

Management

Defusing the 'Type A'

By Marlin Bree

Every corporation has at least a handful of these people: They're bright, aggressive and productive — or so they seem.

Unfortunately, for top management, these same folks are often exceedingly expensive to have around. They cause organizational disruptions and too often can't be promoted beyond a certain level. In short, they can create as many problems as they solve.

In some respects, these people share the so-called "Type A" behavior characteristics described by Drs. Meyer Friedman and Ray H. Rosenman in their widely discussed book, *Type A Behavior and Your Heart*. They are go-getters, to be sure, workers who put in maybe 50 or 60 hours a week and are plainly uncomfortable if they feel they're not "achieving." They often think on two or three levels at a time. They're also impatient and manipulative, temperamental and impersonal. Their threats and schemes are frequently counterproductive, but they persist in using them.

Often, too, they are totally unaware of the problems they cause because what they accomplish within the corporation may reinforce their behavior. At the same time, they get frustrated when they don't move ahead and get more power. The dilemma of their bosses is obvious. On the one hand, they are exceedingly valuable because of their drive and accomplishments. On the other hand, they leave so many casualties behind them that their gains are offset by the losses.

The solution for several Upper Midwest corporations — Control Data, Dayton Hudson, Brown Printing and Litton Microwave Cooking Products among them — has been the use of behavior-modification techniques to "defuse" the Type A characteristics. Thus, the corporation and the troublesome individuals can have their cake and eat it, too.

"These are valuable individuals to

their corporations," says Dr. Frederick Kiel of Kiel & Associates in Minneapolis. "What we want is a different means of getting [productive] results." Kiel is the chairman of an organization called the Center for Behavior Modification and an assistant clinical professor of health-care psychology at the University of Minnesota. He specializes in behavior-modification methods to help the corporate "problem people" go through the change process and, along the way, unlearn some of the negative behavior traits they've acquired in business.



Kiel: 'A different means . . .'

One of Kiel's tools is his Behavior Rehearsal Laboratory. The lab is a specially equipped communications room designed for a one-on-one situation: one "Type A" executive and one psychologist, who interact through electronic-communications devices. The devices — ranging from "instant-replay" television monitors to the flashing lights of a "feedback box," run by remote control — are used to help the executive learn more about himself and to help begin shaping behavior in specific areas.

The executives who work out in Kiel's lab are neither "villains" nor people who need "therapy." They are, according to Kiel, "well-functioning persons" who are intelligent, highly motivated and able to change

behavior patterns once they see the reason for change.

Kiel works with direct-shaping skills, which, he insists, participants "don't pick up in a week." Though they get quick feedback as to what's wrong and what's right, they may not incorporate what they've learned into their behavior. "They'll say, 'We got it,' and feel they don't need the practice," Kiel explains. But, in actuality, they need assistance for months to come. They need "lots of success in using new techniques" in order to see that the modification works.

A typical problem area involves the punitive nature often found in the Type A person. "In a work environment," says Kiel, "these executives think they can get others to do what they want by using a punishing style." But this technique is unproductive, says the doctor, for it creates an atmosphere of anxiety and stress, and develops "win-lose" relationships. Co-workers become hostile, and the result is a negative payoff. There is subterfuge, foot-dragging and, in some cases, sabotage.

An executive's behavior can be developed in a way that emphasizes results — getting projects done productively, effectively and on time. According to Kiel, it's a matter of defining and communicating the problem, then going to work through behavior-modification techniques to work it out with a cooperative manager.

"The laws of human nature are well-known," says Kiel. Screaming at people doesn't get the job done. "The best managers don't threaten others," he says, simply.

The "defused" Type A executive benefits as much as his company and colleagues. Having gone through a considerable amount of counseling and training, which usually includes learning deep relaxation through a biofeedback program, the individual feels less stress and greater success. Anxiety and high blood pressure become less of a threat to the individual's mental and physical health.

Such behavior-modification techniques are still fairly new in the business world, but they're obviously catching on. Kiel notes that one firm he works with finds the program valuable not only for senior management development, but as a growth tool for people still on their way up. "Companies can use it to hit the comers — people they know are going to be vice presidents in 10 years," says Kiel. ■