



by Daniel Jarvis

The military operates in a Type A world. This age of information is a globally reaching, fast-paced environment defined by constantly changing factors contributing to complex problem sets. Modern leaders must ensure their forces stay current and get ahead of the technological and operational power curves. However, the solution is not to simply try and keep pace with the environment, but instead control our interaction with it.

It may seem natural to place [Type A personalities](#) into leadership positions given this competitive atmosphere. Type A's are aggressive, time-focused, and determined while B's are relaxed, patient, and methodical. As a junior combat arms officer, I was told repeatedly by leadership, "There are meat eaters and there are plant eaters," insinuating hard-hitting

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carnivores are the epitome of success and others are weak and incapable. When engaged in battle, those high-pressure traits are absolutely the personalities you want leading the charge - literally. The question is whether that equally correlates to effectiveness in a garrison, training, or office environment. Type A's may play to win, but Type B's enjoy the game.

In the early 20th century, German General Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord [developed a method](#) to divide officers into categories by how clever, industrious, lazy, and stupid they are. Placed into a chart, it creates a quadrant of possibilities and displays which combination of traits are best suited to which positions. Contrary to the meat-eater analogy for a combat leader, those defined as intelligent and energetic, most closely associated to Type A's, are instead better fit for staff positions. Their drive and passion for victory in a time-sensitive condition can quickly resolve the administrative, logistical, and technical necessities required to support operations. Those best suited for leadership instead fall into the intelligent and lazy category, the Type B personality. While it may appear counterintuitive to define a strong leader as lazy, the truth is those individuals are not interested in wasting effort with busy work and will choose the least restrictive path to success, saving the time and energy of their team.



The US Army’s number one priority is People. If it truly intends to put them first in deed as much as word, leaders must seek ways to protect Peoples’ most valued possession – their time. Type A’s can become so focused on completing tasks they are unaware of the burnout created amongst their team. Do you care more about sticking to bureaucratic timelines and processes or are you considering some issues may be caused by deeper concerns? Highly effective leaders first consider why a person’s performance is faltering and offers assistance as needed to improve the situation. While failures need to be accounted for and corrected, the interpersonal strength of Type B’s makes them first concerned with ensuring their people are physically, mentally, and emotionally capable of achieving success.

Once the team is capable, Type B’s are then focused on completing tasks in the most efficient and creative method possible. Anyone who has ever answered a Type B’s question with, “we have always done it that way” and experienced their passionate response understands exactly how much they loathe bureaucracy and unnecessary obstacles. The Type B leader is an expert in flexecution, the ability to use creative problem-solving and find the clearest path to an answer by executing with flexibility as new factors emerge. They are

not concerned as much with the process as they are with getting to “yes.” This requires the innate ability of refusing to stop at the first “no” and not accepting “no” from anyone who cannot say “yes.” For leaders, this means trusting and empowering others to accomplish objectives in their own legally, ethically, and morally acceptable way. Additionally, understanding it will not necessarily be the particular way the leader envisioned. If it results in achieving the objective, the Type B is happy with it no matter how you got there. This approach strikes a balance with learning and performance while facilitating leader development and organizational change.

That kind of organization is one people *want* to be a part of. This Type B relaxed, open-to-suggestion approach to problem-solving is especially important at the Field Grade level. “Iron Majors” in key developmental jobs are metaphorically spinning plates, keeping hundreds of actions moving simultaneously and giving special focus as necessary to areas in need of direct attention. They are the decision makers for all the lesser decisions within a unit, including directing logistic support, answering specified and recurring tasks, managing implied tasks, and reviewing documents for accuracy and formatting. They vet information before it reaches higher, cutting the wheat from the chaff, which creates space for the commander to make more important decisions. The Type A leader faces significant risk in this regard by expecting subordinates to maintain an extremely high operational tempo (OPTEMPO), especially for an unknown amount of time. Alternatively, the relaxed, people-based Type B explains which items are important, which are urgent, and which are both in the way prescribed by [Steven Covey's](#), *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Type B's do not just enjoy a reduced OPTEMPO, they *create* one by establishing timelines for tasks with clear and concise guidelines on expectations through communicating intent and end state.



“If everything is important [and urgent], then nothing is.” -Patrick Lencioni

Along with establishing these priorities, it’s equally important to protect the time itself, necessary for completing the work. Good leaders and team-focused managers protect white space at all costs, especially their commander’s. This is achieved through the proficient and continual effort of improving systems to do routine things routinely well. However, those systems also require constant re-evaluation to ask, “Is this really the most efficient way?” The Type B’s tendency to stay grounded, view things from a realist’s perspective, and dissatisfaction with wasting time lends itself to this. Is a recurring meeting really a discussion amongst subject matter experts and key stakeholders with a clear purpose and expected inputs and outputs or has it evolved into a monotone gathering of disgruntled representatives thinking about all the other tasks they could be completing? If a meeting can be an e-mail, make it one and give everyone that hour of their day back.

Saving time by arranging requirements into these categories and protecting the time itself has personal benefits as well as professional and organizational ones. Having a plan of

attack to finish tasks not only saves time and effort during the workday but also helps prevent work from occurring during off duty hours. This is enticing to the Type B's, noted for their relaxed attitude, by leaving work at work; an ability which becomes increasingly important as one climbs the leadership ladder. Greater responsibility means more tasks and increasingly harder and more important decisions. Heavier weighted decisions have the tendency to occupy more of our time and potentially linger on our minds for hours or days. Yet the ability to relax at home is critical to individual mental health and personal relationships. Imagine everyday walking through your front door with the same feeling at the end of a key billet after you finally turned in your government phone. It is total freedom because you have the trust and confidence you set well-defined objectives, left everyone with a clear understanding of what's expected and when, and have faith in the capability of the team moving forward.

In addition to these benefits Type B leaders bring to an organization, there are also important blind spots to recognize. Most significantly is their tendency to procrastinate. Despite the truth behind [the Stock-Sanford corollary to Parkinson's law](#), "If you wait until the last minute, it only takes a minute to do," the approach is not well-suited to leadership. Procrastination may work for putting off personal tasks like homework or yardwork, but it is severely detrimental to leading organizations where one is responsible for protecting other people's time and effort. If a leader's role is to provide the guidance and direction outlined in the previous paragraphs, it must be done at the onset of each project and the receipt of each task.

While the A and B personality type definitions conveniently sort people by their dominant traits, the ground truth is everyone is a bit of both and just lean a little in one direction over another. It is not the meat-eaters who win, it is the omnivores. Type A's have the ability to use creative Type B leadership styles and Type B's can know the moment and place which calls for Type A aggressiveness. The best kind of organizational leader is a disciplined Type B who uses their knowledge and experience to place People first by protecting their time

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and effort while accomplishing the unit's mission and goals. One who creates an established work-life balance for themselves and their family by trusting and empowering others. While they establish systems and processes to achieve success, they also believe "getting to yes" is more important than bureaucracy and accept there is more than one way to accomplish a task. Great leaders provide intent, end state, and left and right limits then refuse to micromanage the effort. Type B leadership is successful because it develops organizations people *want* to be in.

Major Daniel Jarvis is currently the Executive Officer of the 305th Military Intelligence Battalion at Fort Huachuca. He previously served as the Intelligence Center of Excellence G3 Operations Officer, USFK STO Chief, a Company Commander, and a Battalion Intelligence Officer and has deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. He holds a Master's Degree in Intelligence Studies from American Military University and a Bachelor's Degree in History from Western Kentucky University.

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