

THE DEADLINE EFFECT **by Ginger E. Blume, Ph.D.**

How do you react when confronted with a deadline? Some people dread having to meet a deadline, whether at work or in their personal lives. For instance, a young man's girlfriend pushes for an answer, as she issues an ultimatum: "Either we get married now or we break up. Which shall it be?"

Let's explore how people respond differently to this common phenomenon of feeling pressured to make decisions or complete a task in our everyday lives.

The Deadline Resistor

Some people respond to externally imposed deadlines with stubborn resistance. You know immediately if you fall into this category. **Deadline Resistors** dig in their heels and refuse to budge forward when someone else pushes for a work proposal to be handed in by a certain date, a closet to be organized before the end of the weekend, to sample a drug at a party before it's all gone, etc.

This resistance strategy can work for or against you, depending on the situation. It may prevent you from behaving in an impulsive manner, or it could cause you to lose a last chance to participate in something really important. In other words, this, like other strategies of resistance that I'll discuss, may represent a life-long pattern that has a hit or miss effect. Clearly, when people have habitual patterns of behaving, their responses will not always appear logical and won't take into consideration the actual situation they are facing.

The Deadline Welcomers

Let's examine another style of reacting to a deadline. Some people respond to deadlines issued by another person with "relief." **Deadline Welcomers** tend to have difficulty bringing closure to situations by themselves. Hence, they welcome that ultimate push they require from someone else to go ahead and commit to a final decision or action. Without external pressure, they will avoid or procrastinate and easily miss out on an important opportunity, even though they were actually ready to jump on board, but only if someone gave them that final, and necessary shove!

For instance, an employee may have done all of the research required for a new product, but without a deadline to present her work, she doesn't bother to complete that crucial finishing touch and turn it into her boss. Without external pressure, her boss doesn't have a chance to see the employee's true potential. Sadly, this worker could be a real asset to the company, but without the push she requires, no one will ever know.

This Deadline Welcomer has a habit of obsessing and delaying until she receives external pressure to display the fruits of her labor. If not asked, she is out of luck! The Deadline Welcomer is what I call a "sleeper"----they often surprise others when they're required to produce. Who would have guessed!

The Deadline Aficionados

There are others who feel positively challenged by a deadline. They are eager to comply and they work toward the deadline as if it were their own idea. In other words, to them, deadlines seem like a natural approach to most of life's challenges. Deadlines provide a boost of energy to these folks.

These **Deadline Aficionados** are the type to either create their own sense of urgency and/or welcome the structure that is provided by an externally imposed deadline and use the pressure to steadily push forward toward completion. They are highly goal oriented and motivated for closure. In fact, they are driven for completion. They can't wait to close one door and open another.

While this approach may seem like an ideal one, it can have its downside, too. Sometimes, the **Deadline Aficionados** are so eager to finish something or make a final decision that they do so prematurely. Imagine a laboratory technician who is anxious to provide lab results for all the lab samples she has been given during the day before she leaves the office. She hurries to finish all her work on time and makes a critical mistake in a patient's lab report.

Her desire for completion has caused her to be hasty and forget to double-check her results. While her typical strategy may help her be the superstar of the lab, she may also make a critical mistake that could cost her the job. She must learn to balance her love of deadlines with a habit to double check important items.

The Deadline Blinded

"What deadline? I didn't hear about one? I'll get it done when it's done." These types of people turn a blind eye to the reality of deadlines. They don't seem to register a sense of urgency when confronted with imposed deadlines and they certainly don't create their own. The pull of reality doesn't seem to faze them. Maybe they're great at excuses; maybe they view life from the "slow lane," maybe.... For whatever reason, they can easily ignore what most of us can't and sometimes get away with it. But not without eventual consequences.

Deadlines: Good & Bad

In general, deadlines naturally create intensity for most of us. That is, they cause adrenalin to flow as we feel the pressure of an impending "due date." But as you've seen in this article, people react differently to deadline stress. Clearly, some folks need a deadline or they endlessly delay; some people love the challenge; others buckle under the weight; and others simply deny the impact and behave as if it was not a reality that must be handled.

These various styles are neither good nor bad. It depends on the situation and on you. As an individual, you need enough self-awareness about your own style of reacting to deadlines (imposed by self or others) so that you can learn various coping strategies for compensating on your shortcomings. Your style can work for you or against you if you have self-knowledge and effective coping strategies.

What's Your Style?

Use this article to assess your personal style or typical reaction to deadlines. While we all use various approaches, we also all have a favorite or default style: a Deadline Resistor; a Deadline Welcomer; a Deadline Aficionado; or A Deadline Blinder. By recognizing and acknowledging your tendency, you can create an opportunity to gain more control over yourself. Also, try to be cognizant of whether your style changes when the deadline is self-imposed or imposed by others. This is a key distinction for many people.

I also encourage you to consciously assess in a logical manner the best way to handle future deadlines based on the circumstances of a situation. Through self-knowledge, you can limit your typical knee jerk reaction and weigh the costs and benefits of responding in various ways. The more awareness you have, the more choice you will have over your behavior. And by the way, there is no deadline for you to conduct this self-assessment!

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