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TYPE A PERSONALITY TRAITS

I'm going to wager a bet that if you're reading this, you're probably a Type A person. I know I don't know you, but hear me out. At least ninety-percent of DICTA's readership must be comprised of attorneys, correct? Probably more. And if you're an attorney, who has jumped through all the proverbial hoops, then chances are you've at least got some Type A in you. Not to mention, this article is typically included in the last pages, so it's conceivable that you read DICTA each month from cover to cover. Maybe that's because DICTA is a quality publication. Maybe that's because you read the *Times*, the *Journal*, the *Tennessean*, the *TV Guide*, and the *Farragut Press* from cover to cover.

Admittedly, there's a spectrum. Some people are so Type A that they actually worry and work themselves into an early grave. Studies have suggested that people with Type A personalities are more likely to die from incidents related to coronary heart disease. Some of us, while driven and organized, have a healthy handle on worry. Meaning, we often recite the phrase "it will all be okay," and we believe that it actually *will* be okay. I like to think of myself as a person included in the latter camp. I am ambitious and tend to overcommit, but I manage my time well, mainly because I suffer from a feeling of constant urgency. I need things done quickly. Like yesterday quickly. I live and die by the checklist. Sometimes, (embarrassingly) I add completed items onto new lists so that I can pat myself on the back about how productive I've been.

In certain areas of law, Type A personality traits seem particularly useful. Say, if you carry a heavy workload and work under frequent and apt-to-change-deadlines. If you travel all over the state or the region, often working out of suitcases and off laptops. If you're often in adversarial situations, perhaps, or if you're managing the work of many others.

If the aforementioned scenarios describe your work situation, you're probably not an estate planning attorney. (Don't be offended, estate planners, I'm one of you.) Make no mistake, estate planning and probate is a complicated area of practice that can be quite stressful. We are often assisting individuals with an emotional, rather than pecuniary, interest in the outcome of our work, and we are often doing so in stressful and difficult times that may be brought on by death, illness, divorce, or addiction. Just as often we have clients who have very a complicated vision for how their assets are to be distributed or preserved after their death. They may need tax planning advice (for now, anyway). They may own businesses and tons of stock and have five ex-spouses and owe the IRS \$68,000. They may expect the impossible. It's never a cake walk. But the deadlines—they're typically generous. They're fairly few and far between and rarely a source of stress. So it's ironic that the scariest moment of my brief career as an estate and probate attorney is the result of a nearly missed deadline.

So picture this: It's Tuesday. I have a client scheduled to come in and sign a document this afternoon. I'm sitting at my desk and the phone rings.

"Oh, hello, client. Thanks for calling. What's that? You can't come in to sign until Monday? The date of the deadline? Around 2:00 p.m.? Well, ummm... Hmmm..."

This makes me a little bit nervous. I explain to the client that coming in at 2:00 pm means that we only have a couple of hours to file the document. The document filed, by the way, is somewhat valuable to her, probably worth around \$2,500.

But she's only signing one document, correct?

"Yes," I tell her, "just one."

And I'm not far from the Courthouse, correct?

"Yes," I acquiesce, "shouldn't take longer than twenty minutes."

She sits in silent victory.

It's really not a big deal, but I make a point not to butt up against deadlines. What if she doesn't show? What if she has a car accident or there's a death in the family? What if there's an earthquake and the interstate is undrivable? What if I find an error in the document after she signs and I need her to sign a revised copy but she doesn't have enough time to get to my office? It doesn't matter that I've read through this two page document thirty times already, I'm human, after all.

"Sure! 2:00 p.m. will be fine. Yes, of course. See you then." Click.

I sit there. Not comfortable, but not uncomfortable enough to have insisted she come sooner. It'll be fine. She said she can make it at 2:00 p.m. She'll be here at 2:00 p.m. A bit more self-soothing and it's out of my mind altogether. The gift of an only slightly Type A personality.

Three days later, I'm again at my desk, this time looking ahead to next week. It's Friday. Oh look at that, Monday is Martin Luther King Day. My client is coming in at 2:00 p.m. On the day of the filing deadline. Monday, Martin Luther King Day when Court is almost certainly going to be closed. Did I mention it's Friday?

My arm goes numb.

With a quickness I reserve for cold showers and Black Friday shopping, I'm on the phone, fumbling for her number. With each unanswered ring, the numbness creeps closer and closer to my heart. If she doesn't answer, this may be the coronary incident that does me in.

Voicemail.

Should I try again? Why can't I find her home number? If I stare at my phone long enough, it will ring, right? Two minutes pass. Three. I have to keep working. It will be okay. She'll call back. Everything is always okay. Right? RIGHT?

Within ten agonizing minutes, the client called back. Of course she didn't mind to come in. It would be no problem at all. She'd see me in an hour.

By the time she arrives, my nerves are settled and I'm patting myself on the back for how calmly I handled the potential crisis. I wonder to myself how a full blown Type A'er would have kept their cool...



Have a story to share?

Lane McCarty (lanemccarty@gmail.com) is coordinating this monthly column for DICTA. If you can look back and laugh at those moments that made you cringe, we'd love for you to share your story.