

# Talking to the animals

Some people monkey about with money, others may be dolphins or owls

SIMON HOYLE



OPRAH Winfrey is a dolphin. Donald Trump is a monkey and Bill Gates is an owl. Warren Buffett is a labrador. We're all one of these animals and the type of animal we are reflects our preference for how we go about wealth management and wealth creation.

The animal classifications are the brainchild of Matt Linnert but the science behind defining each type has been tested and refined since World War II.

Linnert, a former maths teacher and financial planner, realised each of us learns in a different way, responds to information presented in a different way and has an individual preference for how to go about creating wealth.

Some people like to plug away, accumulating wealth slowly but surely, and will follow a plan to the letter. Others want only to know what the new and most interesting thing is, and to hells with the long-term strategy. Still others will follow a plan only if they understand it fully and believe it's technically sound.

It may sound a little airy-fairy, but it has some serious consequences. Linnert, who is a dolphin, says knowing your preference type is a precursor to following a financial plan effectively.

Plans often fail not because they're poor but because they're framed and communicated in a way that doesn't engage the person they're designed to help. They get bored or can't see the point and drift away. Or when the going gets tough and the plan is stress tested, they abandon it.

Linnert says his approach to preference types is built on two existing models. One is the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and the other is Keirsey Temperament Sorter. Combined,



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these tests tell us a lot about our preferences, how we make decisions and how we're likely to behave.

They describe characteristics that are innate so there's not a lot we can do to modify them, but Linnert believes that in understanding them we can accommodate them.

The Myers Briggs and Keirsey models divide us into the preference type categories; Linnert's insight was to label each category using types of animals that have readily identifiable characteristics. When he says Winfrey is a dolphin, we intuitively understand the preference type he's describing.

"There's one common factor that applies to every single person in whatever strategy they use to accumulate wealth and that is who they are," Linnert says.

"That's the common factor that sits behind the success or the lack of success of every financial plan.

"[Preference type] will dictate which parts of a strategy a person is naturally more engaged with and which parts of a strategy they will struggle to stick with.

"Some people like the idea of being on top of their cashflow, but a traditional budgeting-type strategy may not last with them. They may stick with it for six months, but that strategy won't last, whereas another person

may stick with that very comfortably. "We've coined a term for this, sustainability risk."

A financial planner can address sustainability risk by understanding the preference types of their clients. Knowing they're dealing with, say, a monkey can help a planner frame the description and objectives of a plan in terms that appeal to a client and that get the client to buy into the plan. Then they're far likelier to stick with it.

A plan for a labrador may map out essentially the same path as a plan for an owl, but the way it's communicated should be different and should accommodate the preferences of each.

We can address sustainability risk ourselves by understanding our preference type and making sure our financial planner knows what we are, too, Linnert says. His 30-question (and soon to be 40-question) preference type test can be taken on a website, [www.innergi.com.au](http://www.innergi.com.au), a business co-founded with another former financial planner, Robert Skinner, an owl.

(Skinner jokes Linnert developed his preference types approach and as a dolphin was happy to give it away; Skinner's job as an owl was to build a business model to support it.)

It costs \$27 a month to register on the Innergi website, but there's more

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- Monkeys like spontaneity and are gifted tacticians; their core needs are flexibility and tactics.
- Labradors like order and closure, and are gifted at executing a strategic plan; their core needs include security and stability.
- Owls like efficiency and possibility, and are gifted at devising strategy and building new commercial models; their core needs are competence and maximising every opportunity.
- Dolphins like harmony, and are gifted at sensing unrest and providing a layer of communication diplomacy; their core needs are possibility and purpose.

Source: [www.innergi.com.au](http://www.innergi.com.au)

to the website than just the preference type test.

Skinner says Innergi aims to provide tools for individuals to make better financial decisions, by learning more about investing and themselves.

Skinner says Innergi is independent of any product manufacturer or financial institution.

He says it's used by employers to help employees improve their financial literacy; by super funds to help fund members do likewise; and by a growing number of individuals who wish to arm themselves before they see a planner.

Linnert says if a planner or investment adviser "understands your preferences, you can hold open dialogue" about the plan that's going to help you achieve your financial goals.

He says a fascinating finding of the development of preference typing is that couples often have quite different preference types.

But they come to understand each other and can see why one responds in one way while the other responds another way. Linnert says it makes the couple's task of discussing money matters easier.

Simon Hoyle is editor of *Professional Planner* magazine and is a monkey married to a labrador.