

RUNNING LATE...AGAIN

Even the Terminally Tardy
Can Change

It's 8:45 a.m., and Lisa Williams* is driving frantically through the streets of Manhattan, jamming peddle to the metal through yellow lights, honking wildly at slow-moving vehicles, and anxiously eying the digital display of the dashboard clock as it inches steadily toward 9:00. She's late...again. Like a series of bad Groundhog Days, this scenario repeats itself each working day for the 35-year old software sales representative. Lisa runs behind for nearly every appointment, meeting, and social obligation she attends. And it's gotten her into some pretty hairy predicaments.

"On the way to an important presentation last month, I tailgated a slow-moving car so mercilessly, the driver finally pulled over to let me pass," remembers Lisa. "Turned out the slow-poke was my client. As he entered the conference room, he shot me a scowl and demanded, 'Do you drive a black Acura?' Feigning a look of what I hoped was absolute innocence, I replied, 'No, why?' At that rather inconvenient moment, one of my colleagues raised his head from his paperwork just long enough to insist, 'Yes you do.' Red-faced, all I could do was stammer, 'Ah...well, it's actually kind of a dark gray.' The subject was dropped, but I never did land that account."

Although her lateness has long been the butt of co-workers' jokes, a frequent source of aggravation for family and friends, and the cause of countless speeding tickets, Lisa still can't master the art of showing up on time. She's tried all the tricks—setting her clock ahead, getting up earlier—but nothing seems to work.

"Chronic lateness can be a surprisingly difficult habit to overcome," explains Diana DeLonzor, author of the new book, *Never Be Late Again, 7 Cures for the Punctually Challenged*



(neverbelateagain.com). Contrary to popular opinion, most chronically late people don't enjoy being late, she explains, but often have difficulty with time management and procrastination in general. In a San Francisco State University study she headed investigating chronic lateness and its causes, Ms. DeLonzor found that the punctually challenged often shared common personality characteristics such as anxiety, a penchant for thrill-seeking, or low levels of self-control.

"There are many misperceptions about chronic lateness," says DeLonzor. "While we often accuse tardy types of wanting attention or of needing to be in control, lateness usually has little to do with those factors." The motivations are often subconscious ones, she explains. While some people are drawn to the adrenaline rush of that last minute sprint to the finish line, others receive an ego boost from overscheduling and filling each moment with activity. Still others have difficulty conforming to rules and structure.

Chronic lateness is a more complex problem than it may seem, says DeLonzor. "Telling a late person to just be time is a little like telling a dieter to simply stop eating so much," she notes. "Like many negative habits, even those with the best intentions can come up short."

“Some years ago, former president Ramos of the Philippines instituted a formal week of punctuality,” she recalls. “Huge kick-off ceremonies were arranged, with the president himself presiding. Unfortunately, he overslept and turned up an hour late,” laughs Ms. DeLonzor. And if you tend run behind, you’re in good company—Bill Clinton, Robert Redford, Farrah Fawcett, Richard Gere, and Naomi Campbell are all reputed members of the better-late-than-never club.

DeLonzor also found some evidence that late people may perceive time differently than the rest of us. In time perception tests, subjects attempting to gauge the passage of 60 seconds while reading a book showed marked differences in the ability to gauge time accurately.

“The jury’s still out on the reasons for these time perception results,” says Ms. DeLonzor. “But I have found the punctually challenged to be chronic underestimators of time. They tend to misjudge the time needed to accomplish even those things they’ve done hundreds of times, like getting dressed for work, or doing the grocery shopping.” This is due to what she calls magical thinking—eternal optimism even in the presence of contradictory evidence. “It’s the unshakable ability to believe you can drive the ten miles to work in seven minutes flat.” Magical thinkers use time estimates based on that one day ten years ago when everything went exactly right—the lights were green and they found parking in front of the building.

A former member of the punctually challenged set herself, DeLonzor knows of what she speaks. “I used to be late for everything,” she says. “Although I tried many times to kick the habit, it wasn’t until I analyzed the problem and researched the subject that I gained control over the clock.”

How to change? Ms. DeLonzor recommends starting with a few basic steps (for additional tips and strategies, visit www.neverbelateagain.com):

1) *Relearn to tell time.* To avoid magical thinking, keep track for one week of how long your daily tasks actually take, then post those new time frames somewhere you’ll see them every day. Start each

day with a written schedule based on your new time estimates.

2) *Never plan to be on time.* Always plan to be 15 minutes early. Late folks tend to have an aversion to waiting, so they try to time their arrivals to the minute. “If the drive to work takes 20 minutes and it’s 22 minutes before 9:00, the late person, rather than leaving the house, will continue reading the paper or cleaning the breakfast dishes until exactly 8:40,” explains DeLonzor. This kind of split second time management rarely works out.

3) *Welcome the Wait.* Maintaining timeliness will be tough if you view waiting time as wasted time. So begin to think of waiting as something you look forward to, as enjoyable, luxury time to take a break from your busy life. Bring a book, magazine, language tapes or a paper and pen to help you enjoy the time.

What if you’re on the other side of the fence? What can you do about a chronically late person in your life?

First, get the late person’s attention by visiting www.neverbelateagain.com to order an anonymous lateness citation. It’s a good way to get the point across in a funny, light-hearted way.

Second, don’t take another’s lateness personally. Remember that it has nothing to do with you. Sit down and have a talk before too much resentment builds up. Calmly and constructively explain your feelings.

Third, institute a system of penalties and rewards. For instance, agree that if the late person is more than 15 minutes late for dinner, they’ll pay for the wine or dessert. If you’re an employer, institute a punctuality policy with rewards and penalties. Communicate the policy to all employees, enforce it consistently, and be sure the policy includes a resolution to start meetings on time. Two minutes after the meeting starts, lock the door. Open it for latecomers, but do not backtrack on subjects

For more insight and tips on overcoming lateness, or to order *Never Be Late Again, 7 Cures for the Punctually Challenged* please call (415) 441-4614 or visit: www.neverbelateagain.com.

*Name and identifying details changed