

### **Slowing Down is Tough for Some: Are you a Type A Person?**

Slow down and live in the moment. This is a worthwhile resolution for the New Year, similar to one I proposed in January 2003 -- “Yield the right-of-way.” And it is related to my June 2004 column about advantages of living the moment. Here I reiterate the safety value of this recommendation, but focus on why slowing down is more difficult for some of us. Yes, I’m talking about personality again.

Several of my *ISHN* contributions in 2004 addressed personality as a human dynamic affecting people’s safety. In February and March, I detailed distinctions between four personalities: success seekers, overstrivers, failure avoiders, and failure accepters; and I suggested strategies for transitioning people to the most desirable state of success-seeking for safety. In April, I discussed anxiety as a personality trait versus a state, and proposed advantages for having some ongoing anxiety or concern with regard to safety.

My July column in 2004 explained the “Big 5” personality traits with reference to industrial safety, and included sample questions for assessing these, including openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Finally, in October I introduced the concept of “entitlement”, and showed how this mindset impacts industrial safety and health.

While these prior considerations of personality were diverse and rather extensive, I left out the one person factor that has the most relevance to personal injury and its prevention -- Type A versus Type B. Type A individuals are more prone to experience a near hit or unintentional injury. On a personal note, I realize my Type A propensities make it difficult for me to live in the moment and attend mindfully to my ongoing behavior and its environmental context.

## **What is Type A?**

Most readers have heard about the Type A personality. It was identified in the late 1950's by physicians Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman as a pattern of behavior presumed to contribute to heart disease. Type A's are competitive, impatient, hostile, and always striving to do more in less time. In contrast, Type B's are calmer, more patient, less hurried, and less hostile.

Early studies of the Type A personality evidenced a positive correlation with heart disease. Specifically, Type A people were more likely than Type B people to have heart attacks. This association became well known in the 1960's and 1970's, and is still referenced in contemporary self-health books. However, more recent research casts doubt on this conclusion, as I discuss later.

The positive correlation between Type A behavior and unintentional injury remains apparent, whether referring to empirical research or common sense. People who are impatient and continually attempt to do more in less time are more likely to hurt themselves or others. With a future-oriented mindset, Type A individuals short-cut the current moment in order to be successful in the next. While mindful of their next moments, they miss pleasures of the present.

## **Are you a Type A Person?**

Okay, I've owned up to my Type A behavior patterns, and realize my special challenge to slow down in 2006 and become more mindful and appreciative of the present. What about you?

- Do you get impatient and experience negative emotions when driving behind a vehicle traveling the speed limit in the left-hand lane?

- Do you look for the shortest line in the grocery store by estimating the number of items in other's carts? And if another line is moving faster, do you quickly switch to that line? Then, do you feel angry when you notice the line you just left starts to move faster than your new line?
- Do you walk on the moving sidewalk in airports, even though you have plenty of time before your next flight? And do you feel any hostility toward those Type B people blocking your path, as you hustle to a departure gate or the baggage-claim area only to wait impatiently for another flight, checked luggage, or a cab?

### **Type A Behavior vs. Type A Emotion**

The above examples of Type A people reflect both behavior and emotion. In other words, while you're rushing to save time (behavior), how do you feel about people who get in your way and slow you down (emotion)? While the hurried behavior increases risk for personal injury, certain emotions put people at risk for heart disease. Specifically, the emotions of hostility and anger that often accompany time-saving behavior relate to the development of heart disease. Thus, it's critical to distinguish between Type A Behavior and Type A Emotion. Type A Behavior puts people at risk for unintentional injury, but not for heart disease. The Type A Emotions of anger and hostility, exemplified by "road rage," put people at risk for heart disease and for death following heart disease.

### **Assess your Type A Behavior versus Type A Emotion**

Figure 1 includes items you can use to measure your propensity for Type A Behavior versus Type A Emotion. Simply write a number from one to seven next to each item to estimate the extent to which the statement applies to you. A "1" reflects "not at all", a "4" indicates "sometimes", and a "7" designates "all of the time". The higher your

score for the Type A Behavior items, the more difficult it is for you to be mindful of momentary risks to your safety. A relatively high score for the Type A Emotion items suggests risk of heart disease.

A score above 30 on either scale suggests Type A tendencies. I score 40 for Type A Behavior and 22 for Type A Emotions. My high Type A Behavior tally supports my earlier confession of being injury prone. What about you?

It would be worthwhile to give this scale to a work team and openly discuss personal scores. It could be quite enlightening to discover your relative ranking of Type A Behavior versus Type A Emotion. However, a discussion of circumstances and contexts that influence Type A Behaviors and Emotions would be most beneficial. This can lead to environmental changes that make it easier for more people to slow down and live in the moment.

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Dr. Geller and his partners at Safety Performance Solutions (SPS) help companies worldwide understand personality factors which come from People-Based Safety (PBS). Coastal Training and Technologies Corporation has recently published Dr. Geller's new book on PBS, as well as five video/CD/DVD programs, accompanied by workbooks and leader guides. For more information, please log on to [www.people-based-safety.com](http://www.people-based-safety.com) or call SPS at 540-951-7233.

## Figure 1: Survey to Assess Type A Behavior and Type A Emotion

| <b>Type A Behavior</b>  | <b>Type A Emotion</b>  |
|---|--|
| 1. I experience a lot of time pressure. _____   | 1. People seem to annoy me intentionally. _____  |
| 2. I feel the pressure to get ahead and succeed. _____                                | 2. I often raise my voice. _____   |
| 3. I do many things fast -- talking, walking, eating, and so forth. _____             | 3. Many situations make me angry. _____  |
| 4. I work long hours. _____   | 4. People consider me short-tempered. _____  |
| 5. I often want to (and sometimes actually do) finish other people's sentences. _____ | 5. I have a "short fuse" when it comes to tolerating incompetence. _____                         |
| 6. I think it's important to acquire a lot of money and possessions. _____            | 6. Being caught in slow traffic frustrates me so much I want to yell at the other drivers. _____ |
| 7. I hate to stand in line. _____   | 7. I try to control my temper, but often lose it. _____  |
| 8. It is not necessary for others to impose deadlines; I set them for myself. _____   | 8. I express my anger physically by hitting, kicking, slapping, or throwing things. _____        |
| Total _____   | Total _____  |

1. Not at all
2. Almost Never
3. Rarely
4. Sometimes
5. Usually
6. Most of the time
7. All of the time