

Chapter 5

Packing List: What's Your Style?



Herman the German's ECC table

Herman the German lives in Rothenburg. He looks like I imagine Santa Claus would in the summer: short white hair, mustache (no beard – that's only a winter look, after all), rosy red cheeks, glowing nose and a belly that shakes like a bowl full of jelly when he laughs. You can find Herman on Wednesday evenings at his buddy Mario's restaurant, hosting

the English Conversation Club (ECC). He ambles over to his favorite table

in the corner, opens a drawer and pulls out a little banner that reads "ECC," as well as little holders for all of the flags his visiting conversationalists have brought over the years. Anyone who wants to join Herman for an evening of chatter needs only to find a seat at the table, order dinner and drinks, and start yappin'. The food is delicious and filling, and Herman is entertaining. So why does the guy do this? "To practice my English," says he. Many moons ago, he needed to learn English well enough to impress an American girl. He found that the more he conversed with English-speaking folk, the better his English became. Reading and studying flashcards weren't enough. He discovered the best way for him to learn was through conversation. It worked, by the way. His American sweetheart sits right next to him on most Wednesdays, and that evening she treated us to her homemade cookies.

When I talk about style, I'm not talking about design or décor or wardrobe. Nope, nothing that glitzy. Instead, what we're talking about is:

What's the best way for you to learn and operate?

After my clients and I determine their challenges and goals, we begin to analyze how they think, feel, react and work. Their awareness of these tendencies helps them be successful in meeting their goals.

He who knows others is learned;
He who knows himself is wise.

- Lao-tzu, *Tao te Ching*

In my past life as a teacher, I received a great deal of training on learning and thinking styles because they are critical elements in the learning cycle. I used this training to create methods of successfully teaching and delivering information to students. If information is not presented to students with methods aligned with their best learning styles, they will experience difficulty in trying to comprehend the information. Even though you're no longer in school, it's still important for you to understand your different styles because you'll understand how better to acquire information on a daily basis. You'll also be cued in to pay more attention in situations that are not addressing your favored mode of learning. Perhaps you can even learn how to access other modes of learning and have them complement your principal style.

If you understand your optimal thinking, learning and working styles, you're more likely to be successful with project completion.

Learning Styles

Those who are not in the education or psychology fields are probably unaware that dozens of learning styles' theories and models have been developed over the years. There are anywhere from seven to 15 different types of learning styles, depending on which resources you study. The science community poo-poo's many of them, saying there's no scientific proof to support the models. Yet, many educators still use basic models to design and deliver lessons that maximize the learning impact on their students.

Because this book is not intended to be a regurgitation of complex theories, I'd like to give you an overview of the three basic learning styles on which I based my lessons throughout my teaching career and which I continue to use today with clients and in my workshops. This summary will give you a starting point for understanding how you currently learn, and how you might be able to learn better.

Visual

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

You like to see things.

If it's hidden, you'll forget about it.

If there's clutter, it becomes visually overwhelming.

If something doesn't look *just right* (e.g., the arrangement of books on one shelf of an entire bookcase you're attempting to organize just doesn't look pleasing to your eye), you'll use it as an excuse for why something didn't get done.

When you take a course, you prefer a video or classroom setting over a CD or podcast.

You learn better when you see pictures or diagrams.

Sounds can distract your concentration.

What you need to know:

It will be helpful for you to map out projects on paper or on the computer so you can see the direction you need to take.

Despite our focus on digital technology, you might consider using a paper calendar so you can see the event details within a given week or month and make better decisions about planning your time.

The way things look might bog you down in the process of getting organized, so it's important to remember that functionality – how well something works – is key. You must put function before form.

You may tend to do better with color coding – folders, baskets, containers, and so on. But color coding won't work if you don't maintain this arrangement over time.

Being able to see empty space on a flat surface will be pleasing to your eyes and brain.

You'll want to take advantage of your vertical space so that you can see more, without taking up more horizontal storage space. Consider using bookcases or shelves securely mounted on a wall, rather than purchasing multiple file cabinets or tables that take up more floor space.

Working with the TV on may be a distraction because you'll want to watch what's going on.

Working with a timer in view might help you stay on track.

Picture what you want the space to look like when your organizing project is finished. As you work, you'll want to keep your vision of the space in mind to help you focus on completing your goal.



Time for a H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) which gives evidence that you might be a visual learner?

If you think you are a visual learner, what steps could you take to capitalize on this learning style while you are working on getting organized?

Auditory

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You rely on sound to think, work and get through the day. This includes thinking aloud.

___ The sight of clutter doesn't necessarily distract you.

___ You learn better when listening to a lecture, CD or podcast rather than watching a video or presentation.

___ You can sit anywhere in a classroom setting because you don't need to see the screen; you just need to be able to hear the instructor.

___ Sounds trigger memories or remind you of actions to take. For example, watching a visual countdown clock does not spur you into action, but hearing a buzzer will.

___ If there are multiple conversations or sounds, it can become overwhelming or annoying.

___ If your environment is silent, you'll use it as an excuse for why something didn't get done.

What you need to know:

It will be helpful for you to discuss your project plans with someone so that you can hear yourself think aloud.

When looking at your paper or digital calendar, talk through your various activities listed on your calendar to help you make better scheduling decisions.

You work better when there's music in the background. You'll need to determine if you can work while listening to lyrics or to strictly instrumental music. Classical music is good for studying or thinking. Upbeat music with lyrics is good for tasks that require movement.

The way your environment sounds might bog you down in the process of getting organized, so it's important to remember that sound can be adjusted by fine-tuning the volume, changing the musical selections or wearing headphones.

You may use your time more efficiently by utilizing music throughout your day – selecting certain songs or CDs as a timer.

If your focus is too much on sound, you might forget about how the look of your space will also affect your productivity. If necessary, bring in an outsider for a different perspective.

Working with the TV on or with background music may soothe you throughout the day.

As you work, you'll want to have positive auditory cues – either favorite songs or hearing verbal praise. You might wish yourself congratulations out loud or ask someone to check in with you at specific intervals and offer you praise.



Time for a H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) that gives evidence that you might be an auditory learner?

If you think you are an auditory learner, what steps could you take to capitalize on this learning style while you are working on getting organized?

Kinesthetic

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You rely on moving around or handling objects to learn, work and get through the day.

___ You have a tough time sitting still.

___ You learn better when writing, drawing or creating objects.

___ You jump at the chance to work hands-on.

___ If you were given a puzzle to solve, you could tune out sights and sounds because you're focused on the activity.

___ If your environment doesn't have objects, your hands get a little fidgety.

___ When you register for a course, you don't care whether you can see or hear a presentation, as long as you can do something with your hands.

What you need to know:

It will be helpful for you either to "act out" or build a model of your project designs so that you can "feel" the plan. If you're not into woodworking, try sketching floor plans, creating a collage, or creating a 3-D mock-up using paper, tape and/or boxes.

You work better when you're interactive with the material. You can't just point and make things happen. You need to touch things.

If you're dealing with clutter, having so much to touch at one time could be overwhelming, so handle only a few objects or papers at a time.

It's helpful if you're able to stand, dance or tap your feet as you work.

Your focus might be on holding items or engaging in an activity, so you may not hear when someone is calling you, or you may not see the little reminder

note you left yourself. You'll have to find a more physical trigger, such as a vibrating timer or phone.

When examining your paper or digital calendar, it may help to use gestures to "act out" the events in your schedule or "air write" so you can make better planning decisions.

Having a pen or keyboard at your fingertips could feed your "fix" to do something.

You'll do better working in short bursts of 15 to 30 minutes since you like to get up and move around.

Your focus is on movement, so you'll want to develop a space in which you have some objects to touch, but they should not impede your movements or concentration.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) which gives evidence that you might be a kinesthetic learner?

If you think you are a kinesthetic learner, what steps could you take to capitalize on this learning style while you are working on getting organized?

Count your check marks and fill in the blanks below:

Visual: ___ out of 7

Auditory: ___ out of 7

Kinesthetic: ___ out of 7

The learning style with the highest number is your dominant style. Most folks have a high, medium and low number or two high numbers. People who are just about even on all three numbers are able to assimilate information, learn and process in a variety of ways.

I've listed a few online learning style inventories in the Resources chapter at the back of this book. If you're really into this stuff, feel free to try them out. But please don't try to keep digging, digging, digging until you figure out precisely which single learning style best describes you. All of us will be some kind of combination.

The key is to use your survey responses to become more aware of how you digest new information, set up your living or working spaces, and work through assignments.



REST STOP

If you already knew your dominant learning style(s), that's terrific. But if this is a new discovery, isn't it exciting?! This knowledge will open up a whole new world and improve your learning.

If you need a brief break from self-discovery, I'll see you back here in a bit.

If you'd like to learn more about how you can work in a way that fits who you are, tighten your seatbelt for an excursion through more learning and personality style concepts!

Mix in Learning Style Variations with Personality Types

I've already hinted at the numerous and different learning style theories and models out there. There are almost as many personality trait models. One I came across outlined 16 different personality types. Talk about multiple personalities!

To make life easier, I'll list some of the sub-categories of learning styles and personality types that affect how you learn, work and get organized. Psychologists and neuroscientists might squirm and feel that I'm oversimplifying some highly technical concepts. It's true; I am. If you're studying medicine, you wouldn't be reading this. You're studying how to get organized, so let's look at what will help you.

Solo vs Social

Solo

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

You like doing things on your own.

You prefer webinars and reading rather than attending a class.

You have a collection of books or CDs on the subjects you'd like to study.

You're a determined do-it-yourselfer (DIY-er).

You don't like to reach out for help because you're determined to do things on your own or you don't trust the diligence of others.

What you need to know:

It's important to devise motivations and rewards to keep yourself going.

Having an accountability partner – someone you can check in with – may be beneficial to you.

If you're not successful with certain types of projects, it may be time to acknowledge that you need coaching from an expert in that field.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) which gives evidence that you might be a Solo operator?

If you think you are a Solo operator, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Social

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You like doing things with other people often.

___ You prefer classes instead of webinars or reading.

___ You don't like to work alone.

___ You love the idea of think tanks or support groups so you can share with others.

___ You might prefer to hire others rather than do something yourself.

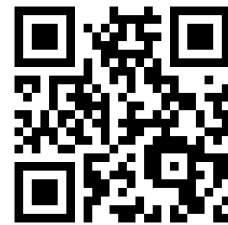
What you need to know:

It's important to devise motivations and rewards to keep yourself going.

Hiring a Certified Professional Organizer® or joining a support group focused on getting organized (like Clutter Diet) could help you immensely.

If you already belong to a group or organization related to another topic, you might consider forming a sub-group with the members who want to join your organizing journey.

While this book will help you tremendously, it's your nature to avoid doing things alone. To that end, you might unite with a group of friends to form a book club. Each of you can work on this book at your own pace, but meet periodically to discuss critical points and to support each other's efforts.



<http://bit.ly/ClutterDiet>



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) which gives evidence that you might be a Social operator?

If you think you are a Social operator, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Overall, are you Solo or Social? _____

Global vs Detailed

Global

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You come up with grand ideas, but usually not the details.

___ You can imagine how separate parts fit together to make the whole, but you're not sure what those parts are.

___ Once you understand the big picture, you can start learning the little pieces needed to fill the image.

What you need to know:

Each grand idea you create sounds or looks beautiful and so simple, but it takes a lot of details and work to make each one happen. It's important for you to study project management. Use a book that helps you develop the steps (like we will in Chapter 7), or consult with someone who can help you develop the details and steps to guide your vision to fruition.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) to give evidence that you might be Global?

If you think you are Global, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Detailed

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You start creating a list of steps before knowing what the final outcome should be.

___ You recognize similarities among individuals items, but you can't name the larger categories they would fit into.

___ Once you understand all the details, you can start learning what the big picture is supposed to look like.

What you need to know:

You have a lot of items on your to do list, but you're not quite sure of your overall vision. Without that vision, you might have difficulty with motivation. If it's tough for you to develop a vision on your own, find a workbook (like this one!) or a professional who can help you with this.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) which gives evidence that you might be Detailed?

If you think you are Detailed, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Overall, are you Global or Detailed? _____

Active vs Reflective

Active

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You jump into action without much thought.

___ You quickly like or dislike a situation.

___ You want things to be finished immediately.

What you need to know:

It's against your nature to do everything in this book, so I salute you for still being here! From our discussion of Stages of Change in Chapter 2, the stage you most likely dodge is Stage 3, Preparation. If you haven't experienced success, it's most likely because preparation is critical, and you're bypassing it.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) which gives evidence that you might be Active?

If you think you are Active, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Reflective

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You take in as much information as possible before moving into action.

___ You question whether you have the most up-to-date information.

___ You want to gather so much information that sometimes no action occurs.

What you need to know:

This book is a perfect fit for you! Thus far, it's been all about gathering, gathering, gathering. From our discussion of Stages of Change in Chapter 2, the stage you probably couldn't relate to or were fearful of is Stage 4, Action. If you haven't experienced success, it's in all likelihood because you're over-preparing and are timid about taking the next step. You'll need to remember the old adage: "It's better to try and fail than it is never to have tried at all." By the end of this book, you will embrace action!



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) that gives evidence you might be Reflective?

If you think you are Reflective, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Overall, are you Active or Reflective? _____



REST STOP

Solo operators, I know you're digging in and enjoying this introspection. Keep at it, but don't be afraid to share with an accountability partner or friend.

Social operators, I see you looking up each time someone passes by, searching for the eye contact that gives you permission to start a conversation. Definitely share, but remember to bring the focus back to learning about yourself.

Global learners, yup, I feel you getting antsy with all these details. Details, schmetails! *Can't my organizing vision just happen?* Hang in there! We'll make that vision happen by putting all these details to good use.

Detailed learners, this harks back to your good ol' school days, absorbing all the tidbits we've been discussing. But you may lose track of what the overall purpose is. If that happens, use the Table of Contents, Introduction and passport stamps at the end of each chapter to help you re-focus on the big picture.

Active folks, bless you! You are probably pulling your hair out, desperate to get your project on the road. If you need to, walk around as you read this book to experience some physical activity. And, I need you to walk with me a little while longer so we can ensure your successful completion of projects.

Reflective peeps, you are lovin' all of this thinking! Eventually, we'll be putting this thinking into action, so be prepared to move ahead with implementation. You will definitely have enough information to get started.

We have a few more styles to contemplate on our route, so let's stay on course and continue to analyze the best methods for keeping our engines purring.

Nurturer

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You want to make sure everyone around you is cared for, but you often neglect your own needs.

___ You're extremely sensitive to feelings – both yours and others'.

___ You avoid confrontation and want everyone to be happy.

What you need to know:

It will be especially important for you to apply the oxygen mask prescription I mentioned in Chapter 3. You need to take care of yourself first; otherwise you won't be able to take good care of those around you. At times you'll want to put aside organizing projects because you feel that someone else needs your help. OXYGEN MASK.

Not everyone will understand why you're trying to get organized, so you'll need to be assertive and effectively communicate your reasons for doing this in order to garner support. Your benefits analysis from Chapter 4 and the motivation components you'll develop in Chapter 6 will give you the verbiage to use at your family or office meetings.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) that gives evidence you might be a Nurturer?

If you think you are a Nurturer, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Overall, are you a Nurturer? _____

Morning vs Afternoon vs Evening Brain

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

Morning

- You annoy people because you're energetic first thing in the A.M.
- You are great at cranking out your toughest projects before noon.
- After lunch, your brain is a little fried, so you don't usually have your best ideas at this time.

Afternoon

- In the morning you tend to do mindless, routine tasks because you just don't feel like getting into anything thought-provoking yet.
- You're a bit sluggish brain-wise in the morning, but after lunch you are rockin' and rollin' on your toughest projects.
- After 5:00 P.M., fuhgettabout it!

Evening

- Mornings are evil. You barely function.
- In the afternoon you tend to do mindless, routine tasks because you just don't feel like getting into anything thought-provoking yet.
- You do your best mind work after 5:00 P.M. You come up with ideas, solve problems, and finish important projects (sometimes sneaking it home because you just weren't in the mood to do it at the office). Note: This is different from procrastination. You weren't avoiding work earlier in the day. You literally can't get your brain to function well any earlier.

What you need to know:

When people try to do their toughest thinking during a period of low brain energy, they end up faltering. It's important to get in tune with your mind and figure out the best time of day to make your decisions or handle your most mentally or emotionally challenging projects.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

What evidence can you give to show that you're a Morning, Afternoon or Evening brain?

What steps could you take to capitalize on your ideal time of day while you are working on getting organized?

Overall, do you have a Morning, Afternoon or Evening brain? _____

Marathoner vs Sprinter

Marathoner

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You can work for hours at a time on a project.

___ You are successful working at this pace and don't get burned out or injured (strained back, sore muscles, stiff neck, bruised knees, etc.).

What you need to know:

It's great to want to get organized, but you'll need to make sure that your organizing projects don't take over your life. You face the possibility of slipping into All or Nothing mode. In other words, you'll be tempted to use every waking hour to finish your project, but other parts of your life could get out of balance if you do that. You still need to have time for work, relationships, leisure time, preparing and eating healthy meals and maintaining your household. You can still work for hours at a time, just not *all* of them.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) that gives evidence you might be a Marathoner?

If you think you are a Marathoner, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Sprinter

Place checkmarks next to characteristics which describe you:

___ You can work for 15 to 30 minutes at a time on a project.

___ If you try to work for longer periods, you get burned out, injured or lose interest.

What you need to know:

To keep your attention focused and your motivation high, you'll need to schedule rewards or rest time after a sprint. Some folks sprint for 15 minutes, then rest for 15. Some will sprint multiple times in a morning, then take the afternoon off to do other things. Others will sprint sporadically throughout the day. What you don't want to do is attempt to marathon. Even if you're short on time, you'll increase the chances of burning out and not returning to your project.



Time to H.I.K.E.:

Is there anything you do (or don't do) that gives evidence you might be a Sprinter?

If you think you are a Sprinter, what steps could you take to capitalize on this style while you are working on getting organized?

Overall, are you a Marathoner or a Sprinter? _____



REST STOP

Hooray! You made it through the style exercises! How about a quick recap?

My dominant learning style is/styles are:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinesthetic

My dominant personality and work styles are:

- Solo
- Social
- Global
- Detailed
- Active
- Reflective
- Nurturer
- Non-Nurturer
- Morning Brain
- Afternoon Brain
- Evening Brain
- Marathoner
- Sprinter

Feel free to turn back to this page to help you develop your motivations in Chapter 6 and your action plan in Chapter 7. As you work through these chapters and start on your project, you might find that, similar to hairstyles and hemlines, your styles will change over time. That's fine. Just because you check it off on this page doesn't mean that you are "set" in that zone for life. The important thing is to keep in tune with your needs so that you can adjust and adapt your methods as these changes occur.

Allow me to repeat:

The important thing is to keep in tune with your needs so that you can adjust and adapt your methods as these changes occur.

Now that you've learned a little more about yourself, let's take a look at your past.



Yup, let's go on our last H.I.K.E. in this chapter:

In Chapter 2, you were asked to look at previous organizing successes. State once again what specific things you did to make that success happen.

Based on what you've learned about yourself in this chapter, *why* did those successes occur?

You need to keep doing these things!

But let's look at the other side of the coin, too, because that's equally important in the learning process.

Related to organizing, what have you tried in the past that was *unsuccessful*?

Knowing what you do now, why do you think it didn't work?

You'll need to keep this in mind as we develop your plan.

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