

Stop Tank Confusion!

A Guide to an
Easy, Stress-Free
Saltwater Tank
By: Mark Callahan



TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Guide to an Easy, Stress-Free Saltwater Tank	3
Tank Confusion Starts Online	4
“What’s your Tank Personality?”	7
3 Distinct Tank Personalities	8
Know Thy Tank Personality	14
Your Tank Personality Isn’t a Life Sentence	17
After you Switch, own your new Tank Personality!	19
What’s next?	20
Be...Your Tank Personality	21
About the Author	23

Stop Tank Confusion!

A Guide to an
Easy, Stress-Free
Saltwater Tank
By: Mark Callahan

Despite the advent of the Internet and the massive amount of information about saltwater tanks being created each day, there is a *huge* problem facing your tank.

What's that problem?

It's simple:

Your tank is confused.

“What the heck is a confused tank?” is likely what you are asking.

To fully understand what a confused tank is, and how it got confused, we have to look at where all this confusion started.

Tank Confusion Starts Online

There are so many saltwater tank Internet forums today that I've lost count of them all. I bet 3-5 new ones pop up each day. More is not always better and if you look at the Internet forums today, you'll see lots of people asking lots of questions and getting lots of very different answers. For example, here's a question I see asked all the time:

Q: “I’ve just started my saltwater tank. What coral should I get?”

Answer 1: mushrooms

Answer 2: zoanthids

Answer 3: montipora

Answer 4: Xenia

Answer 5: Green Star Polyps

etc., etc.

Excited with a list of potential corals for your tank, you start researching each of these corals. You see which one looks pretty, which one fits in your budget and then rush to your local fish store to see if they have the coral in stock.

You likely buy one of each, plopping them in your tank and then see what happens. I call this approach “hoping for the best” and leads to you back online posting in the “Oh, shit! forums” - *a.k.a. the emergency forums*.

What’s the real problem with the actions above? If you bought some of the corals in the list, you’d end up kicking yourself down the road when you want to switch to hard corals because the *Xenia* would have taken over and the mushrooms would kill anything they touch.

Fan-freakin-tastic.

Why didn’t someone tell you that fact up front?

The result: *confused tank* (and a big problem as well)!

Let’s look at another example of where tank confusion starts; equipment purchases.

Q: What protein skimmer should I buy?

Answer 1: Vertex

Answer 2: Tunze

Answer 3: Bubble King

Answer 4: Deltec

Answer 5: SWC

Answer 6: Reef Octopus

etc., etc.

After researching each of the suggestions, you whittle the list down to a few that fit in your budget.

Then what?!

Maybe you try one brand and it works okay, but you find out that it is really for high-end tanks and you're just getting started. You could have saved a bunch of cash if you'd known that fact.

The really sad part is that your tank ends up with all different types of equipment you don't need.

The result; *confused tank*.

Here's an excellent example that happened to a friend of mine who I'll call "Will."

Will is a newbie saltwater tank hobbyist and his tank is just finishing cycling. He's excited and he's getting ready to stock his tank with fish, and maybe one day, coral. He read on a forum that he needs a calcium reactor so he spends several hundred dollars on one and proceeds to set it up.

Err...what?

Why would you worry about a calcium reactor when the tank has no coral in it—hence no need for a reactor?

That's like saying you need to choose the refrigerator for your new kitchen when you haven't even bought the house!

The result; *confused tank*.

Sure, you can do research online and read people's reviews and see what has worked for them, but how would you know what is right for you and your tank?

The truth is, you'll never find that answer on the Internet forums because no one is asking the question:

“What's your tank personality?”

Yes, you have a tank personality. Simply put, a tank personality is how you approach your tank. To put it another way, your tank personality gives you a context to base tank decisions.

When you know your tank personality, you can make the correct buying decision faster which leaves you with the right equipment, fish and coral for your tank. The end result...a successful tank that looks beautiful and makes you happy with zero confusion.



Not a Confused Tank

Now that you understand the concept of a tank personality and why knowing your tank personality is important, let's have a look at the tank personalities themselves.

3 Distinct Tank Personalities

TANK DABBLER

As a tank dabbler, you want your tank to look great, and you want to do the minimal amount of work necessary to have it look that way. You might even hire someone to maintain your tank due to low level of commitment to your tank.

Before you think that being a tank dabbler, or having a low level of commitment to your tank is bad, realize neither is a bad thing. As a tank dabbler, you still care about your tank and its inhabitants; you just aren't willing to spend a lot of money or effort toward it.

Tank Dabblers range from ultra-rich CEOs to a long-term saltwater tank hobbyist who enjoys his tank, but doesn't have any spare time in his day to dedicate to his tank.

The CEO doesn't have time to maintain a saltwater tank. She knows her time is worth thousands of dollars an hour, therefore, it is more worth her time to hire someone to maintain her tank for her. Does she want her tank to look great and be full of healthy fish?

Absolutely.

Is she willing to personally take the time to make it look that way?

Absolutely not.

Nothing wrong with that fact. She knows she is a tank dabbler and she's okay with that. It doesn't bother her that she can't explain saltwater tank chemistry to her friends. And honestly, her friends aren't asking about the chemistry of the tank. They are just admiring the fish in it!

The other end of the tank dabbler spectrum is the long-term hobbyist who enjoys his tank, but isn't married to it. At one point in time, he was likely a saltwater tank guru, reading all the books and magazines he could and spending hours a day on his tank. He's been there, done that and he's scaled back now, dedicating a hour or two a week to his tank. He gave up keeping corals, which is fine with him because he doesn't want to take the time to maintain them and he's clear on that fact. His fish-only with live rock (FOWLR) tank makes him happy.

These tank dabblers might have high-end equipment on their tank like the latest LED light fixture. The equipment isn't there because their tank necessarily needs it; the equipment is there because they like impressing their friends with lighting effects. The high-end equipment also comes with great customer service that eliminates the potential of an equipment failure getting in the way of the Tank Dabbler's other activities.

Tank Dabblers Do:

- Care about the health and longevity of the livestock in their tank
- Evaluate purchases on the basis of "Will this make my life easier?" or "Will this save me time working on my tank?"

Tank Dabblers Don't:

- Chase the latest equipment fad
- Spend hours on Internet forums researching topics or arguing with other hobbyists
- Keep coral



Zoanthid frag

Keep this fact in mind; being a tank dabbler doesn't exclude you from having a really nice looking tank. When you are a tank dabbler, you are just clear that you aren't willing to move heaven and earth to make your tank look great.

REEF ENTHUSIAST

The day you buy your first coral, you are instantly a reef enthusiast.

As a reef enthusiast, buying and successfully keeping corals is your new focus in life. Fish only with live rock tanks suddenly look really bare and ugly!

When you become a reef enthusiast, a new relationship with your tank begins. Your first priority becomes re-working your tank to match up with your new personality.

Those fish that you got as a tank dabbler can nip or completely eat coral, so it's time for those fish to find a new home ASAP!

Suddenly the calcium, alkalinity and magnesium levels of your tank are really important to you. Before when you were a tank dabbler, as long as everything was alive and healthy in your tank, that was fine by you and tank chemistry didn't cross your mind.

As a reef enthusiast, it's also time to UP the education! You start reading about T5, metal halide and LED lighting. Light temperature is suddenly a big concern for you. It's a priority to get your nitrates and phosphates as close to zero as possible. Adding vodka to your tank isn't a party foul, it's actually something to consider doing immediately. If your tank needs a new piece of equipment, so be it!

All these actions sound like a lot more effort to you?

Yes. And as a reef enthusiast, you are ok with that.

You're clear on this fact though:

There is a clear tank/life balance and you are diligent about keeping it in check.

Let's look at my friend Mike as an example.

Mike has one child and works a regular 40-50 hour week. He has a 200-gallon saltwater tank in his living room and part of his garage is dedicated to his other hobby; woodworking.

Mike likes keeping corals in his tank and he'll do the regular tank maintenance to keep his corals growing and looking good. Sundays are off-limits for working on the tank though, as he goes to church in the morning and watches his favorite sports team in the afternoon or works on his woodworking projects. There is a clear line in the sand for how much time, attention and money the tank gets and that line is rarely crossed.

The newest deep water acropora coral that sells for \$150/inch doesn't interest Mike because he'd like to make sure his retirement account gets properly funded every month.

Mike has one "prize" fish that he knows he spent too much money on, but hey, you gotta have some fun right?!

Looking around Mike's tank, you'd see a little bit of nuisance algae but that's okay with him because winning "Tank of the Month" on the local saltwater forum isn't a life goal.

Scanning his tank further reveals a tank controller that is seven years-old, yet is still mostly functional and doesn't need replacing with the new model...just yet. Forget high-dollar LEDs. He'd rather buy a middle of the road model and deal with sending it off for 3-4 weeks to get it repaired if it breaks.

See the balance?

As a reef enthusiast, you like your tank, but it isn't your life.

Equipment that might be slightly out of your budget is okay as long as it makes your life easier. You won't go running up the credit card to get it though.

You like the increased commitment that corals require, and there is a definite limit to what you'll do to keep those corals thriving.

Balance...in everything you do. That's the life of a reef enthusiast.

REEF JUNKIE

Yes, I said it, a *junkie*. Until you get your hourly reef tank fix, you aren't happy.

You are the true addicts of the reef-keeping world and you are damned proud of it.

You can name all the corals in your tank by their scientific name. You don't have to test your tank levels. One glance at your corals and they tell you which parameter is out of whack.



SPS Coral

Spending \$200/inch for the newest and hottest sps coral is a weekly activity for you. You scour the Internet looking for the next "hot" coral trend so that you can buy up the inventory of those corals and

start growing them out. Your retirement fund is your tank...these purchases are justified!

If I showed up on your doorstep, I'd see that half your house is dedicated to your tank. You'll have pipes running through the walls and the garage is full of aquarium equipment. Your house might even be falling down, and your wife really unhappy, but none of that matters as your tank is in perfect condition.

For you, a \$450 for a powerhead doesn't faze you a bit because all you care about is how clean and sleek it makes your tank look. \$700 for a protein skimmer... doesn't sound strange to you at all if it's the latest greatest thing out there!

If you are completely broke reef junkie, then you'll find *some* way to get new equipment. You'll take on do-it-yourself (DIY) projects that take hours (if not days) to complete because the cost is minimal, and the payoff is you get

something new for your tank.

The latest reef keeping news is hot grounds for arguments and you can back up your opinion by citing extensive research. And rest assured that hours, if not days, of research time will be spent before you make any changes to your tank.

It doesn't take years to achieve reef junkie status. You can be a reef junkie from day one. Your new tank is your baby and you don't return your friend's text messages begging you to come out to happy hour.

Just in case you aren't catching on, as a reef junkie, your tank **IS** your life. And you are really, really proud of that fact.

Know Thy Tank Personality

Until you know what your tank personality is, tank confusion is waiting just outside to creep in and take over. New equipment purchases feel like complex life decisions and you'll spend money on things that aren't needed. You'll spend way more money than you need to up front, or you'll try to cut corners and end up costing yourself headaches in the long run.

Here's a great example. You are a reef enthusiast who doesn't know you are a reef enthusiast and you are told that you should consider a media reactor to avoid algae outbreaks. You dismiss the advice because you think you can get away with just throwing some media in a bag and placing it in the corner of your sump.

The time spent placing the bag of media in the sump: *3 minutes*

The time it would take you to setup a media reactor: 30-45 minutes

Wait...I said being a reef enthusiast was about tank/life balance, what's wrong with only spending 3 minutes on your tank vs. 45 minutes?

Here's what's wrong:

Since the bag of media in the corner of your sump doesn't work as well as the media reactor, an algae outbreak occurs. Your sand bed ends up looking like a mat of red fuzzy stuff from a high school biology class and your rocks look like



Your biology teacher would be proud.

a healthy lawn of green grass that most homeowners would envy, but you hate.

Now you have a big problem on your hands that will take weeks, if not months to fully fix.

If you knew you were a reef enthusiast, you would have no problem spending 45 minutes setting up the media reactor because in exchange for your 45 minutes of effort, you could avoid the weeks of time fixing the algae outbreak.

Did setting up the media reactor cost you 45 minutes of your time?

Yes.

Is the 45 minutes worth it to avoid having to battle algae outbreaks?

YES!

Here's another example.

You are a tank dabbler and you know it. You like your tank, and there is a definite boundary for how much effort you'll put toward your tank.

One Saturday afternoon you go to the local fish store to see what's new. A flashy green mandarin catches your eye and you think to yourself, *Wow...so pretty. He'd definitely catch the eye of my guests when they come over!*

You do some quick research on your smartphone and find out that mandarins



Spotted Mandarin (*Synchiropus picturatus*)

can be very finicky eaters and often require being fed live food that you either have to raise, or purchase from the fish store every couple of days. Even mandarins that eat frozen food often need to be fed directly via feeding tool or from a feeding station.

Pretty fish? *Absolutely!*

Going home with you? *Absolutely not!*

As a tank dabbler there is no way you'd put forth the effort to care for the fish properly, so you leave it in the store. Easy decision.

When you know your tank personality, the decision process on equipment, fish and coral is easy and saves you money. Tank confusion stays away and you stay happy as a saltwater tank hobbyist.

Your Tank Personality Isn't a Life Sentence

Just because you are one tank personality now, that doesn't mean you have to be that tank personality forever.

You easily switch tank personalities and you'll switch with ease as you'll know what a change will entail and how much it will cost.



If you are a reef junkie and you switch to a tank dabbler, you'll know your corals will need to go as you aren't going to dedicate the time to them anymore. Heck you could probably sell the coral in your tank and bag a couple thousand dollars for the cruise you've been wanting to go on!

The high-end equipment on your tank will stay because it makes your life easier and even if you have a large tank, you'll keep it going because it is already set up and rolling.

Your reef junkie friends might think your tank looks bland because you sold some corals, but you don't care because now you have more time and energy to

devote to other things.

Or, you're a reef enthusiast and you want to switch to a reef junkie. You know the protein skimmer you have works okay, but not *great*. Instantly the skimmer has to go because a better skimmer will make your tank look better. Better looking tank = more bragging rights!

Now that you want to be a reef junkie, your collection of brown soft corals suddenly looks horrible to you and want to you replace them with colorful hard corals. (Inset picture of setosa.jpg) Yes, the hard corals cost more, and need more attention, but that's okay, you are a reef junkie now!

Before you get all excited and change your tank personality, there are three crucial questions to ask yourself:

1. "Am I willing to increase/decrease the amount of time I spend on my tank?"
2. "Am I okay selling that coral or fish because it won't fit in my tank personality anymore?"
3. "Is the increased investment okay with me if I change my tank personality?"

If the answer is "yes" to all 3 of these questions, you're ready to change your tank personality.

Keep in mind that if you change your tank personality, life won't be the same on the other side. You'll have to put in more time and money into your tank. Or if

you are scaling back and moving from a reef junkie to a tank dabbler, your high end corals will lose some of their color or stop growing as fast, but these trade offs will be worth it for the time and money you'll save.

There is a cost with changing your tank personality, and you can decide if the cost is worth it for you because you'll know exactly what a change will entail.

If you didn't know your tank personality, then you'll do drastic things like sell off your tank because you think if you can't be 100% dedicated to your tank, then that's bad and says something about your moral character. Clearly you can see such an idea is crazy nonsense.

After you Switch, own your new Tank Personality!

Switching tank personalities isn't a bad thing and you don't have to hide out because you made a switch. Be loud and proud that you are now a reef junkie and you are looking for high-end corals. Or, start selling the equipment that kept coral alive because as a tank dabbler, you don't need it anymore. Go spend the money on something else! Get that predator tank up and running that you've always wanted or go on vacation without worrying if the corals will be okay while you are gone!



Sell the corals, book the cruise!

The past is the *past*, you have the future ahead of you now with your new tank personality. Certainly don't let someone talk down to you because you switched tank personalities. It was your decision, not theirs. They can have their tank personality and you can have yours...and

still be friends by the way!

What's Next?

Your next step is to move forward making your tank fit 100% the personality you have chosen. If you want to change your tank's personality, that's great! Do it and own your new personality! Just don't be bipolar and switch tank personalities frequently. You'll only confuse your tank and yourself. Choose a tank personality and stick with it.

If you are a tank dabbler, start spending your time looking for really colorful fish NOT corals that require costly, time-consuming equipment.

Likewise, if you are a reef enthusiast, eliminate the fish that are not reef safe. That Clown Trigger fish that was suitable as tank dabbler; it should go.

Ditto for the Emperor Angelfish that will likely decimate any coral or anemone you put in the tank.



Clown Triggerfish (*Balistoides conspicillum*)

Reef Junkies, start owning your addiction! Let your buddies know that bringing you beer on a Friday night is okay, but frags of coral would be better. Schedule in an hour a day to research the latest topics such as LED fixtures and DC pump driven skimmers. If you have any piece of equipment that isn't top of the line or close to it, sell it and upgrade. It is time you have the best.

Be...Your Tank Personality

Now that you've figured out your tank personality, you have access to making quick, informed decisions about your tank that were not possible before.

The single best thing you can do with your tank personality is to *become* that tank personality.

Start basing your decisions about equipment or fish by asking the question, "Does it fit my tank personality?"

Likewise, when you get advice from people on online forums, ask yourself, "What tank personality is this person and does this advice fit my personality?"

Your tank personality is really a way of life for you and your tank and as long as you stick to your personality, the saltwater aquarium hobby is easy, enjoyable and affordable.

This report is a whole new way of looking at keeping a saltwater tank and I don't expect you to get all you need from it. It's just a framework to get started. There is a lot more to saltwater fish keeping than what is in these pages, which is why mrsaltwatertank.com is stocked full of information so that you can be successful with your tank. I've even got a guide on [how to set up your first saltwater tank](#) if you are new to the hobby.

You can also check out my show, [Mr. Saltwater Tank TV](#), where I interview tank owners of varying tank personalities and I show you great shortcuts that will save you time and money.

Lastly, don't go it alone. I'd like to hear your feedback on the report and how your tank is going. Feel free to share the website with your saltwater buddies so that they understand what the heck you are talking about when you mention

your tank personality. Click here to [tweet it](#)/[facebook it](#) with them.

Go get your hands wet,

Mark Callahan, “Mr. Saltwater Tank”

www.mrsaltwatertank.com

Twitter: [@mrsaltwatertank](#)

Facebook: facebook.com/mrsaltwatertank

About the author



Mark also is the creator of mrsaltwatertank.com and star of [Mr. Saltwater Tank TV](#) a web-based TV show that not only entertains audiences, but educates them as well.

Since starting Mr. Saltwater Tank TV in 2010, Mark has created over 260 Mr. Saltwater Tank TV episodes resulting in over 5,750,000 views worldwide. The show has attracted 20,000+ YouTube subscribers and 11,000 + fans on [Facebook](#).

In addition to Mr. Saltwater Tank TV, Mark has authored and co-authored five books on various topics including [The No-Nonsense Guide to Setting Up A Saltwater Tank Volume One](#) and [Volume Two](#), [The Ultimate Guide to Saltwater Tank Cruise Control](#), [The No-Nonsense Guide to Preventing and Curing Nuisance Algae Outbreaks](#), and [The No-Nonsense Guide to Saltwater Fish Diseases, Treatments and Quarantine](#).

His writing also includes 5 authored or co-authored articles for international magazines such as *Tropical Fish Hobbyist* and *Marine Habitat Magazine*. Public appearances include speaking at major fish trade shows – Marine Aquarium Conference of North America (MACNA), Marine Aquarium Expo (MAX) and the Seattle Marine Aquarium Expo (SeaMAX). When he isn't traveling or working, Mark maintains a 375-gallon mixed reef tank and spends time with his wife, 3 yr. old son and his pug named Bart.