



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kayakers_in_Redwood_City,_California.jpg

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

One evening last week, seven of us began the new year in a wonderfully collegial, constructive gathering after work. After self-introductions by all, John Riordan led a vigorous discussion of The Four Tendencies by Gretchen Rubin. As John explained beforehand,

“By asking the one simple question, “How do I respond to expectations?” we gain a great deal of insight into ourselves and others. We all face two kinds of expectations – outer expectations (work deadlines, requests from a friend) and inner expectations (trying to make a personal change or start a new behavior). Our response to expectations determines our “Tendency.” Knowing our Tendency can help us set up situations in the ways that make it more likely that we’ll achieve our aims. We can make better decisions, meet our promises to ourselves and others, reduce stress, and engage more deeply with others. The Four Tendencies explain why we act and why we don’t act.”

See the **diagram** and 1-Page Summary at

[https://www.shortform.com/summary/four-tendencies-summary-gretchen-rubin,](https://www.shortform.com/summary/four-tendencies-summary-gretchen-rubin)

the quiz we took at <https://quiz.gretchenrubin.com/>, and other resources at <https://gretchenrubin.com/about/biography/>.

John cautioned us that these tendencies are not be-all, end-all; it's better to see them as bread crumbs or as a tool. The essence is how we respond to expectations and *move into action*; i.e., some interest in acting is required.

After explaining the upside and downside of each tendency, John shared his quiz results and used several examples from his own life to illustrate how he used this tool to come to terms with his own makeup, which has enabled him to develop strategies and habits for getting stuff done and move to action more quickly. His willingness to lead by example and be vulnerable encouraged several others – including someone who's about to begin a newly created position with 12 direct reports – to share their current challenges with the group. This stimulated discussion and made the session very rich.

Since one of John's examples involved the Rebel tendency, we spent a bit more time on it. Several things that tickled me as a Questioner, which in Rubin's framework overlaps with Rebel and Upholder, were "Rebels resist expectations, period – including their expectations of themselves!" and "How to motivate the Rebel? Carefully!" and "You can't make me do it, and neither can I!" Identity is important for working with the Rebel tendency: a key question is "Who do you want to be?." A retired participant who coaches senior people inside her former agency shared a question she uses: "What do you want your legacy to be?."

John emphasized that, whatever our tendency, we've got to stop beating ourselves up – it doesn't help. The point is not to become like everyone else; the point is to find ways to work with our tendency – back to the bread crumbs idea. Strategies for working with the tendencies, whether ours or others, include:

- Scheduling the important things (**Upholders**, who are trying to keep commitments to everybody, including themselves)
- Answering why (**Questioners**, who often have to know before they can act)
- Involving someone else (**Obligers**, who may need backup in keeping their commitments)
- Identifying the de-motivators (**Rebels**, who are resistant to doing things just because others want them to)

John's answers to our questions made us realize that there are deeper levels to this. For example, at some point we might ask ourselves, "Why are my behaviors not aligned with what I want?." John used the example of a car out of alignment; this led to a discussion of workforce alignment. Another retired participant observed that using the top half of the alignable 60% in the middle of the typical distribution to bring the bottom half along has worked for him.

Participant affiliations

ASPA National Capital Area Chapter
Business Strategy Consultants, LLC (at HHS)
Government Accountability Office, Retired
Lighthouse One LLC (USN submarine officer, Assoc. CIO etc., Retired)
Office of Management and Budget
Public Service Leadership Academy
U.S. Army

The seven of us joined from the DC Metro Area, Colorado Springs, and Virginia Beach. What a value-added session! Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,

Kitty Wooley



[Meet John Riordan](#)