or priorities, so that jobs get left undone when someone else needs help.

Vijay sometimes gets tired and emotional from being so helpful and complains about being misunderstood. Vijay also gets very anxious and upset by criticism, even when it is offered constructively. And Vijay has been known to keep quiet instead of pointing out problems - for fear of offending anyone!

Robin is enthusiastic and interested in all aspects of work. Robin is generally the first to volunteer when new tasks are being allocated. In fact, Robin is involved in some way in just about everything that is going on in the department and even outside it when opportunities arise. People tend to ask for Robin's help in their section because they know the answer will be an enthusiastic yes.

Robin likes to investigate all aspects of a task, but this often means that the work never quite gets finished - there always seems to be another important part of the job left to do. It is not uncommon for projects to be handed over to someone else to be completed because Robin's time is taken up with other new work. This sometimes leads other people to complain that they have to pick up work which they feel Robin should have done.

Lee works steadily and produces work at a regular pace. Even when the pressure is on, Lee stays calm and continues to work at the same steady rate. Lee never appears to worry about the workload, and won't be hurried.

Lee seems to ignore how people feel and doesn't understand the need to be flexible to deal with those sudden emergency jobs - everything can just take its turn.

Lee prefers to work alone and never asks for help. Somehow, Lee appears aloof and almost unfriendly - it's as if there are no real feelings there. Sometimes the work is not being done after all; Lee has tidied it away to give an appearance of coping.

Working Styles

These five people have rather extreme versions of five typical working styles. There are many people who have similar characteristics, although most of us have more of a mix of styles. You may not match one of the patterns exactly but you probably recognise aspects of a couple of them that are uncomfortably close to you.

Think about what is important to you as you do your work. What aspects keep you energised and motivated?

Do you enjoy having lots to do, like Chris? Are you usually in a hurry? Can you pull out all the stops when urgent work comes up? This is the Hurry Up style.

Or are you more like Pat? Do you pride yourself on your accuracy? Does it worry you when you see mistakes? Do you enjoy the challenge of bringing order into the world? In that case, you have a Be Perfect style.

Is your priority to get on well with people? Are you intuitive about how people are feeling? Are you happiest working in a team where everyone's views are taken into account? If you are like Vijay, your style is Please People.

Are you motivated by almost anything as long as it's new? Do you enjoy most the early stages of each new project or task? Is it a challenge to explore different areas of work? This is the Try Hard style, like Robin.

The fifth style is called Be Strong. If you are like Lee, then you pride yourself on your ability to cope. You may even welcome pressure because it gives you the chance to show how well you can deal with it. You stay calm when there is a crisis.

In the real world, people don't always fit into the neat boxes of a framework like this. However, most of us still fit more into some of the boxes than others. We fit even more closely when we are under stress as this seems to emphasise some of our weaknesses.

Alan had the task of responding to a large volume of customer complaints. Alan's manager, David, suspected that the workload was too high for one person to deal with. David was puzzled that Alan's desk always seemed clear but the more he questioned Alan the more insistent Alan was that everything was under control. Offers of help were treated with suspicion, as if Alan thought his job was at risk.

Alan worked longer and longer hours and then he got the 'flu - probably because he was run down through overworking. At that point, David finally discovered that there was a considerable backlog of complaints. Alan had been filing them neatly away to maintain the appearance of coping. Like Lee, Alan was reluctant to admit problems or ask for any help, even though the workload was in fact excessive. Instead he had struggled on. David, for his part, was a bit like Vijay - afraid to confront Alan for fear of hurting his feelings.

Knowing the effect of stress on working styles means you can plan better ways of working with people. You can take care that you do not unintentionally make the situation even more stressful. Had he known about working styles, David could have insisted on monitoring the workload himself. If he'd demanded to see the complaints and the responses, instead of being so afraid of offending Alan, he would have known that more staff should be allocated to this task. As it was, Alan simply got more stressed the further behind he got, and the more stressed he got the more determined he became to prove he could cope on his own.

There are a number of other ways in which understanding more about our working styles can be of use. These styles affect everything we do. They show up in the way we organise our work, manage our time, how we function alongside others, our contribution to the team, our style of communication, even our sentence patterns. They have an impact whether we are alone or with others. Greater awareness can help us build on the strengths of our style and minimise any problems. We can also develop alternative approaches so that our range of options is increased.

Drivers

As you have read, each working style has a number of benefits. Unfortunately, each style also has drawbacks. These drawbacks are known as drivers, so called because they have a 'driven', or compulsive, quality when we are under stress. They are subconscious attempts by us to behave in ways that will gain us the recognition we need from others. Drivers are also programmed responses to the messages we carry in our heads from important people in the past.

So a driver is rather like a superstition. When we were little we used to believe that if we avoided the cracks in the pavement, or crossed our fingers when we were afraid,

then we would be spared from some awful impending occurrence. In the same way, we operate as if a certain style of behaviour will ward off problems and earn us the respect of others.   Unfortunately, this is a myth.   The reality is that we can never do quite enough of whatever our driver calls for. In seeking to be more and more as we believe we should, we create problems. These in turn lead to us feeling more stressed, so we put even more energy into our driver behaviour, create more difficulties, and get yet more stressed.

On the other hand, our driver characteristics are often the things we did when children because they seemed to satisfy the grown-ups. When our stress levels are acceptable, the driver will appear as a strength. It is probable, therefore, that we will be known to others in terms of our working style and how effective it is. If they have a different style, they may wish they were more like us (put them under pressure, however, and they may see only our negative aspects after all!). If they share the same style, they will probably regard us even more highly. Bosses are likely to value subordinates more when there is a good match of working styles.

One important point to note is that drivers occur outside our awareness. We can recognise our working styles when they are described, and even accept that the drivers also occur. However, at the time that we move into the unhelpful aspects of our working styles, we are not conscious of doing so. We believe that we are still operating within the effective band of the style. We need, therefore, to review our behaviour from time to time, especially when we are under stress, so that we can avoid the problems that driver behaviour brings.

Hurry Up

Let's look now at each style in more detail. As you have read, if we have Hurry Up characteristics we work quickly and get a lot done in a short time. Our major strength is the amount that we can achieve. We respond particularly well to short deadlines, and our energy peaks under pressure. We actually seem to enjoy having too many things to do. The saying "If you want something done, give it to a busy person." was probably coined with us in mind.

Our underlying motivation is to do things as quickly as possible. We feel good if we can complete tasks in the shortest possible time. Like organisation and methods specialists, we look for the most efficient way to do work in the hope of shaving even a few minutes off each task. These few minutes can add up to significant time savings across the week. We also spend less time preparing than others do, giving us chance to meet more people and contribute more to the team.

However, give us time to spare and we delay starting until the job becomes urgent - then we start work on it. This can backfire because in our haste we make mistakes. Going back to correct the mistakes takes longer than doing the job right first time, so we may miss the deadlines after all. At the least, the quality of our work may be poor because we have not left enough time to check it over or improve it. Our urge to save time may be inappropriately applied to everything we do, instead of being reserved for

those tasks where it will make a real difference.

Our ability to think fast may lead us to appear impatient. We speak rapidly and have a habit of interrupting others. We may even finish their sentences for them, often misunderstanding and getting involved in needless arguments. Our body language reflects our impatience through fidgeting, tapping with our fingers or toes, looking at our watch, and perhaps even sighing or yawning ostentatiously.

Our appointments get planned too close together, so we rush from one to another, arriving late and leaving early. We are likely to turn up at a meeting having left the necessary paperwork in our office; we may even fail to arrive because we didn't stop to check the location of the meeting. When we do arrive, others must wait while we are given a summary of what we missed. Our constant rushing may prevent us from really getting to know people, so that we feel like an outsider.

A typical event for a Hurry Up is the time we approach a door that opens towards us, while we are carrying two cups of coffee. Most people would put one cup down, open the door, go through, put the cup down and then return to fetch the second cup. Not a Hurry Up, though. We juggle! Usually it's quicker. Every so often, it's a lot slower because we have to stop to clean up the coffee we spill. (If you never get the coffees, imagine an armful of files to be picked up from the floor, or the pulled muscle from carrying too many bags of groceries in one trip from the car, or the piece of wood that is too short because you didn't check the measurement carefully before you sawed!)

Be Perfect

Be Perfect people are as unlike Hurry Up's as can be.   Our motto is: "If a job is worth doing, it's worth doing well". Be Perfect characteristics involve a quest for perfection - no errors, everything must be exactly right, first time. Our major strength is our reputation for producing accurate, reliable work. We check the facts carefully, we prepare thoroughly and we pay attention to the details. Our written work will look good because we aim for perfection in layout as well as content.

This working style means we are well organised because we look ahead and plan how to deal with potential problems. In this way, we are not taken by surprise but have contingency plans ready to put into effect. Our projects run smoothly and efficiently, with effective co-ordination and monitoring of progress.

Unfortunately, we cannot be relied on to produce work on time because we need to check it so carefully for mistakes, and this checking takes time. Because of our concentration on how something looks, we are likely to call for a whole series of relatively minor changes to layouts. Our concern about being seen to be wrong means we are reluctant to issue a draft rather than the final version, so opportunities for incorporating the ideas of others may be lost.

We are also likely to misjudge the level of detail required. We include too much information and have the effect of confusing the recipient. Our reports become lengthy;

our sentence patterns also suffer whether we are writing or speaking. We have a tendency (as demonstrated here) to add in extra bits of information in parentheses; not so difficult for the reader (who can always glance at it again) but hard for a listener to follow. We choose our words carefully and may therefore use long, less familiar words or technical terms that others do not understand.

There is a danger that we end up doing everything ourselves because we do not trust others to do it right. We apply our high expectations constantly and fail to recognise when a lower standard would be appropriate and acceptable. This makes us poor delegators and may earn us a reputation for demotivating criticism. On the other hand, when we recognise the errors in our own work we may well feel worthless and not good enough even though others are satisfied with our performance.

The Be Perfect carries the coffees on a tray! The really Be Perfect even has a napkin on the tray to mop up any spills. And they never saw the wood too short; they check the measurements several times with a range of different measuring tapes, find they get different results, and postpone cutting the wood at all while they write to complain to the manufacturers of the measures!

Please People

Please People are the good team members.   We enjoy being with other people and show a genuine interest in them. Our aim is to please other people without asking. We work out what they would like and then provide it.   This working style means we are nice to have around because we are so understanding and empathic. We use intuition a lot and will notice body language and other signals that others may ignore.

We encourage harmony within the group and work at drawing the team closer together. We are the one most likely to invite the quieter members into the discussion so that their views are shared. This is especially useful when someone is not airing their concerns and might otherwise remain psychologically outside the group. At the same time, we are considerate of others' feelings and will not embarrass or belittle them.

Unfortunately, this style can have serious drawbacks because of our avoidance of the slightest risk of upsetting someone. We may worry so much about earning their approval that we are reluctant to challenge their ideas even when we know they are wrong. We may be so cautious with criticism that our information is ignored. Our own opinions and suggestions are so wrapped around with qualifying words that we seem to lack commitment to them.

We spend a lot of time smiling and nodding at people to indicate our agreement with them. Our own views are presented as questions only, with us ready to back off if they do not like what we are saying. Our facial expression is often questioning, with raised eyebrows and an anxious smile. We may be seen as lacking assertiveness, lacking critical faculties, lacking the courage of our convictions. When criticised by others, we may take it personally and get upset even when the comments are worded constructively.

Because we are reluctant to say no, we let people interrupt us and we are likely to accept work from them instead of concentrating on our own priorities. We hesitate to ask questions because we feel we should somehow know the answer, only to find out later that we've not done it the way they wanted. Our attempts to read people's minds often result only in us feeling misunderstood when they do not like the results.

Please People fetch the coffees frequently. They also open doors for other people who are carrying coffees, even those with only one cup to carry who could open the door themselves. Please People rush to open the door long before you reach it with your coffee - or offer to carry the coffee for you anyway. And they want to know if you approve of the way they are about to saw the wood!

Try Hard

The Try Hard working style is all about the effort put into the task, so we tackle things enthusiastically.   Our energy peaks with something new to do. People value our motivation and the way we have of getting things off the ground. We may be popular with colleagues in other sections, and with customers or clients, because of our enthusiastic approach to problem solving. Managers especially appreciate the fact that we often volunteer to take on new tasks.

Because of our interest in anything new and different, we may well be noted for the thorough way in which we follow up on all possibilities. Given a project to undertake, we will identify a whole range of ramifications and implications that should be taken into account. The result is that we pay attention to all aspects of a task, including some that other people may have overlooked.

However, we may be more committed to trying than to succeeding. Our initial interest wears off before we finish the task. Managers begin to realise that we are still volunteering for new projects even though we have not completed any of those tasks given to us previously. Our colleagues may come to resent the fact that we do the early, exciting parts of a project but then expect others to finish off the boring, mundane, detailed work.

We may fail to finish also because we spread our interest over too broad a range. Our attention to so many aspects makes the job impossibly large. Even if we complete most of it, we may still think up yet another angle to pursue before we can really agree that the job is done. Thus a small straightforward task may be turned into a major exercise, creating havoc with the time schedule. We miss the deadline or hand in a report full of items that are largely irrelevant. It is as if we are secretly making sure we do not succeed, so that we can just keep on trying.

Our communication with others may be pained and strained, as we frown a lot while we try to follow them. Our own sentences are likely to go off at tangents because we introduce new thoughts just as they come to mind. The listener becomes confused, both around the constantly changing content and about judging whether we have

finished speaking. Sometimes we string questions together so the listener has to 'try' and sort out what to respond to. When asked questions, we may well answer a different question - a skill used deliberately by politicians but not so useful when it is outside our awareness.

Try Hards forget they were going to collect coffees because something more interesting occurs on the way. Or they stop to oil the door when they hear it squeaking - so the coffee gets cold. They change their mind about what the wood was for anyway - they may have several half-built items. Or they decide to redesign the saw or build a better workbench. They end up with lots of unused wood with saw marks!

Be Strong

Be Strong people stay calm under pressure. With this working style, we feel energised when we have to cope. Because we are so good at dealing with stressful situations, we are great to have around in a crisis. We are the ones who will keep on thinking logically when others may be panicking. We seem to be able to stay emotionally detached from the situation, enabling us to problem solve around difficult personal issues and to deal efficiently with people who are angry or distressed. We are able to make 'unpleasant' decisions without torturing ourselves with guilt about the effects of those decisions on others.

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 strong sense of duty ensures we will work steadily even at the unpleasant tasks. As supervisors, we are likely to handle staff firmly and fairly. We will give honest feedback and constructive criticism. We stay even-tempered so that people know what reaction to expect from us.

One problem with this style is that we hate admitting weakness - and we regard any failure to cope as a weakness. So we get overloaded rather than asking others for help. We may disguise our difficulties by "hiding" work away; often our desk looks tidy but correspondence is filed away in a rather large pending tray. We may be highly self-critical about our shortcomings, as well as seeing it as weakness if other people ask for help.

Colleagues may feel uncomfortable about our lack of emotional responses. This may be especially pronounced in those situations where most of us would feel the strain. They may suspect that we are robots rather than human beings. It can be hard to get to know us when we seem to have no feelings. Occasionally, someone with this style will appear to be very jovial and friendly. However, this will be a mask that prevents anyone from getting to know the real person beneath the superficial layer of jokes.

Our communication may reinforce the barriers to getting to know us. We are likely to use passive rather than active voice - 'It occurred to me...' rather than 'I thought....'. We may depersonalise ourselves - 'One often does...' rather than 'I often do....'. Our voice may be monotonous or dispassionate; our face may be expressionless. The observant person will spot that our smile does not extend from our mouth to our eyes. Deep

down, we fear that we are unlovable so we avoid asking for anything lest it be refused.

Be Strongs are very matter-of-fact about having coffee. They get coffee when they are thirsty. They carry only one cup because they get it for themselves. This means opening the door is not a problem. Neither is sawing a piece of wood. Be Strongs never have problems - they specialise in coping with anything. If the saw breaks and cuts them, they apply a tourniquet and finish what they were doing before driving themselves to hospital!

Working Styles and Relationships

Different combinations of working styles will have different effects on relationships. We are likely to have a higher regard for people who share our own approach. We find it easier to understand them, and to empathise with their problems. Even our sentence patterns will match;

Mary and Harry were both Hurry Ups who were sub editors in a busy corporate newspaper office. They spoke rapidly to each other, interrupted each other, and made quick decisions together. Each thought the other was quick-witted and decisive; the interrupting did not bother them as they hardly noticed it in their rush to sort out which stories to print.

Ernest and Mike, on the other hand, were Be Perfects. Each of them spoke carefully, with plenty of long words and specialist jargon. They arrived at carefully considered decisions together. Mike was Ernest's boss; as they worked in a pharmacy their careful attention to detail was also seen as reassuring by doctors whose prescriptions they dispensed.

Please People are very polite to each other, keep checking that the other party is comfortable with the discussion, and aim to find compromises. Mervin and Gloria were like this. They were employed as care assistants in a residential home for old people. Their courteous and caring approach was also much appreciated by the residents in the home, who felt they showed good old fashioned values.

Try Hards explore many alternatives, go off at tangents, fail to finish their sentences, and make decisions enthusiastically. Shipra and Catriona worked for an advertising agency, where they sparked each other into increasing levels of innovation. Between them they produced many workable ideas for the rest of the team to implement.

Carol and James were Be Strong professional buyers for a large local authority. They spent their days behaving rather like poker players, giving little away about how they felt. This meant that they got good deals from salespeople, who would increase discounts for fear of losing the business. Carol and James respected each other's skill at making logical, pragmatic buying decisions.

Unfortunately, we do not always attain the benefits of complementary styles. Instead, we are just as likely to have relationship problems when our styles differ. Our

incompatibility generates stress; stress sends us more deeply into driver behaviour; the more locked in we get, the more stressed we get. The more stressed we are, the less we are able to tolerate the differences in others. The scene is then set for problems.

Elena was a Hurry Up boss who had a Be Perfect subordinate, Peter. Peter had a report to produce. The deadline had arrived (it was a short deadline anyway because Elena did not think the job should take long!) Peter had not finished the report. Indeed, he wanted another week to double-check some of the data in the appendices, to amend the layout and run off a reprint, and to have the diagrams produced professionally. Elena was expecting a draft report, which would be combined with the work of others to form a final proposal to a customer. Elena was expecting to take the report to a meeting at which senior managers would determine the content of the final document.

Imagine the conversation which took place. Elena asking impatiently for the report; interrupting when Peter tried to explain the need for more time; complaining that it has taken too long already; and finally demolishing Peter by pointing out that only a rough draft was needed. Peter, meanwhile, concluded that Elena clearly had no interest in quality; was incapable of allocating a realistic time to an important task; was bad-mannered and was refusing to listen to a reasonable request for more time; and, horror of horrors, was proposing to show imperfect work to senior managers who would get a totally wrong picture of Peter's standard of work.

In another case, Michael was a Try Hard design engineer who joined a quality circle led by Dennis, who was a Be Strong. Michael showed typical Try Hard characteristics and enthusiastically raised several ideas in the quality circle meetings. He became increasingly frustrated with Dennis' apparent lack of enthusiasm. Dennis, on the other hand, thought Michael's ideas had not been thought through and were impractical. However, neither knew how to explain their misgivings to the other, with the result that Michael become disenchanted and left the quality circle. Dennis had no one else in the circle who generated ideas and after a time senior management closed it down. Had they been able to work together, Dennis might have added a useful element of practicality to some of Michael's better ideas.

Other instances of the problems that arise when styles do not match include Please People trying desperately to read the mind of a Be Strong so that they can please them; Be Strong observing uncomprehendingly the anxiety of Please People about doing the right thing; Be Perfect's frustration at the tendency of Try Hards to leave jobs unfinished; Try Hard's resentment at Be Perfects who insist they do the boring part of the task. I'm sure you can think of more examples!

A major danger with compatible working styles is omission. We need a variety of styles to compensate for the potential negative elements of each.

A Hurry Up will add necessary urgency for a Be Perfect who is in danger of missing a deadline, and prompt a Be Strong to request help to save time. A Be Perfect will stop the Hurry Up from rushing into an expensive mistake, and encourage the Try Hard to finish what they started. Please People will stop the Hurry Up from pushing others into

hasty decisions. Try Hard will provide Be Strong with the animation they fail to show, stimulate the Hurry Up to consider more options, and respond enthusiastically to the tentative ideas of Please People. Be Strong will highlight the need to complete the mundane tasks that the Try Hard tends to overlook, invite the Hurry Up to be less frenetic, and the Please People to be less anxious.

Les, like Elena, was a Hurry Up. When Peter transferred to Les' section, he found that his Be Perfect style was treated quite differently. Les made it clear that he appreciated Peter's attention to detail.   He made a point of commenting favourably on Peter's thoroughness, and asked Peter to check reports that Les had drafted. Les did not make all the changes Peter suggested - that would have taken too long - but he did explain how he decided which were important enough to incorporate. He also told Peter clearly how he made his decisions about which corrections to ignore. Once Les was sure that Peter felt valued, he then began to set clear timescales for work. He also gave Peter guidelines about what he wanted included and what he felt could be omitted.   In this way, he gradually coached Peter into being able to make his own decisions about the level of detail to include.   And Les found that his own manager soon noticed the improvement in Les' reports, which had previously tended to be a bit sparse sometimes!

Fiona was a Be Strong accountant whose relationships with line managers in a manufacturing unit were very rational and rather formal. She handled their budgets and often needed to query payments. When Steven joined her team, she saw how his Please People style led him to notice when managers were uncomfortable or annoyed that their requests had been rejected. Steven would then check out his impressions and encourage the managers to clarify their concerns. Even when he was still unable to help them obtain financing, they understood why and there were fewer complaints made about 'inflexible accountants'.

Working Styles and Time Management

The five working styles give us invaluable insights into what happens to our management of time. We can then identify specific actions to redress the balance. It may be that we need to select from more than one style to create our own time management plan.

If we are Hurry Up: to avoid mistakes, we need to plan sufficient time for tasks, especially the preparation that we are so inclined to skimp.   To avoid appearing impatient, we should consciously slow down so that other people have time to absorb the information. We must stop interrupting them and concentrate on listening. It can be very helpful to remember to ask about their needs instead of making assumptions, and to paraphrase back to check our understanding. If we feel we lack real contact with others, we could plan our arrival or departure times to allow us to join in the socialising that goes on before and after meetings.

If we are Be Perfect: we need to relax more and accept that human beings, including ourselves, are not capable of total perfection. Making mistakes is an important source of learning.   Prioritising is required so that we can decide which jobs really warrant such

high levels of accuracy. We must also understand that deadlines are important to others and that we should keep sight of the objective. We need to plan to finish on time instead of using too much of the time to plan. Check how much detail is enough; then give the key information and stop before we bury people in facts and figures.

If we are Please People: to avoid being dumped with unrealistic requests and unimportant tasks, we need to learn to say no skillfully. It is important that we set our own limits and 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.

If we are Try Hard: 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 diary 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.

If we are Be Strong: we may have the hardest working style to identify in ourselves. Our potential weaknesses may be well hidden. Before we take on new tasks, we should review the potential requirements and check we have access to the appropriate resources. We also 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.

Using a Time Management System

Our working styles have a direct bearing on the way we use a time management system.

Hurry Up people are usually too impatient to get the full benefit from such a system. They start using the system before taking time to work out the most appropriate way of setting it up to match their work. Without clear sections, they record items hastily and then cannot find them again. Hurry Ups are also the ones most likely to keep lots of scraps of paper with notes on that they have been too rushed to transcribe into the system.

Hurry Ups are probably better off with a very simple system that allows them a quick sort into a few categories, with no need to transcribe. If you have this style, carry a pad of stick-it sheets for making notes - then you can attach them simply to the correct page. Avoid computerised systems unless they are very quick; otherwise you'll find even logging in takes too long for comfort.

Be Perfect people have 'perfect' time management systems. They keep them so accurately and neatly that it uses up a lot of time just making the entries. One problem

is designing the 'ultimate' category system. A Be Perfect will be reluctant to use the system at all until they are certain they have made it foolproof. They may spend on inordinate amount of time on this. If they subsequently realise that their arrangement is not quite perfect, they may feel compelled to start all over again and spend hours transferring their data across.

Be Perfects need to review the available systems before choosing one that fits their needs best. You could also look for a system that allows customising. You will probably enjoy a computerised system that automatically amends and updates every time an entry is made. If you operate a manual system, use a pencil so you can erase when things change.

Please People worry about whether they are using their time management system in the way they are supposed to. They look at other peoples' systems to check if their own is all right. They have real problems using pre-set pages for anything other than the original intention, so they are limited in how far they can personalise a system.

Please People need to stop worrying about what other people think is right. Choose a system only because you like it yourself; don't adopt one just because everyone else has. Once you have a system, feel free to do just as you like with it. Use coloured pages or stick cartoon characters on it to help reinforce your right to be individualistic.

Try Hard people are likely to go from one time management system to another. Each system lasts only until they lose interest. They may be very enthusiastic at first, demonstrating their great new system to everyone else. However, they somehow keep not quite getting around to the mundane aspects of deciding how to operate the system in detail. So then they discover another, better system and start again, and again....

Try Hard people need variety in their time management system. A system which allows you to add new features from time to time will maintain your interest. You also need a system with the minimum of detailed recording. You will probably benefit from computerised project management systems that prompt you to cover all significant aspects of the task.

Be Strong people are likely to wonder why anyone needs a time management system in the first place. They may secretly believe that a good memory should be enough. If their work is very involved, then a straightforward system will be seen as appropriate. Having got a system, then entries must be made promptly and conscientiously, regardless of the circumstances.

Be Strong people should select a system that is very practical. If manual, you will prefer something in a plain yet serviceable cover. If computerised, you will not want too many enhancements to the basic system. Any instructions for the system must be clear and logical, so you do not have to ask for any assistance in setting up.

Getting the Benefits of Working Styles

You may well have recognised bits of yourself in each of the styles. Look more closely, though, at the one or two styles that have most impact for you. Consider what matters most to you: to be quick, to be perfect, to get on with people, to tackle new tasks, or to be calm. How have you approached the task of reading this chapter about working styles: have you skimmed through in a hurry; considered each slowly and carefully; been most interested in ways to improve your relationships; been keen to see if there are new ideas in it; or wondered what all the fuss is about?

What can you do with your increased awareness? The next step is to set out to obtain the advantages of your preferred working style(s) without the potential problems. What is needed is a conscious choice of options, followed by a period of practice as you become competent with additional techniques.

If you are Hurry Up:

plan your work in stages, setting interim target dates

concentrate on listening carefully to others until they finish speaking

learn relaxation techniques and then use them regularly

If you are Be Perfect:

set realistic standards of performance and accuracy

practice asking yourself what the consequences really are - do this whenever you find a mistake

make a point of telling others that their mistakes are not serious

If you are Please People:

start asking people questions to check what they want instead of guessing

please yourself more often, and ask other people for what you want

practice telling other people firmly when they are wrong

If you are Try Hard:

stop volunteering

make a plan that includes finishing a task - and then stick to that plan through to a conclusion

check out the parameters of a task so that you do only what is expected

If you are Be Strong:

keep a task and time log so that you can monitor your workload

ask other people to help you

take up a spare time activity that you can really enjoy

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 ideas:

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.

Remember also that it may be useful to acquire some of the other working styles if you recognise you are heavily into one or two only.