

Once More With Feeling!



EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT
THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Kaye Cleave

NOTES

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With Feeling*

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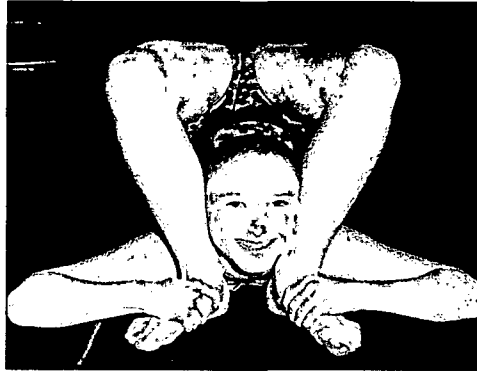
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*To reach your full potential it is
necessary to untangle your past*

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Contents

	Page
INTRODUCTION	ix
Chapter 1	
I Just Can't Help Myself:	
UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS	1
* suppressing feelings	
* fear of feelings	
* feelings and our physical health	
Chapter 2	
They're Driving Me Crazy:	
MANAGING EMOTIONS	23
* what is emotional intelligence?	
* techniques for managing feelings	
* feelings in the workplace	
Chapter 3	
I Can't Cope With This:	
HANDLING DIFFICULT EMOTIONS	43
* managing anger	
* managing fear	
* critical incident debriefing	
Chapter 4	
That's Just How I Am:	
IDENTIFYING BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS ...	63
* what are behaviour patterns?	
* separating people from their patterns	
* what pushes your buttons?	

Chapter 5

I Wish I Hadn't Blown My Top: EMOTIONS IN COMMUNICATION	81
* creative conflicts	
* communication skills	
* peer support-debriefing sessions	

Chapter 6

Someone Tell Me What's Going On Here: EMOTIONS AND THE CHANGING WORKPLACE	103
* new ways of thinking	
* the changing shape of work	
* feelings about change	

Chapter 7

I Can't Have Fun At Work Anymore: VALUES AND EMOTIONS AT WORK	123
* confusion around gender roles	
* changes in language	
* work etiquette	

A FINAL WORD	145
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Introduction

The costs of emotional mis-management

Colin has been with the same government department for over 20 years. He has seen many changes in that time. He believes morale has never been lower - there are rumours of further cut backs, retrenchments and hidden agendas. People are being asked to do more, with less resources.

Anita and Paul own a delicatessen. The pressure of being self employed is taking a toll on their marriage. Anita is concerned about her eldest son who is getting into trouble at school and her youngest child who has chronic asthma. Paul is often exhausted and snappy. He is worried about their finances and feels annoyed Anita isn't doing more in the shop.

Jeremy works at a fast food outlet. He is a confident young man and liked by the customers. Bob is offended by Jeremy's earrings and what he believes to be his overconfident, know-it-all attitude. Bob's hostility towards Jeremy is affecting the whole team.

Andrew and Pam are supposed to work together but they do as little as possible with each other. Neither understands the other's behaviour – Pam withdraws and goes quiet under stress while Andrew becomes loud and dogmatic. They don't feel able to talk about their working relationship.

Do you identify with any of these situations? In each one, people's feelings are having a negative effect. Even though workplaces have always been considered as places for rational thinking only, we see evidence everyday that this is not so.

Productivity is frequently lost through the emotional storms that sweep through our workplaces. And every day, people who feel upset, angry or depressed infect others with their negativity.



There are three main benefits to learning emotional management

1. Managing your feelings enables you to *choose* how you respond to any situation, rather than just reacting. It puts you in the driver's seat instead of being driven by how you feel.
2. Managing your feelings enables you to think more intelligently and creatively and communicate more successfully because your feelings and your thinking are intricately linked – each has an impact on the other.
3. Managing your feelings helps you to stay healthy – it teaches you how to express feelings safely and appropriately. If you suppress your feelings you increase your stress and your vulnerability to stress-related illnesses.

This book stems from the work I do as a *Professional Speaker* and *Workshop Leader*. The case studies are all based on actual events but I have changed names to respect the privacy of the people and the organisations concerned. In my writing, I sometimes use the word emotions and sometimes the word feelings to mean the same thing.

When I talk about work, I usually cite case studies from workplaces employing paid workers. But work is not just what we're paid for, or what happens outside the home, and my observations about emotions and communication apply to work wherever it happens. **Therefore this book is for everyone.**

Once More With Feeling is written to stimulate your thinking. It does not pretend to provide all the answers or address all there is to know about the complex subject of emotional management. What this book will do for you is provide you with some useful strategies for managing your emotions and for communicating successfully. I believe this book is timely – given the way our working lives are changing. **Learning emotional management has never been more important than it is today.**



I Just Can't Help Myself

—
UNDERSTANDING FEELINGS

Learning to feel your feelings and manage them effectively is an essential skill for everyone.

The emotional part of us is very special. It is our source of fun, laughter and joy as well as fear, anger and sadness. It's what gives colour and shade to our lives. Having the potential to experience the whole range of feelings is what makes us fully human and alive.

Feelings are central to life – expressing feelings is a natural part of being human. Just think of all the mixed emotions that happen when we feel attracted to someone. Not only does our body undergo many physical changes, including excitement and increased energy, but falling in love can be an experience of profound joys and sorrows.



Although opinions differ, there are probably five primary feelings that human beings experience – **anger, sadness, joy, fear, and love**. Any other feelings, such as depression, excitement, embarrassment, confidence, disgust, exhaustion, jealousy, loneliness, suspicion, guilt, anxiety or boredom are either a mixture of one or more of the core feelings or a response to them. For example, depression is understood to be the result of long suppressed anger while excitement is a mixture of fear and joy.

We express our feelings in many ways. For example, if we feel sad and upset we often cry and sob and even wail with deep grief. Feeling happy usually brings a smile to our faces and we may laugh, although deep happiness may also cause us to cry. We laugh too when we feel embarrassed or sometimes when we feel nervous or annoyed. When we're frightened our body starts to tremble and sweat which may also happen when we feel angry. If we feel furious at someone or something we often want to yell and scream and we may even feel a strong urge to hit out.



We can also express our feelings at a different level by talking or writing about them or through movement and drama.

Most of us are beginners when it comes to understanding how our emotions work. We're either unable to feel much at all because we've disconnected from our feelings, or we feel so many accumulated feelings that we're sometimes overwhelmed by them. Why is this?

SUPPRESSING FEELINGS

One reason is that we rarely learn the art of managing feelings. During our formative years, our natural ability to express our feelings is choked off in various ways. As babies, dummies, bottles or food are often pushed into our mouth to stop us from crying, even though the reason we are crying may have nothing to do with hunger.

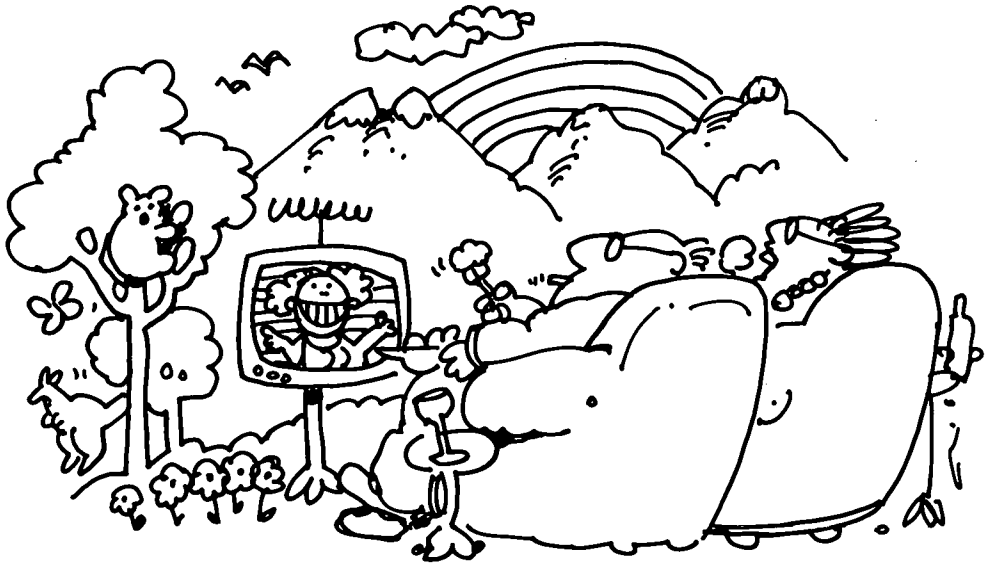


Our parents, the school, the church and society generally all play various roles in teaching us to bring our feelings under control from an early age. We may be mocked, punished, threatened or talked out of our feelings. This is all seen as an essential part of the socialisation process.

By the time we reach puberty, some of us feel a lot of pressure to be cool and not to display any emotion at all, including excitement and real happiness. Drugs are attractive at this time because they help young people to escape from the uncomfortable feelings of disillusionment, despair and hopelessness. **The availability of drugs has now become a part of young people's culture.**

Suppressing feelings takes a lot of effort so we're sometimes driven to seek the help of aids such as smoking, drinking, overeating, and various drugs. These all help us to "numb out" and escape from how we currently feel. Other activities like

compulsive shopping and gambling can also distract us from unpleasant feelings. Although these are acceptable forms of relaxation, if used regularly they can create problems.



Working excessively is another method of escaping from painful feelings. Hard work however is generally viewed in a positive light and usually only becomes a problem when we become stressed, someone close to us complains, or when we have extended periods off from work. If work has been an escape we may then be overwhelmed by uncomfortable and unresolved feelings.

Dennis had been in the same job for over twenty-five years. When he became ill he was unable to work for several months leaving him with time on his hands.

He was swamped by unresolved feelings from the past – regrets about his failed marriage, sadness because he hardly knew his adult children and a deep grief about the death of his parents, particularly his father. He wished he had told his father how much he loved him before he died. He felt lonely and defeated. Much of his life seemed futile.

It was only when Dennis had time off, without the distraction of work, that many unresolved feelings surfaced. It's even possible that the suppressed feelings contributed to his stress and eventual illness.

We not only learn to suppress uncomfortable feelings such as anger, fear and grief, but we often learn to hide pleasant feelings, such as love and passion. Our embarrassment often prevents us from revealing just how much we care about others. This limits the quality of our relationships and hinders any real closeness, which in turn can increase our sense of isolation and disconnectedness from others.

Even though we can suppress our feelings and push them into our subconscious they still affect our thoughts and our actions. Over time we will accumulate a baggage of unresolved feelings.



Suppressed feelings can either leak out as sarcasm or burst out inappropriately and attack an unsuspecting victim. Either way communication is damaged.

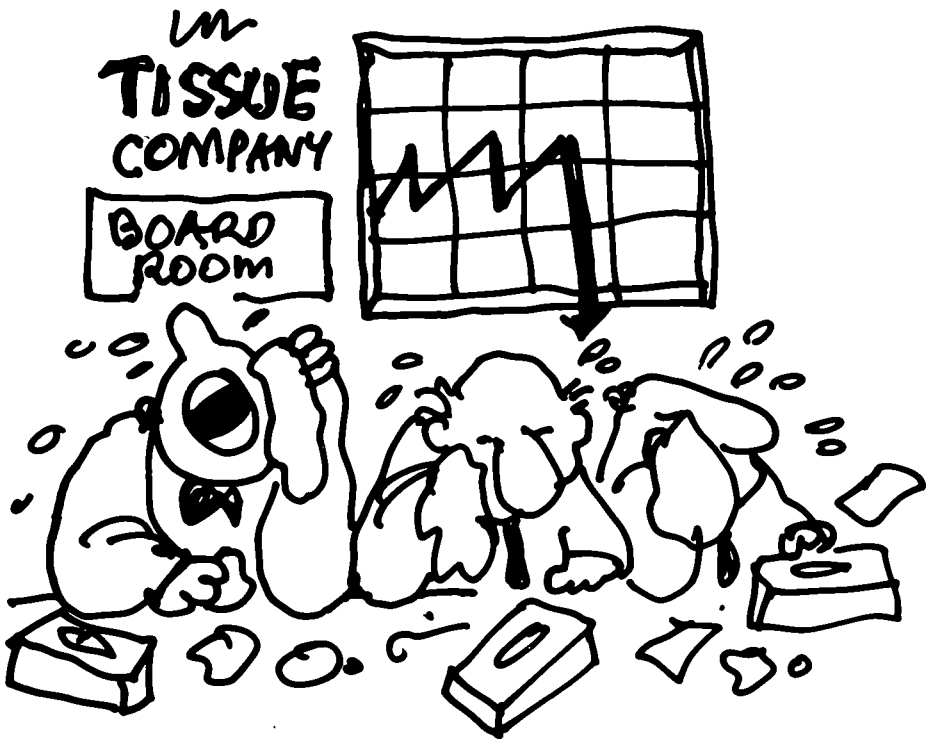
Elisabeth worked in a large council library. She was a very tidy and fastidious worker. Her pet hate was a dirty kitchen sink. Over a period of several months she built up enormous resentment because the kitchen was always left in a mess. No matter how many hints she dropped or signs she put up in the kitchen few people ever bothered to wash their cups or do any of the general tidying up. Because she couldn't stand the mess she'd always be the one to clean up. One day when she saw Fred come in and deposit his dirty cup in the sink Elisabeth let fly. She was furious and dumped months of accumulated resentment on Fred.



There is a mistaken belief that we can suppress our feelings, forget about them and they will go away. This is not true. Suppressed feelings have a lasting impact on our thoughts and our behaviour.

FEAR OF FEELINGS

There are strong cultural attitudes against the expression of feelings in most public places, including the workplace. This is especially true of feelings that are viewed negatively – like fear, anger and sadness. Displays of feelings are usually considered inappropriate, weak or childish and are often referred to as *losing control*.



We all live with the possibility or fear of being labelled crazy, weird or mentally unstable if we show that we feel too strongly about anything.

Our “civilized” society’s model of an emotionally healthy human being is someone who is always in control. Even in mourning, although we can understand the emotional display of grief, we admire those who show composure.

Not only is it considered highly inappropriate to show or express strong feelings in public, but whenever we do witness a display of emotion we generally feel extremely embarrassed, uncomfortable, inadequate and at a complete loss as to what to do. What we usually do is comfort the distressed person and help her or him to “pull themselves together”. We may offer drugs, “*Have a scotch*”, or threats to children “*If you keep that up I’ll give you something to cry about*”. We placate, “*I’m sure it will turn out OK*”, or suggest: “*Why don’t you forget all about it, it could have been worse*”!

Yet evidence increasingly shows that if we don’t deal with our feelings at the time they are felt or soon after, they can have an adverse effect on us both physically and mentally.

Gender conditioning

Both women and men are capable of feeling and expressing the full range of human emotions. The expectation, though, that we should suppress emotions and function solely by reason rests most heavily on men. The only emotions that are considered appropriate for men to express are riotous laughter, anger, aggression or rage. **Consequently men may display anger when they are really feeling frightened, unhappy or confused.**

On the other hand it is acceptable for women to cry, look frightened, and appear vulnerable when appropriate. They can also laugh, although not too raucously, but they mustn't show anger. **Consequently some women cry and even smile when they're really feeling angry.**

In my **Gender Awareness** workshops participants are asked to write a list of messages they were taught when growing up about the correct behaviour for their sex. Although the lists vary, men usually include,

I must be strong and tough, be the breadwinner, be the boss, not cry, not play with dolls, be prepared to fight and stand up for myself, not ask for support and not wear pink!

And to ensure that boys become "real" men they're frequently told,

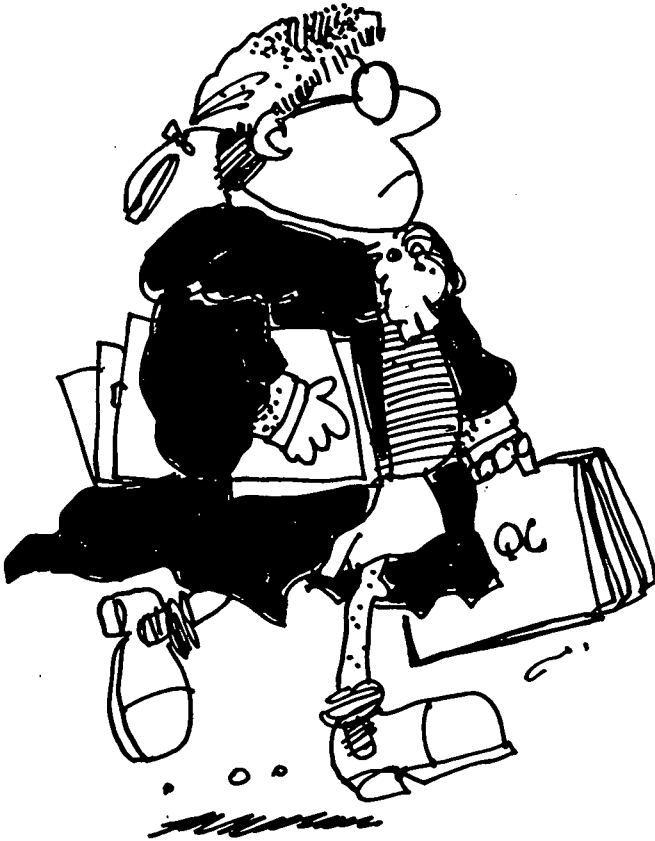
"Stop crying, you're a big boy now". "That didn't hurt much, it's only a little cut". "You must take it like a man" or "Don't be a sissy, it's nothing to be frightened about!"

Expressions of caring are gradually withdrawn, or rejected by boys as they grow older. They fear that if they speak affectionately or show too much gentleness, their peers will think them soft or even gay. Young males are often led to believe that toughness is the quality they should aim for in life. **By the time they reach manhood, sex is often the only appropriate way to express and receive any tenderness.**

Fortunately these attitudes about what makes a "real" man are slowly changing. For example, expressing vulnerable emotions such as crying is no longer seen as something only women should do. This change is helped by the growing amount of information which reveals a direct link between gender conditioning and the

suppression of feelings. Statistics show that men die earlier than women, men are more prone to heart attacks and high blood pressure, men are far more likely than women to be the drivers in fatal car accidents, and Australia has one of the highest youth male suicide rates in the world.

Such evidence shows that this male conditioning is a **major** threat to men's health and well being. (Of course there is no single view of masculinity – for example, a road worker would probably have a very different perception of what it means to be a man than a lawyer would.)



The gender messages women list in workshops usually include the words or phrases:

must be good, quiet, neat and clean, look after other people's feelings, be emotional, don't be loud, be the carer and nurturer, and be pretty and slim!

Women are more likely to be adversely judged by the **absence** of emotional expression. The fact that Lindy Chamberlain was not seen crying and overcome with grief, like any “good” mother, may have contributed to the common perception that she was guilty, and led to the harsh treatment she received. Certainly a woman in authority who is not emotional is often considered hard and may be referred to as *having balls*, implying that she can't be a “real” woman.

In the workplace there are many barriers a woman must overcome as she strives to reach positions in the top echelons of organisations. Some are structural barriers while others are the negative beliefs women have about themselves, and about other women. Another major hurdle is the limiting beliefs some men have about women. All these barriers need to be confronted as women strive to have a say and exert influence.

As a child Penny received a lot of positive attention for looking after her younger brothers and sisters. Her identity as a “good” woman is strongly connected to caring. When Penny began a personal development course she identified the internal battle she has between caring about others and caring for herself and the repercussions that being a caring woman has had on her personal life and her career. Recently she held back from going for a promotion because another colleague badly wanted it.

Penny's major hurdle is her belief about herself. Although she doesn't want to stop being thoughtful and kind she

realises that she must unravel this message if she wants to reach her career goals. It may even mean that at times she will risk not thinking about others. The very thought of this floods Penny with feelings of anxiety!

We take in countless messages about the ways in which “proper” men or “proper” women are expected to behave which then affect our perception of ourselves and others.

Simon was recently retrenched as a supervisor from the small engineering firm he'd been employed with for the past nine years. He was devastated. He struggled with his worth as a man every day as he did home duties while his wife Brenda went out to work. A message he strongly internalised growing up was that men are the providers for the household. He also learnt that men don't ask for help so he was unable to talk about his feelings. “Real men” solve their own problems.

These different messages we receive about what it means to be a “proper” woman or man include different perceptions about emotions. Men are generally uncomfortable and uncertain as to how they should react when women show any emotion, especially in the workplace. They often consider displays of feelings as being too emotional or label it as *that time of the month*. On the other hand women may feel frustrated with “emotionless” men who appear to be cold and ruthless. But although men may not express their emotions in the same ways as women, it's wrong to assume they don't have any feelings. The fact that they get stressed, fight and compete with each other are indications that feelings are present!

The expectation that men should stay in control of their feelings affects both women's and men's behaviour at work. A male friend believes that even the clothing men wear helps them stay self-contained. He's convinced the real purpose of neck-ties is to stop feelings from escaping!



The television shows we watch, the advertisements and the movies we see, as well as the actions and words of the people around us, all have an influence on how we behave as women and men.

I grew up in the 50's where the movies had heroes and heroines like Ingrid Bergman and Clark Gable. In these movies when a crisis occurred the women always either fainted, cried, stopped thinking and panicked or did all of the above and completely fell apart. **Men, meanwhile, went into action.** They comforted and

even carried the heroine if she had fainted, at the same time warding off all evil and staying strong, calm and rational, without a hint of feeling, except maybe anger toward the villain. **Real men always put women and children first and if necessary went down with the ship!**



Fortunately, this sex-stereotyping, is slowly changing. Today, although we still have the stiff upper-lipped heroes like James Bond and Sylvester Stallone who stay in control by means of superior strength, weapons, or daring, there are other male heroes who risk being vulnerable. Some “macho” men are even mocked for their bravado. And there are now more women who are portrayed as active and equal partners alongside men.

Healthy challenging of the gender messages allows us all to express the full range of human emotions, instead of only half of them.

The natural recovery process

It's important to understand the critical role our emotions play for us as whole human beings. When we are hurt, either physically or emotionally, the natural recovery process in our bodies involves releasing the feelings that have arisen. This release of feelings is separate from the hurtful incident itself. So, for example, when we receive a fright from a car accident, the automatic shaking of the body when we realise we've survived, is separate from the fear felt at the moment of the accident. Shaking is the body's way of processing and releasing the tension that has resulted from a fright. **It is an important recovery mechanism that we all share as humans.**

Most of us lack this information about the recovery process. **We confuse the releasing of the emotions with the pain of the incident itself.** This confusion, along with our general unease about revealing our feelings, makes us try to stop the natural recovery process. However a consequence of not expressing our feelings after a hurtful incident is that the feelings are suppressed and stored, and they can then influence the way we think and behave in future similar situations.

Peter will never forget his fourth year of school because it was a particularly unhappy year. It was just before his parents discovered that his eyesight was poor and he needed glasses. He clearly remembers the time he was made to stand up in front of the class and read from the blackboard. Because of his bad eyesight he was unable to do this and was completely humiliated. Consequently,

even though it was many years ago, Peter still finds it painfully difficult to present any information at staff meetings in front of the group. The feelings of humiliation are still there.

FEELINGS AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Expressing our feelings is necessary for the harmony of our whole system. It's unique to humans. No other creature, for example, has developed the ability to cry emotional tears. Biochemist, Dr William Fry, author of *Crying – The Mystery of Tears* suggests, “*crying is the only excretory process we have that animals don't. Perhaps there is a reason for it*”.

Recent research has discovered that the composition of tears from peeling onions is different than the composition of tears expressing grief, the latter containing neuropeptides which, if held in, weaken the immune system of the body. We're all familiar with the saying, “**go ahead and have a good cry, you'll feel much better**”. Well it seems it's true!

Laughter plays a big part in keeping us healthy too. It relaxes us and boosts the strength of the immune system by releasing endorphins, our body's natural “happy” drug. One study carried out with seriously ill patients had them viewing comedy videos for several hours each day as part of their treatment. It was found that these patients recovered significantly faster than patients who didn't have a laugh every day. It seems that as a general rule, people who laugh more become sick less often, giving weight to the saying that “**laughter is the best medicine**”.

Managing stress

Body tension resulting from suppressing feelings is a common problem and a major cause of chronic stress. Although we need a certain amount of stress, which is the get up and go mechanism,

the *flight or fight* response, carrying pent-up emotions can put our body in overload. The automatic reaction that triggers the release of adrenalin and other stress-related hormones and chemicals throughout the body is on full and can cause us to burn-out. Chronic stress weakens our immune system and makes us susceptible to major and minor illnesses, as well as psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, or panic attacks.

We can manage our stress levels with a variety of techniques, including deep relaxation such as you get from meditation. Any form of exercise will reduce stress by working off the excess adrenalin released. Crying also cleanses the stress chemicals from the blood, but at work, humour is one of the best and the most acceptable stress release techniques.

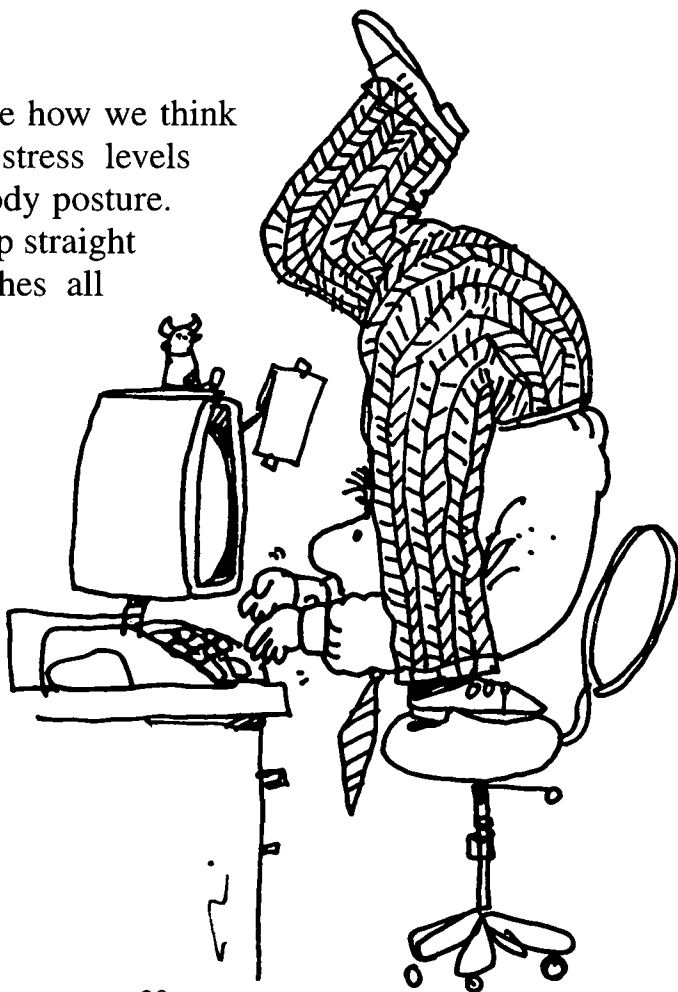
In professions such as police and ambulance work, I'm told the jokes in their lunch rooms are very "sick". This is an essential way that these workers deal with the broken bodies and human damage that they see every day. Without humour it's questionable how long anyone could last in such a job.



If you're regularly coming home from work with a neck-ache, a sore back, headache or stomach-ache or just feeling tired and exhausted, your body is clearly telling you something. We now know that when feelings are not released they are stored as tension in certain parts of the body.

An important step in staying healthy and managing our emotions is learning to identify where the feelings are stored as tension in the body.

We can often change how we think and feel, and lower stress levels just by altering our body posture. Standing tall, sitting up straight or doing some stretches all help. Take a moment now to stretch and yawn and notice any changes that occur in your body.



Wellness is more than the absence of disease. It's a real vitality, a sense of purpose. It's a mental, emotional, physical and spiritual balance. Neglect of our feelings unbalances other aspects of our lives. Illnesses such as high blood pressure, ulcers, and some heart disease often have a direct connection with our emotional state. There are also indirect effects of not dealing with our emotions, like dependency on drugs, a lack of concentration, accidents and depression.

There are clearly benefits for us all in learning to manage our emotions well. Such management will also have enormous payoffs for workplaces including helping to reduce or eliminate burnout, conflicts, poor interpersonal relationships and absenteeism.

Summary

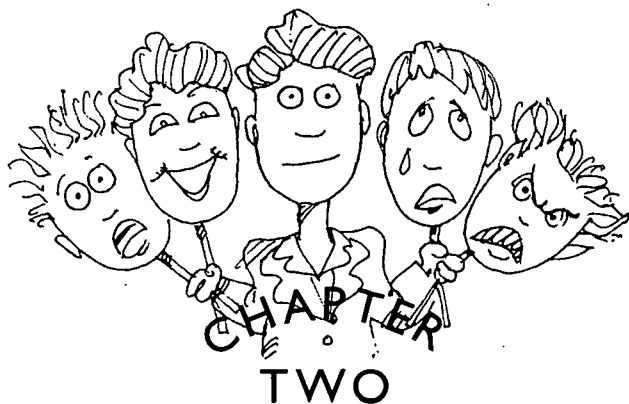
- Having a range of feelings and expressing them is a natural part of being human.
- Mis-information and fear often result in suppressing feelings which has an effect on our behaviour and on our physical health.
- Women and men learn different messages about what feelings are appropriate for their gender.
- Learning to identify where feelings are stored as tension in the body is an important stress management technique.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING

Davis, Martha Ph.D., Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, M.S.W., Matthew McKay, Ph.D., *The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook* (USA: New Harbinger Pub., 1988)

Frey, William H, with Muriel Langseth, *Crying: The Mystery of Tears* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985)

Kaufman, Michael, *Cracking the Armour-Power, Pain and the Lives of Men* (Canada: Penguin Books, 1993)



They're Driving Me Crazy

MANAGING EMOTIONS

We can feel our feelings without acting on them. Feelings do eventually pass – what we do with them is what counts

Managing how we feel

Joe owned an auto-workshop. He employed six mechanics and an office worker, Raelene. One week Joe had several unpleasant interactions with a dissatisfied customer who accused Joe of shoddy work. Joe was furious with his mechanics and came into the office ranting and raving. He started to yell at Raelene for her unorganised desk and files.

Raelene was very upset. Her mother had recently been diagnosed with cancer and was in hospital. Raelene was exhausted visiting her every evening, and keeping her household running as well as working full-time. She had thought about taking time off work but was unsure about asking when everyone seemed to be under so much pressure.

Joe's misdirected anger was the last straw. Raelene screamed back at him, started sobbing and told him what an unfair boss he was and took off home. Joe, having vented his anger, was left surprised and bewildered by Raelene's outburst. Unfortunately Raelene decided not to return to work. Joe lost a good worker and ended up with more problems than he started with.



Learning to live with our feelings and manage them, instead of allowing them to manage us, has many advantages. By appropriately expressing our feelings we stop them from building up and turning into excess baggage. Management of our emotions also allows us to think more clearly and to choose our responses instead of just blindly reacting.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Research is continually uncovering information about how the mind works. It is now recognised that emotions and intelligence are intimately connected – not a contradiction in terms as was once widely believed. In a sense we have two brains, the rational and the emotional. How well we succeed in life is determined by both. People who only have academic intelligence often lack an ability to cope successfully with life's turmoil. Emotional intelligence, a term coined by Daniel Goleman in his book of the same name, is another kind of intelligence, which is at least equally, and many would believe, more important.

Emotional intelligence covers five main areas: understanding emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, that is, using emotions to help reach a goal, recognising emotions in others and handling relationships. **Evidence suggests that people who are emotionally intelligent manage their lives better. They have better relationships, are more successful at work and are generally more content in their lives.**

Permission to feel

Emotionally intelligent people know how to live with their emotions – just being with their feelings. We learn all sorts of ways to avoid unpleasant feelings, but as we know, this doesn't

mean that they go away – we only learn not to feel them. Rarely are we told when we feel unhappy, “*let yourself feel sad for a while – it’s just a feeling*”. Although Joe felt angry with his mechanics he didn’t have to act on his anger by taking it out on Raelene.

**We can feel our feelings without acting on them.
Feelings do eventually pass – what we do with them
is what counts.**

TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING OUR FEELINGS

In learning to manage his feelings Joe needs to first notice his anger surfacing. He can then choose what to do next. He can

1. **release** his feelings appropriately and safely
2. put his **attention off** his feelings
3. **alter** his perspective

Each of the above techniques is useful and can become a regular part of our emotional management. Whatever option Joe chooses it will give him a better outcome than just reacting because he won’t be at the mercy of his emotions. Let’s look at each option separately.

1. Releasing our Feelings Appropriately and Safely

We release our feelings by expressing them, talking about them or writing them down. As we’ve seen, if we never release our feelings they can cause us trouble.

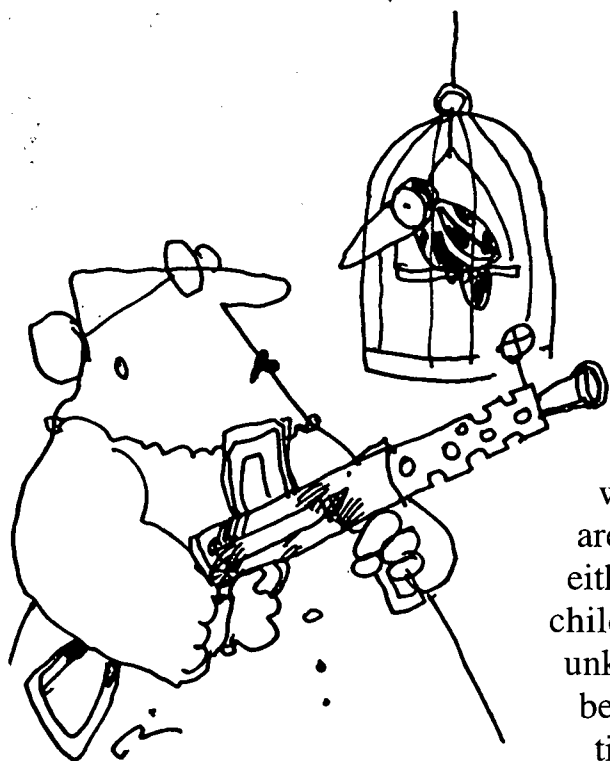
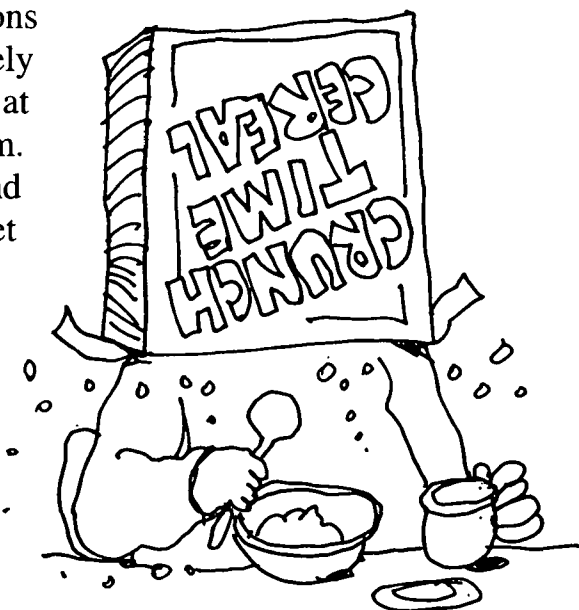
Expressing our feelings

We can express our feelings in various ways, such as crying, yelling, laughing and shaking. It is difficult however to create places and methods that allow us to do so safely, especially at work. Maybe we need to provide rooms to allow people to get things off their chest. The walls could all be soundproof and a punching bag could hang from the ceiling. Anyone would be able to pop in when they felt the urge to “emote”, perhaps during their lunch break or after a hard day’s work!



Of course it's not always appropriate or possible to release our feelings at the time we're feeling them. To start shaking or crying in a board meeting is not a good idea. Nor is it useful to dump ten years worth of anger on a colleague when we've just had a run in with them and feel fed up.

People who splat their emotions all over the place indiscriminately are not managing their feelings at all. Rather, they're driven by them. Their life feels out of control and chaotic because anything can set them off. Common occurrences like an empty cereal box at breakfast, their car breaking down or a fight with a spouse can trigger off negative feelings which will affect every other interaction that follows. Their whole day **feels** ruined.



Given that few of us really manage our emotions well, it's surprising that there are not more reports of people who go berserk. Some of us are walking time bombs who will either do harm to ourselves, to our children and loved ones or to unknown others who just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Although there's a lot of ambivalence about the expression of feelings, we still have found creative ways to do this. Go to any large football or soccer match and you'll see the expression of feelings en masse. Even women can get angry there and men can express delight by hugging each other!



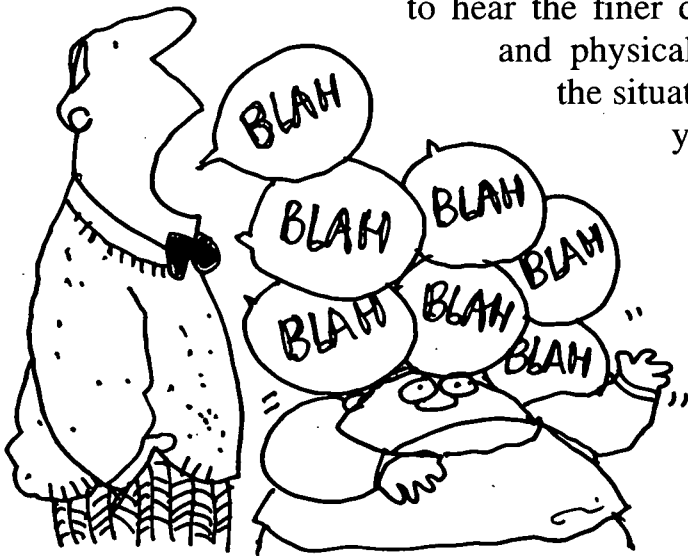
Rituals such as weddings and funerals also provide acceptable ways for people to display deep emotions. And of course movies are a wonderful venue for people to laugh and cry and feel along with the characters.

To allow for the release of emotions requires building into our lives an emotional management program. Just as we know that we function more effectively when we do some form of regular exercise, we need to take the same approach to staying emotionally healthy.

Putting time aside regularly to talk about and release our feelings in a safe and appropriate environment will prevent the build up of emotions and potentially destructive situations.

Talking about our feelings

This is a skill some people find very easy and others find excruciatingly difficult. Like anything else, the more we do it, the easier it becomes. Don't however assume everyone is infinitely interested in how you feel. When someone asks in passing "How are you?" they do not necessarily want to hear the finer details of your emotional and physical health! Be sensitive to the situation and ask permission if you really want to talk at length about how you feel.



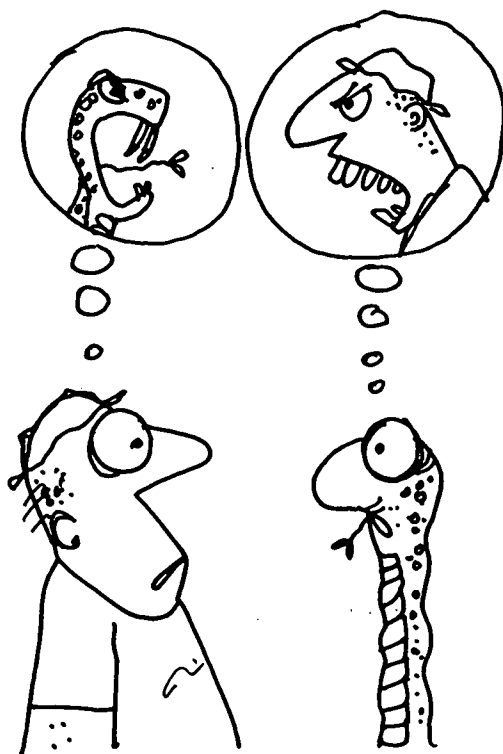
We must start by learning the language of emotions, and especially the difference between a thought and a feeling. It can be confusing because we often use the words **I feel** and **I think** interchangeably. Sometimes it takes a lot of talking and exploring to identify just what is the feeling, separate from the thought. For example if I say "*I feel that you are better at computing than I*

am", although I am attempting to express how I feel, I haven't actually done so. What I've said is that I **think** you are better at computing than I am. The **feeling** I may be experiencing might be one of inferiority towards you, pleasure to be working with you, envy or jealousy of your ability at the computer or I may have a feeling of being overwhelmed by your skill. (A helpful tip – when people say "I feel that"- it's usually a thought not a feeling.)

Thoughts and feelings are intimately connected, and consequently they affect each other. In the above example, my feelings about your computing skills determined the thought that you are better at computing than me.

Not only do feelings impact on our thoughts but our thoughts influence the way we feel and, as a result, our response to a situation.

For example, when Jack, who works in a reptile park, got bitten by a snake, he could have thought *"Damn, it's happened to me again,"* or *"Oh my God, this is serious, I might die from it,"* or *"I shouldn't go on about it, there's much worse things that could happen,"* or *"It's no big deal, why the fuss,"* or *"I've never been bitten before, this is a new experience for me."* The particular words that Jack says to himself will influence how he feels about the situation and then what behaviour he'll adopt.



We've all experienced times when we've **felt** so overwhelmed by our emotions that it seemed that we were unable to think. Sayings such as *"I was so angry I couldn't think"*, *"You're so upset you'll only make mistakes if you continue"*, *"I was scared out of my wits"* and *"He was so full of grief when his wife died he was incoherent"* show the important relationship between thinking and feeling.

Our emotions guide our thinking and likewise, our thinking plays an important role in our emotions. Our first response though in any situation will always be emotional because the rational mind takes a moment longer to register and respond. **Ideally our thinking and feeling are in harmony with each other.** However because we usually don't manage our feelings well we often either dismiss the feeling and try to operate rationally or we're so overwhelmed with feelings that there's little capacity for logic and reason.

Writing about our feelings

Dr. Roger Booth, from the University of Auckland, has found in his research that the expression of emotion and trauma through writing has a direct positive effect on the immune system. In his study he asked a group of healthy students to keep personal journals in which they wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings. As well as being useful in developing insights about why they had the feelings they did, after four days the students keeping a journal were found to have developed a significantly higher level of antibodies, which fight disease, than the students who didn't write. Again, a link between holding back strong emotions and the likelihood of developing a physical disease.

2. Attention off the Feeling

My work requires me to speak to groups of people many times a week. Occasionally the last thing I want to do is get up the front

and be positive, powerful and the focus of people's attention. I **FEEL** crummy – I'd much rather be curled up at home with a good book and a hot chocolate drink.

Yet this is the work I do. I'm being paid to be informative, inspirational and professional. It's out of the question that I do anything less. When this happens I decide not to focus any of my attention on the negative feelings. Instead I choose to attend 100% to the job I'm doing. Before long I'm fully engaged in the process at hand and I no longer feel awful.

When we notice how we feel it means that some of our attention is focused on those feelings. If it feels unpleasant we can choose to distract ourselves and focus our attention elsewhere. There are all sorts of ways people have of shifting their mood, including thinking uplifting thoughts, going for a walk, meditating or reading.



There are many inspiring stories about people who have done brave acts or extraordinary feats against all the odds because they chose not to feel their fear, or their despair or their hopelessness at the time. Such is the following story by Mark V. Hansen called *"Are You Going To Help Me?"*

In 1989 an 8.2 earthquake almost flattened Armenia, killing over 30,000 people in less than four minutes.

In the midst of utter devastation and chaos, a father left his wife securely at home and rushed to the school where his son was supposed to be, only to discover that the building was as flat as a pancake.

After the traumatic initial shock, he remembered the promise he had made to his son: "No matter what, I'll always be there for you!" And the tears began to fill his eyes. As he looked at the pile of debris that once was the school, it looked hopeless, but he kept remembering his commitment to his son.

He began to concentrate on where he walked his son to class at school each morning. Remembering his son's classroom would be in the back right corner of the building, he rushed there and started digging through the rubble.

As he was digging, other forlorn parents arrived, clutching their hearts, saying "My son!" "My daughter!" Other well meaning parents tried to pull him off what was left of the school saying:

"It's too late!" ; "They're dead!" ; "You can't help!"; "Go home!"

"Come on, face reality, there's nothing you can do!"

"You're just going to make things worse!"

To each parent he responded with one line: "Are you going to help me now?" And then he proceeded to dig for his son, stone by stone.

The fire chief showed up and tried to pull him off of the school's debris saying "Fires are breaking out, explosions are happening everywhere. You're in danger. We'll take care of it. Go home." To which this loving, caring Armenian father asked, "Are you going to help me now?"

The police came and said, "You're angry, distraught and it's over. You're endangering others. Go home. We'll handle it!" To which he replied, "Are you going to help me now?" No one helped.

Courageously he proceeded alone because he needed to know for himself: "Is my boy alive or is he dead?"

He dug for eight hours ... 12 hours ... 24 hours ... 36 hours ... then, in the 38th hour, he pulled back a boulder and heard his son's voice. He screamed his son's name, "ARMAND!" He heard back "Dad!?! It's me, Dad" I told the other kids not to worry. I told 'em that if you were alive, you'd save me and when you saved me, they'd be saved. You promised, "No matter what, I'll always be there for you! You did it, Dad!"

"What's going on in there? How is it?" the father asked.

"There are 14 of us left out of 33, Dad. We're scared, hungry, thirsty and thankful you're here. When the building collapsed, it made a wedge, like a triangle, and it saved us".

"Come on out, boy!"

"No, Dad! Let the other kids out first, 'cause I know

you'll get me! No matter what, I know you'll be there for me!"

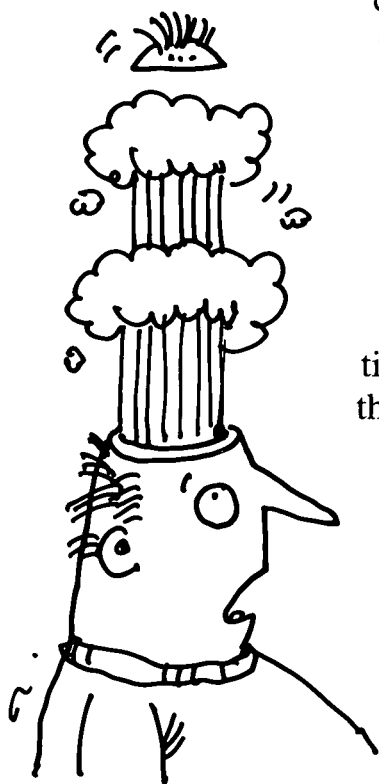
(From *Chicken Soup for the Soul* by Jack Canfield & Mark Victor Hansen, Health Communication Pub., USA 1993)

Not only does this story illustrate a father's love for his son and his son's absolute confidence in that love, but it shows the father refusing to give in to any feelings of hopelessness or despair, against all the odds.

When we choose not to pay attention to how we feel it is very different than suppressing our emotions. Suppressing our emotions means losing touch with how we feel. It results in tensions being stored in the muscles of the body. There's not a free movement of energy and there's no easy access to the feelings.

When we suppress our feelings, they contaminate our thoughts and actions. **Choosing not to focus attention on our emotions, temporarily puts them to one side to be dealt with later.**

Not paying attention at the time to how we feel is a powerful way to live and a useful habit to develop. It must be combined, however, with setting time aside later to express and process the feelings that have been put on hold, by talking things through with a skilled listener, or writing in a journal. We know that if we don't provide this release, the tensions will build up and either harm our bodies and make us ill or make us blow up when we're less prepared.



3. Altering our Perspective

We can also change the way we feel by our **thoughts**, by our **beliefs** about ourselves and the world and by the **words** we use to describe an experience.

There is a lot of power in how we name our reality. One day I was travelling on a train. A mother and her daughter were sitting next to me. The little girl was being lively, curious and excited about being on the train. The mother was clearly exhausted. She became increasingly irritated, constantly telling the child to sit still, be quiet and stop being naughty. I was enjoying the energy of the child. I told the mother what a delightful daughter she had. I said it was wonderful to see such a spirited and alert little girl. It was interesting to see the change in the mother's attitude towards her daughter. My **reframing** "naughty" into "spirited" altered her attitude and feelings towards her child. The next time she had to correct her daughter she was much more loving and the daughter responded positively.



We ALWAYS have a choice about what attitude and perspective we adopt. It is true that our thoughts can set us free!

Given the link between our thoughts and our feelings, and the fact that they each influence the other, we can choose how we feel at any time by what we think.

Tony had just been appointed the new office manager of a medical centre. He replaced Wendy who had been there for fifteen years. Wendy was well liked and respected and the staff were sad to see her go.

One thing Wendy would not tolerate was any gossiping or griping behind people's backs. On the induction of each new staff member she explained her expectations that they deal up front with any issues they might have.

However when Tony started work many of the staff found it hard to accept him. They talked longingly about the good old days and criticised his management style to each other. No-one talked to him directly about their feelings but Tony could sense the unhappiness of his staff. It was hard for him to remember that he was a good manager. He felt he could never live up to Wendy's reputation and he began to lose confidence in his abilities.

Tony met with some trusted colleagues from his previous work who listened to him and reminded him of his past successes. By talking and sharing his feelings he was able to get a better perspective of what was happening with his staff. He stopped comparing himself to Wendy and focused on what he could contribute to the job.

Shortly afterwards, Tony arranged a team building session with the whole staff where he talked about the effect of changing managers and laid out his own style and expectations. Together they established new ground rules about giving feedback and general ways of behaving with each other.

By choosing a positive attitude Tony was able to bring about a successful outcome to a potentially on-going problem.

FEELINGS IN THE WORKPLACE

We see evidence daily of the mis-management of emotions. After an emotional outburst people generally feel embarrassed and uncomfortable. Some try and forget it, while others find themselves very upset by it.

When you feel emotions rising it helps to take slow, deep breaths to calm yourself, and if possible take time out from the situation. If an emotional

outburst does happen, review later what happened, how it got out of hand and what else could have been done. It is also important to clean up the situation after an outburst, such as apologising for your behaviour.



In my **Customer Service** workshops an important skill participants learn is how to manage their emotions while dealing with a customer's anger. Superior customer service includes **NOT** taking a customer's anger personally, that is, not getting emotionally "hooked".



For service workers who deal regularly with customers, peer debriefing and support sessions are an important tool to help them "off load". These sessions provide the time and space for workers to talk with each other about their feelings and about the difficult situations they've encountered as well as sharing useful tips. (Peer support/debriefing sessions are developed further in chapter 5).

Summary

People who manage their emotions can do the following things:

- get in touch with how they feel
- release their feelings by talking, writing and expressing them
- temporarily decide not to pay attention to how they're feeling
- alter their perspective by their thoughts or words

There is little scope for the expression of strong emotions at work. Instead there are other techniques that can be used. Choosing our response to our feelings puts us in the driver's seat – we handle our emotions instead of letting our emotions handle us.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (Great Britain: Bloomsbury, 1996)

Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990)

Rebecca L. Morgan, *Calming Upset Customers* (California: Crisp Publications, 1989)



I Can't Cope With This

HANDLING DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

*The better we get at managing our anger
before it escalates, the more we will be in
control of our lives*

Probably the least acceptable and the most difficult emotions to manage are anger and fear. Most of us are functioning at pre-school level when it comes to these two emotions. Certainly none of my schooling was spent learning about emotional management – although hours were spent on history and geography. When you think about it, it's incredible. Prisons and hospitals are full of people who have trouble with their emotions, not because they don't know the capital of Australia! A friend of mine who works in the burns unit of a large hospital says that many accidents he has to deal with occur because of emotions, particularly anger, going out of control.

Anger management begins with a basic fact – anger is a common and normal emotion. There are many things in our daily life that can produce angry feelings, from mild annoyance to intense fury. In fact it's very healthy to feel angry about some situations we face. I feel outraged when I read about child sexual abuse or when I witness the senseless destruction of the environment in the name of progress. And I feel annoyed when someone takes the parking space that was mine or when I get a defective shopping trolley that won't go in a straight line!



Many of us are scared of anger and see it as a negative emotion. We may be frightened of our own anger or of other people's rage because we've had bad experiences with it, including threats, abuse, intimidation, or punishment or we've witnessed the destructive actions of angry people acted out on television.

Few of us know how to handle such a powerful emotion. We may have completely detached from our anger and be unable to feel it at all, we may have learnt to suppress it (often with the help of food, tobacco, alcohol, or narcotics), we may have turned it in on ourselves and become depressed or we might direct it outwards towards others. Whatever we do it probably has been harmful in one way or another and has added to the belief that anger is a bad emotion.

Harry is a manager with a firm of accountants. Ted, his boss, is an autocratic man in his late fifties who always has to be right. Harry is good at his job but he was becoming increasingly depressed.

Harry sought counselling help for his depression. It took several sessions before he was able to identify feelings of anger in his body. He began to notice how often he experienced feelings of anger towards Ted, but he was afraid to show his anger so he suppressed it. Harry had buried his anger so deeply that he was not even aware that he had been angry with Ted.

Through the counselling sessions Harry learnt alternate ways to deal with his anger, including talking honestly to Ted. Initially this was very difficult for Harry and when he finally gave it a try it was not well received by Ted. Harry persisted though and slowly their relationship improved, and Harry's depression began to lift.

The turning point in reducing Harry's depression was when he acknowledged his anger. Only then could the healing process begin.

Because of our fears about anger, our society has developed a series of myths, such as *Nice people don't get angry . . . There is no point in getting angry . . . I must have done something wrong if someone is angry at me . . . If I feel angry I'll go crazy, . . . If I'm angry I'll lose control and shout, hit or break something . . . If I feel angry at someone it means I hate them . . . and Anger and violence always go together.*

Yet anger when managed effectively, can generate enormous positive energy. It can motivate us to take constructive action and it can allow us to move past our feelings of powerlessness, fear and despair.

Jody was driving home late from her work as a chef. As she turned the corner of her street, a car behind her lightly bumped into the back of her car. She was only a block from home, so she continued until she reached her house.

As soon as she stopped, a man came over to her car. When she rolled down the window he apologised for running into her. He said he wanted to give her the name of his insurance company. When she got out of her car he grabbed her, put his hand across her mouth and stuck a knife at her side.

He threatened to use the knife if she tried to get away and started to drag her to his car. At first she felt terrified, she couldn't believe this was happening to her. Then she felt angry. This rage filled her with an energy and strength. It enabled her to act. She fought hard and broke free from her attacker, and ran screaming to her house where she called the police. Jody's anger probably saved her life.

It is healthy to feel angry, even very angry, towards life's many injustices. The challenge is in learning how to deal with the rage appropriately and constructively.

ANGER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Anger management begins by exploring our attitudes towards anger. Once we accept that anger, when used correctly, is an enormously positive and exciting emotion, it gives us permission to experience the feeling.



People who have learnt to use their anger productively are able to feel their anger and recognise what provoked it. They are able to consider their options and either use the anger to motivate them towards changing a situation or they decide that they don't want to

take any action, and adopt other measures to diffuse their anger, such as some vigorous exercise. **Whatever they do it is from a position of choice – rather than being at the mercy of their emotions by reacting blindly.**

Recognise the early warning signals

Does your heart start racing, your breath become uneven or do you feel a tightness in your jaw, shoulders or the back of your neck? Maybe you start sweating, get a headache, start picking at your nails or your stomach feels like a “washing machine”? You may start trembling, your face may go red or women especially may feel like crying. These are the early signs of anger.

We have many choices at this stage. Acting on our anger is only one of our options. **The main task is to prevent the escalation of feelings which prevent us from thinking rationally.** This is when we are likely to blindly lash out either verbally, physically or both.

Walk away

If there is a danger of losing control we must remove ourselves immediately from the source of the anger until the feelings are not so overwhelming. This cooling off technique has a physical purpose – it gives time for the adrenalin burst to die down. (However it doesn't work if we spend the time churning over thoughts that continue to fuel the rage.)

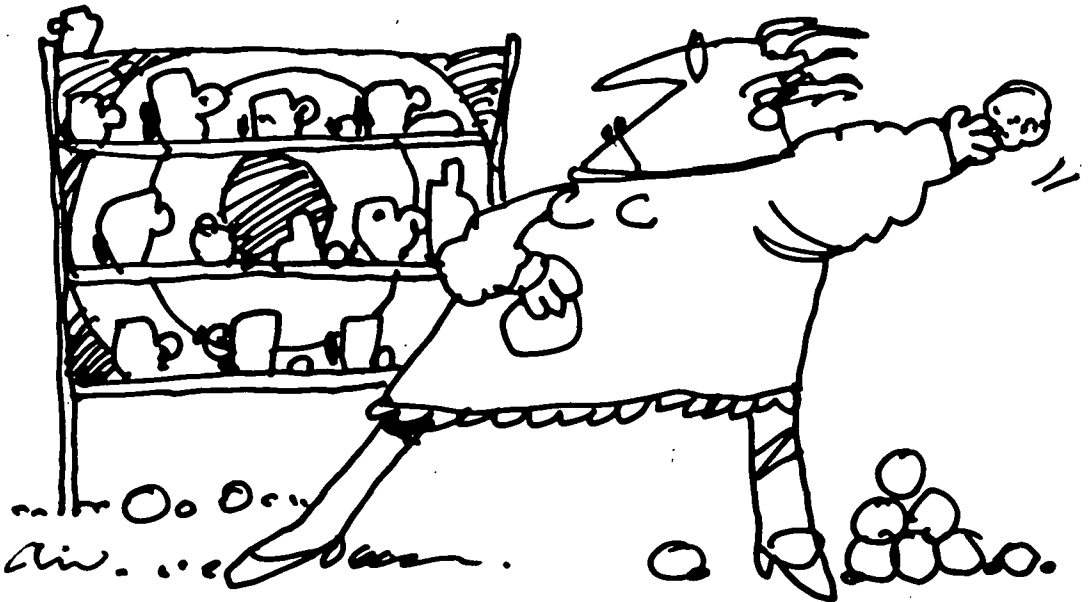
Distraction

The benefit of distraction is that it stops the angry thoughts. For example, watching a movie can be a short term answer. Of course the cause of the anger must eventually be faced and dealt with, but it will more likely be a successful outcome if it's done when we're calmer.

Movement

Doing something physical like running, chopping wood, working out in the gym, punching a punching bag, cleaning the house or gardening can be useful ways of using the adrenalin and burning off the energy that goes with the anger. Writing angry letters and tearing them up, thumping pillows, hitting a mattress with a rolled up newspaper or yelling in the car with the windows wound up can also be very satisfying.

When Ellen gets angry she marches down to the back of the garden where she's lined up several rows of old crockery that she has collected over the years from garage sales. She says the sound of smashing crockery is very healing and after several minutes she's able to walk back up the garden ready to talk through the problem that's caused the anger. She swears by it!



There are mixed views about whether giving vent to rage is the best way to handle anger – some people believe it only increases the anger. You must decide for yourself whether it's an effective anger management technique.

Talking

As with any emotion, talking with another person is useful. By examining the thoughts that triggered the anger often a new perspective can be gained. **Timing is important here.** The earlier the fire of anger is dealt with the less likely righteous thoughts will fan the flames. Being listened to can help an angry person feel supported and not so alone. It can also buy time which will help to defuse the anger.

The better we get at managing our anger before it escalates, the more we will be in control of our actions and our behaviour, and the better our lives will be.

Constructive confrontation

It usually doesn't help to blow up at someone when we're full of rage. Although some of our anger may be justified it often comes pouring out with years of other injustices. Although it may feel tempting to attack, it rarely improves the situation.

If we do let loose indiscriminately we will probably say things that are destructive. Then we'll have to deal with a new problem. If, instead, we're able to release some of the explosion safely we should then be able to think more clearly about what appropriate action is necessary. And if we then decide to confront the person we're more able to manage our feelings and the situation. (This will be further developed in chapter 5.)

There will be times when it's appropriate to feel angry at work. Perhaps there are changes which threaten job conditions or people are abusive. **It's critical that we learn to manage this anger and make it work for us.** If you're feeling very angry at work, then taking a walk around the block, talking with a colleague, ringing up a friend or taking a coffee break can all help to break the escalation of feelings and allow you to keep thinking clearly. Ideally you can then use the anger positively to communicate your thinking about what needs to happen.

Sylvia was an organiser for a nursing union. She was called in to help staff deal with the possible closure of a small country hospital.

At the first meeting Sylvia heard from the nurses that management had cut their hours and had announced a proposal to drastically reduce staff numbers. Retrenchment offers were made which ignored the award and long years of loyal service by the nurses. There was no consultation with the staff.

Sylvia listened to the nurses talk about the impact on their lives. She listened to their feelings of anger, disappointment, fear and a sense of betrayal by their employer. She was able to give them information from her perspective as a union organiser and together they worked out a plan of action, which was to strike. The aim of the strike was to force management to consult with the nurses and to bring the issue to the attention of as many people as possible.

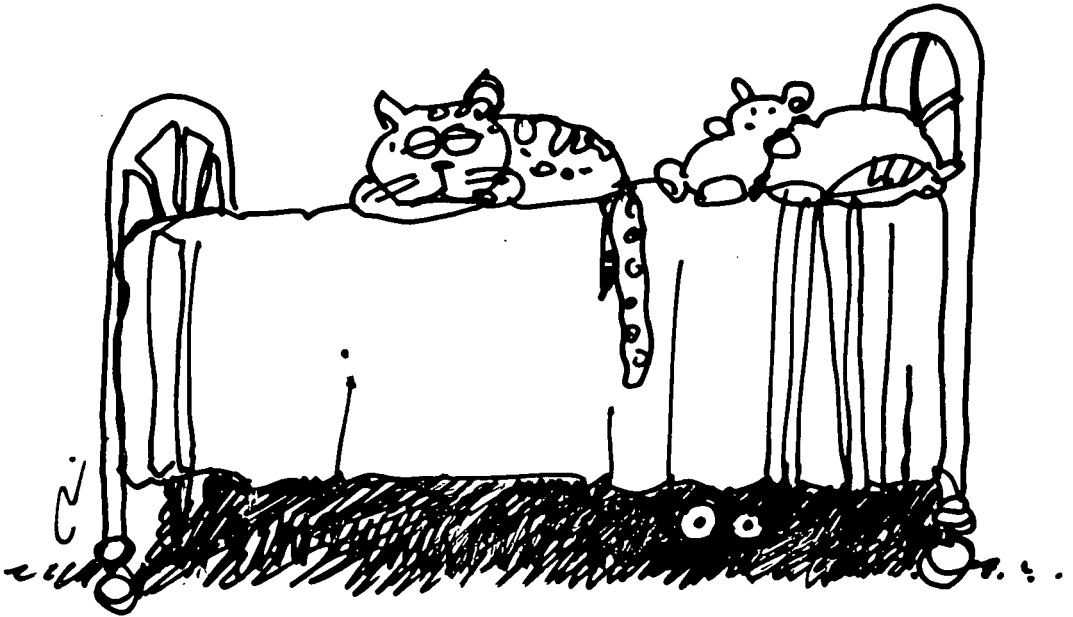
The strike was very successful. Although the hospital may still close, the nurses are being listened to and included in negotiations and a fair redundancy payment has been agreed to. **By turning their anger into constructive action the staff feel good about themselves and the positive outcome they achieved.**

MANAGING FEAR

Acknowledging that we feel frightened and then managing our fear is very hard for most of us. There's a certain stigma to feeling frightened – it's often considered weak. Childhood taunts, such as “*scaredycat*” and “*you're such a baby*” have taught us to mask our feelings of fear. It's definitely **not** OK to show how frightened we feel, especially if we're older boys or men.

Yet we're frightened much of the time. We fear many things including change, failure, aging, being abandoned, and death. We even fear intense feelings, a condition I call “feeling-phobia”.

Feeling frightened can be an important indicator to warn us of danger. But we can create fearful responses unnecessarily because of our attitudes and the words we say to ourselves inside our heads. Even going outside the house can be a terrifying ordeal for some.



When we're scared it may feel as if our lives are at stake, but of course this is seldom the case. So an important step in managing fear is asking “*what am I really afraid of?*”

FEAR MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Recognising early warning signs

Like managing anger, it's helpful to notice the early warning signs of fear which are brought on by the rush of adrenalin to prepare us for "flight or fight". Signs of fear include feelings of intense excitement, dizziness, dilating pupils, dryness in the mouth, rapid heart beat, shortness of breath, sweaty palms, weak knees, a "wobbly" stomach and loose bowels. Although some people never experience these symptoms, because they have learnt to disconnect from their body and *live in their heads*, it doesn't mean that they don't experience fear or are not affected by the feeling of fear. **Never experiencing the feeling of fear can mean an unawareness of potential danger and taking unnecessary risks. It's also impossible to develop close intimacy without feeling vulnerable feelings like fear.**

Talking with others

It's important to make space to talk about our fears, without judgement from ourselves or others. Naming all the possible "what if's" and describing the "worst likely scenario" is helpful and can end up in laughter, which is of course a way of releasing the tensions connected with the fear.

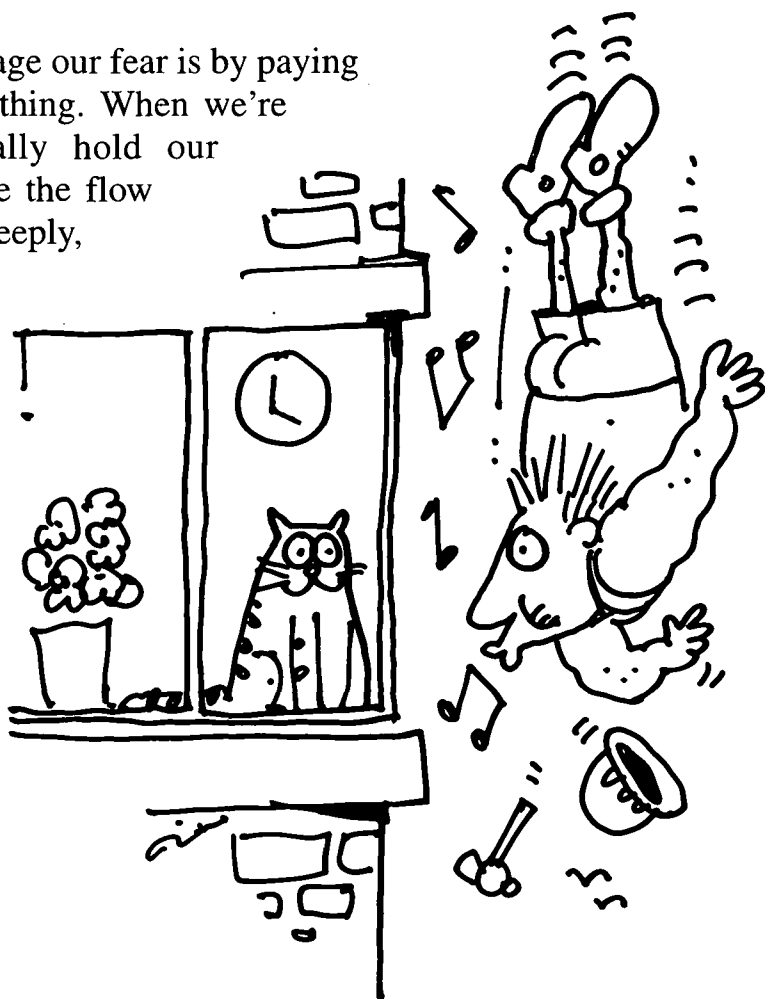
Movement

Any kind of movement, such as running on the spot, jumping, shaking, laughing or exercising is helpful because it keeps the fear manageable by increasing oxygen to the brain, enabling us to keep thinking. What can happen without this movement is that we become "frozen with fear" and our brain shuts down. If this happens we are unable to think rationally. **It's not a good idea to make any important decisions at this time.**

Breathing

A useful way to manage our fear is by paying attention to our breathing. When we're frightened we usually hold our breath. If we manage the flow of air, by breathing deeply, it can calm our fears.

Whistling when we feel frightened has long been recognised as a helpful technique because it forces us to control the flow of air.



Self talk

Talking to ourselves in a positive way, such as reminding ourselves of the strengths we know we have, thinking of ways we could handle the frightening situation and remembering other times when we did handle a fearful situation, is another excellent technique for managing fear. This is called **positive self talk**.

By recognising and admitting our fears, and even validating ourselves for being brave enough to feel them, we can use positive self talk to develop a belief that we'll be able to handle whatever we must face. We can then take any action that is necessary.

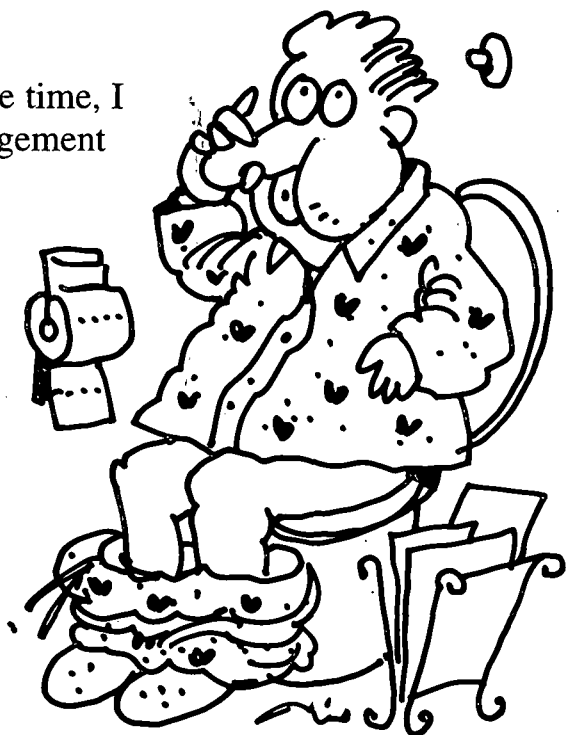
We need to accept fear like any other emotion, as simply a fact of life. By becoming familiar with our feelings of fear and learning how to manage them, like our anger, we will be more in the driver's seat in running our lives.

I sometimes feel frightened when I'm about to lead a workshop, especially if the content is very new or I think the participants will be critical or judgemental. My main fear is that I'll stop thinking well.

I remember one particularly difficult workshop where the whole group became stuck and I was hit with a rush of terror. I called a break and did a whole series of breathing exercises in the toilet.

Then I asked a participant I knew to come for a walk with me while I thought through the difficulty and we shared our perspectives, including what was going well.

Although I didn't realise it at the time, I used several classic fear management techniques. I did a breathing exercise, I took a brisk walk outside and I talked through the problem, as well as using positive self talk. Because I used these techniques it freed up my thinking and I was able to confidently continue leading the workshop.



CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

Alan was manager of a small suburban bank. He had four staff – Chris, Val, Ron and Greg. One afternoon, just before closing time, two men wearing balaclavas burst into the bank and held the staff at gun point. They were instructed to lie on the floor. When Alan attempted to trigger the alarm button, he was shot and died instantly. Before they left, the robbers threatened to kill the rest of the staff if they moved.

Each staff member was traumatised by the incident, struggling with a multitude of feelings, including a terror of dying. Other feelings ranged from guilt for surviving, shame for not standing up to the robbers, anger that it had happened to them, grief for the loss of Alan, to feeling emotionally removed from everyone who hadn't shared the experience.

Critical incident debriefing was initially developed because rescue workers who dealt with major disasters were having emotional difficulties both at work and at home. Research has found that if people exposed to a traumatic event don't deal with their feelings, they frequently relive it in mental images even when they consciously try and forget. Other symptoms recorded include restlessness, irritability, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression, difficulty concentrating, nightmares, vomiting and diarrhoea.

Chris, Val, Ron and Greg had a formal debriefing session the day after the bank robbery with a trained facilitator, Faye. The process began with Faye emphasising the importance of confidentiality – this is necessary to develop safety within the group. All participants were asked to agree not to discuss the details of the debriefing, or any details about any other participant.

Faye began the first stage – the fact stage – by asking the participants to talk about the facts of the critical incident; that is, where they were, what they saw, heard, smelt, and what they did during the incident. Each of the four told their stories, slowly at first but soon becoming more animated as the incident started to come to life again. Val remembered the smell when the gun went off, Chris noticed the worn shoes of one of the robbers, Greg commented on a sense of timelessness and unreality during the robbery and Ron noticed the agitation of the smaller robber.

Faye then asked feeling questions, such as, “How did you feel when that happened?” “How are you feeling now?” “Have you ever felt like that before in your life?” This gave them all an opportunity to begin to discuss their fears, their feelings of guilt, anger, frustration and ambivalence – feelings they had been struggling with on their own.

At this feeling stage people may release strong emotions which is an important part of the process. Val started shaking as she spoke of her fear when the gun was pointed at her, expecting to die along with Alan. Chris “broke down” and sobbed for several minutes as he spoke of his guilt that it was Alan who had died. Faye emphasised that the releasing of these feelings is a normal part of the healing process.

The symptom stage followed where individual participants described their own response to the stresses they had undergone. Questions from Faye included “What unusual things did you experience at the time? What about now?” “Has your life changed in any way since the incident?”

Faye gave the group information about the stress response syndrome, including the signs and symptoms they may

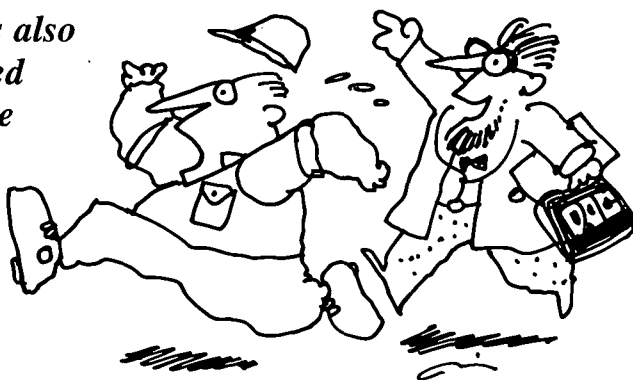
experience, and their emotional reactions at the time and after the incident. She emphasised again that although each person will respond differently it is all NORMAL, there is nothing wrong or weird about their reactions. This is called the teaching stage.

The final phase, the re-entry stage, involves a wrap up and an action plan. They arranged to attend the funeral together and to have some flowers sent. They also agreed to a follow-up session in a week's time, to evaluate where they were at and to tackle any further difficulties.

The timing of a critical incident debriefing is important. People vary in their emotional responses. Many people, including emergency workers, are trained to suppress emotional reactions during, and for a brief time after, the incident. Instead they function cognitively, that is, they intellectualise the incident, mulling over in their minds what happened and how they could have handled it better, in an attempt to come to terms with it. Several hours later when their rapid thinking slows, feelings may rise to the surface which is a good time to hold a debriefing. If it's put off until much later the feelings may submerge and become difficult to get in touch with again.

When a drilling platform in the North Sea broke apart many people were killed. Those that survived were brought to shore in two groups. The first group was hospitalised and interviewed by psychiatrists as part of their treatment.

The second group was also hospitalised but refused any treatment from the psychiatrists because they thought it was weak.



Since the accident members of the first group are functioning well, with most of them back at their jobs. Even though some workers in the second group received a debriefing session several months after the incident a large percentage are still experiencing a variety of disturbing emotional and physical symptoms and many are still unable to work in their old jobs.

(adapted from an article “When Disaster Strikes” by Jeffrey T. Mitchell)

Critical incident debriefing sessions are becoming recognised as an important process to help people manage their intense emotions and avoid dangerous physical symptoms. My hope is that these sessions will become more widely used. With the many changes and losses people are facing in the workplace today these debriefing sessions could help support people to process their feelings and think through their options.

Paul, Len and Jack held senior management positions. In the process of restructuring, the three were told that their jobs were being abolished and they could apply for one of several supervisory positions. Len decided to leave but both Paul and Jack chose to be interviewed. Paul gained a position, Jack didn't.

It was a devastating experience – yet there was no official recognition of this. People were left to cope the best they could. It produced many casualties besides Jack. Paul is still recovering. He is now a peer with people he has trained and managed for many years. He's felt a loss of his dignity throughout the whole process.

Until the importance of emotional health of workers and its impact on productivity is recognised, we will continue to ignore the number of casualties that are mounting in today's workforce.

Summary

- Probably the hardest emotions to manage are anger and fear.
- Although anger is often considered a negative emotion, managed properly it can be a powerful tool to bring about positive change.
- Managing our fear enables us to take calculated risks despite feeling frightened.
- Critical incident debriefings are a formal process to assist workers to deal with traumatic incidents. It helps to reduce the number of psychological casualties amongst workers.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING

Lorraine Bilodeau, M.S., *The Anger Workbook* (USA: CompCare Publishers, 1992)

Susan Jeffers, Ph.D., *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway* (USA: Ballantine Books, 1987)

Elaine Peddey & Leonie Paddick, *Stop the World I want To Get Back On!* (South Australia: Published by the Authors, 1995)



That's Just How I Am

IDENTIFYING BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

*One of the most important steps we can take
as adults is to start to notice where and how
our behaviour is patterned*

WHAT ARE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS?

We now know a lot about feelings. We know that to be a well functioning and healthy person we must learn to manage our feelings. We know that ignoring or suppressing feelings will not make them go away – they just become hidden and can affect our thought processes and our behaviour as well as having an adverse affect on our physical health.

But there is still much that we don't know about feelings and behaviour.

Ed and Jeff are twin brothers. They had similar experiences growing up in a household with an alcoholic father. At times their Dad showered them with affection and attention – he was a loving and proud father. At other times he would rage around the house, criticise everything they did and threaten them with a beating if they stepped out of line. Both boys grew to hate and fear their father.

The brothers are now middle-aged men. Ed is a teetotaler, having decided never to touch a drop of alcohol. He won't even tolerate alcohol in his house. Jeff is a heavy drinker, with rapid mood swings and is fast becoming an alcoholic like his dad.



Although both boys experienced emotional pain because of their father's drinking and erratic behaviour, what made one boy decide never to behave like his father while the other boy is repeating his dad's life?

We do know that from our childhood experiences we develop particular behavioural patterns or habits, both helpful and unhelpful. These habits are learned by either watching what goes on around us or by doing what works.

One of the most important steps we can take as adults is to start to notice where and how our behaviour is patterned.

We can begin by looking at the roles we have adopted at work and at home because they are a way we play out our patterns. Some of the more common work patterns include:

Patterns around time

Like most people I received lots of messages, both verbal and nonverbal, about time. They include

It's rude to keep someone waiting. If people are late they're inconsiderate. It's important to get to places early. If you're running late you must panic.

This has resulted in my "prompt" pattern which means I'm almost always on time, actually I'm usually early for all my commitments, and I get anxious if I think I'm going to be late. Now in this society I'm rewarded for being on time, unlike some of my late friends who have enormous difficulty managing their

time. In fact if it looks like they're going to be early, they fit in one more thing and, hey presto, they end up rushing to wherever they need to be and arrive, as usual, flustered and late.



Differences in time keeping patterns can cause enormous emotional clashes between people. My problem is learning how to turn off my internal clock. There are times when it's not important to arrive at an exact time, such as social occasions. However, I still find myself sometimes being driven by my watch and I have to keep reminding myself to switch off the internal clock.

In my **Time Management** seminars I've developed activities which allow participants to discover the subconscious messages they have accumulated about time. By altering these messages they can develop more workable decisions about time and adjust their personal internal clock accordingly. **I believe this is the key to time management.** Any well-intentioned techniques developed to manage time will be undermined if this is not done first.

Patterns around work

Workaholic William works very hard. His whole identity and self esteem are wrapped up with his work. When he has time on his hands he feels uncomfortable and jumpy. Although this workaholic pattern has brought material rewards it has come at a cost to other areas of his life. He has little closeness with his wife and sons, or any real friendships at work, and he's wondering whether satisfaction at work is outweighed by these other strains. One of his underlying beliefs is –

“If you want something done properly you have to do it yourself”.

Consequently, he's unable to delegate effectively because he doesn't trust anyone to do the job as well as he can.

Patterns around authority and power

Rebellious Ronald always seems to be doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. He never comes to work or to meetings on time, he often doesn't do what is asked of him and he has difficulty with anyone in authority. He feels dissatisfied with his lack of success. His constant theme is –

“You can't make me”.

Ronald's feelings have him reacting against any rules or structure.

Likeable Lesley, his boss, has different feelings about authority. She finds it difficult to be in any position of power, because of her negative experiences with people in authority. She wants to be liked by everyone and she has a dread of being called bossy! Her underlying belief is –

“I'm not a nice person if people don't like me”.

This particular behaviour pattern has caused considerable damage to her ability to lead.

Negative Narelle drags around an enormous pattern of powerlessness. She sees the negative side of everything and constantly tells everyone how bad things are. Her underlying theme is –

“It’s not fair!”

Things are never her fault, she can always find someone else to blame: her boss, her company, her fellow workers, the government or her mother!

Both Ronald’s and Narelle’s behaviour not only makes them feel bad but because emotions are contagious, (how we feel influences how others feel), their negative feelings have a damaging effect on the morale of the office.



Patterns around success and failure

Failed Phillipa always seems to muck up just when success is a possibility. Her fear of being successful and therefore visible has her repeating an old pattern of messing up. Her belief is

“I don’t deserve to succeed”.

The reverse of this pattern is the fear of failure which drives people to win at all costs.

Perfectionist Patterns

Perfect Peter struggles with having to always get it right. He often judges his work and others as not being good enough. He’s very hard on himself and is aware his standards are rigid and often unreasonable. His underlying belief is

“It has to be perfect every time, anything less is not good enough”.

Patterns around organisation

Messy Mike has great difficulty in keeping anything in order. He has attended several sessions on how to organise, especially how to keep an ordered desk but nothing has made any significant impact. This is because he hasn’t changed his underlying belief that

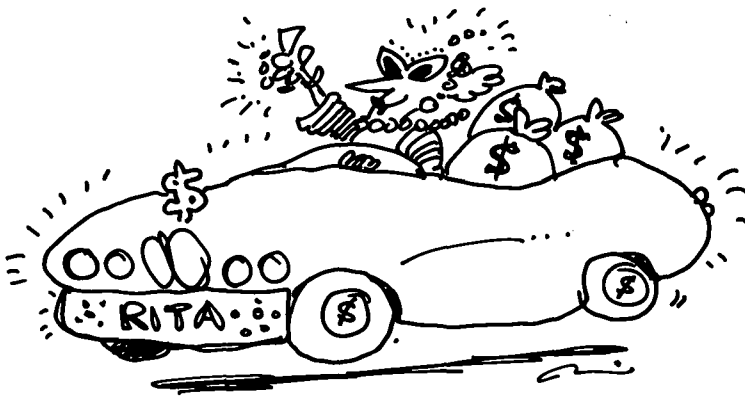
“Life is constant chaos and drama”.

Patterns around money

There is an enormous amount of misinformation about money. Some of the more common myths are;

There is never enough money. Money makes the world go round. He worships money. She's tight with her money. Money just goes through his fingers. She's good with money. He doesn't know the value of money. Money is the root of all evil. She comes cheap. That's priceless. Never talk about how much money you have.

Rich Rita's beliefs developed from her poor childhood. She had to bury many painful emotions about herself including the feeling that she was not as good as others. She decided early on that she'd never be poor again and has worked very hard to build a successful career.



Behaviour patterns depend on the situation or context. Someone may be a know-all and a bore at work but shy and lacking in confidence in an unfamiliar social setting.

To free ourselves from troublesome behaviour patterns, we must take an honest look at ourselves. Asking questions such as “What are my beliefs and feelings here?” “How does this habit serve me?” “How does it cause me pain?” “What better way can I meet my needs?” can help form a picture of the pattern. It's helpful to remember that although a particular pattern may have once been a good survival choice as a child it's usefulness has probably long passed and could now be a liability.

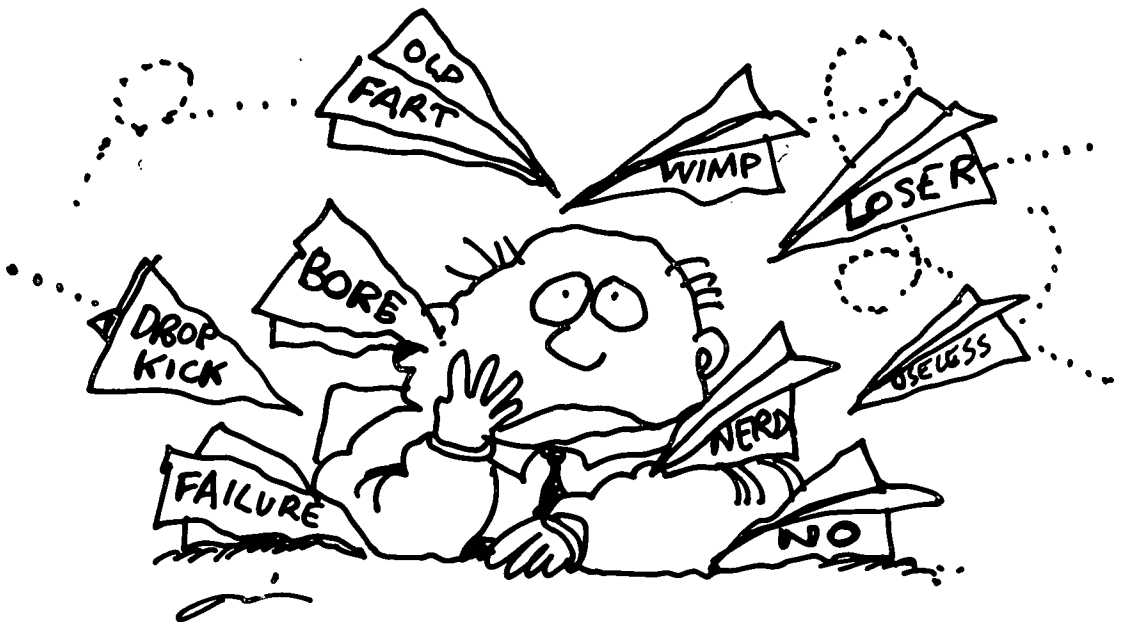
SEPARATING PEOPLE FROM THEIR PATTERNS

When we identify ourselves or others with a pattern, such as *Rebellious Ronald* and *Messy Mike* we tend to believe that the pattern and the person are one and the same. This is not so. Ronald is not a *rebellious person* or Mike a *messy person* – instead it is their **behaviour** that is rebellious or messy.

We are not our patterns. Separating a person from their pattern is especially important when giving any kind of feedback. For example, in performance appraisals, managers must be clear that they are assessing their employee's **performance** not their **personalities**. Too often criticisms are given as personal attacks rather than complaints that can be acted upon.

When done effectively, constructive feedback is valuable information about how to do better. However it is important when giving feedback to keep in mind the following:

- Keep the feedback in a positive context. Always say what has been done well first – it's easier to hear a negative if there are also some positives to balance it.



- Choose a private space. People often find it difficult to hear what they haven't done well. "Saving face" is critical – never criticise someone in front of others.
- Be specific. It's not helpful to hear that something is generally no good without knowing the details.
- Listen well. People will feel uncomfortable and may become defensive when hearing negative feedback. Listen and allow them to sound off. Work together in developing options as a way of solving the problem. Possibilities and alternatives need to be explored – by listening well they'll be more able to think about possible solutions.
- Show empathy. If negative feedback is done tactlessly it will be destructive and will probably cause bitterness and resentment.
- Do it personally. Doing it at a distance, such as in a memo, may feel easier for those who have difficulty with giving feedback, but it doesn't give the person a chance to discuss or respond to the information.



Being able to separate the person from their behaviour pattern is vital to giving constructive feedback and to building successful working relationships.

If we're confronted by a situation that challenges a pattern or belief we will often find that we're overwhelmed by old feelings which may then cause us to react and behave quite irrationally.

Graham has worked in a clothing factory for several years. Six months ago his boss retired and the new boss appointed was a woman, Terri. This situation challenged Graham's beliefs about himself as a man – that men are the boss and that taking orders from a woman makes you less of a man. So whatever efforts Terri made to appear fair, friendly and “non-female”, Graham couldn't deal with the situation. His disruptive and undermining behaviour made the situation impossible for everyone. He could see no way out and ended up picking a fight with a co-worker, and storming off the job.

Patterns are very resistant to change, but not impossible. It's necessary to uncover the underlying negative beliefs and feelings that make up the pattern. Only then can an alternative and more constructive perspective and action be adopted.

Sarah was aware that her male boss reminded her a lot of her father, who was impossible to please. No matter how hard Sarah tried, she never heard her father say “well done” or “I'm proud of you.” Sarah realised that she'd got caught up in a similar cycle of trying to please her boss. She finally acknowledged that no matter what she did it would never be good enough for him, just as it wasn't good enough for her father.

*Knowing this Sarah began to develop strategies to break the cycle. She had other people give her positive feedback, she began telling her boss what she'd done well and she made a point of writing down what she'd achieved. She also regularly gave herself talks about "giving up seeking approval from others" and posted a sign over her desk which said **WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF ME IS NONE OF MY BUSINESS.***

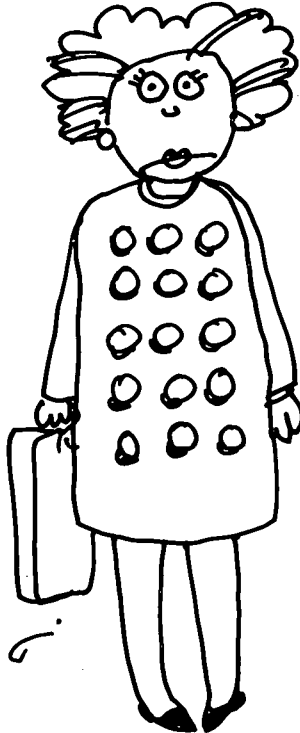
Throughout the process of choosing not to follow this pattern she became aware of old feelings of grief, regret and anger about her father, who died ten years ago. She started to keep a journal about her feelings and thoughts and also talked about her experiences with a trusted friend. All these tactics began to weaken the "trying to please" pattern, although for some time she found herself off guard and caught up in the old cycle.

Confronting our behaviour patterns isn't easy. As soon as we try to alter a pattern we're often swamped by a mass of uncomfortable feelings. When Workaholic William decided to challenge his belief that he has to do everything himself, by delegating some of his work, a mass of feelings surfaced. Even though he carefully selected what could be delegated, and who would be the right person for the task, and thoroughly explained the assignment, he was still confronted by his internal voice which said, "They won't do it properly, I should check up on them now, It was a stupid thing to do in the first place". With perseverance and determination, William eventually learned to delegate and free up his time to do other things.

WHAT PUSHES YOUR BUTTONS?

In my **Leadership** workshops I ask people to think about what "pushes your buttons", that is, what triggers a pattern. What things do people say or do or what situations cause uncomfortable

feelings or puzzling reactions for you? Is it people who are late or unorganised or negative or authoritarian? Is it in situations where you don't understand what's going on, or when you're the centre of attention, or when you're being criticised or overlooked?



Sometimes when you react automatically rather than choose your response, it is because your buttons are being pushed and some hidden feeling or underlying belief has surfaced.

Even the way people look can trigger uncomfortable feelings. If we have strong negative feelings about someone it's a good idea to think who they remind us of.

Ian is a primary school teacher with a class of eleven and twelve year olds. He's a good teacher, caring and fair and enjoys interacting with young people. The students like him – they know they can have fun in his class, but they also know where the boundaries lie. Ian usually manages to find at least one thing he genuinely likes about each child he comes in contact with. However he's struggled with Danny.

Danny is small for his age, with behaviour Ian describes as sneaky and cunning. Several times he's been caught cheating and recently he was seen going through some of the children's bags. Even though he was caught in the act, Danny denied he was doing anything wrong. Ian lost his cool and very nearly struck him. It was clear that one of Ian's "buttons" had been triggered because he was unable to think rationally about Danny and how to deal with the situation.

When Ian spoke about his concerns with Sheila, another teacher, he gained a totally different perspective. Sheila liked Danny, had had few problems with him and had developed a very positive relationship with the boy. This caused Ian to examine his own feelings. He remembered also being labelled sneaky as a child. In fact in many ways Danny reminded Ian of himself and of behaviour that he'd been taught to feel badly about. Knowing this, Ian was able to separate his feelings about himself from his feelings about Danny.

In most workplaces, an enormous amount of management time is spent dealing with conflicts brought about by people who are oblivious to their own behavioural patterns and how they affect others.

Many of the difficulties we encounter in communication occur because behaviour patterns get in the way. Sometimes a total interaction with two people ends up as two sets of patterns trying to communicate. If they happen to fit together, things will go well until one of the two alters or modifies her or his pattern.-Other people may instantly dislike each other because of their behaviour patterns and clear communication is doomed to failure from the start.



We need to become more skilled in understanding when our patterns or other people's patterns are surfacing and contaminating the interaction. Because much workplace conflict is the result of patterns clashing, the sooner we can recognise and deal with the feelings underlying our patterns the sooner we will be able to handle difficult interactions.

Summary

- We have all developed behavioural patterns or habits. Some are helpful while others are a hindrance.
- Although patterns are resistant to change, we can alter negative patterns by first uncovering the underlying feelings and beliefs that keep the pattern in place.
- An important communication skill is separating the person from their patterns.
- Sometimes an interaction between two people ends up as two sets of patterns trying to communicate.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING

Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973)

Richard Bandler, *Using Your Brain For A Change* (Utah: Real People Press, 1985)

Muriel Schiffman, *Gestalt Self Therapy* (California: Self Therapy Press, 1971)



I Wish I Hadn't Blown My Top

EMOTIONS IN COMMUNICATION

*If feelings are not dealt with early in a conflict
the resolution process will be hampered*

Misunderstandings at work

Peter and Jane both work for a community organisation. Recently Jane has felt angry at Peter because of his joking comments about her weight. However, because she's uncomfortable showing her anger she's responded with a flippant and funny remark. Consequently Peter has no idea that he's angered Jane. This could spell real trouble for their working relationship as Jane's anger begins to mount.

Similarly when Jane corrected Peter about a mistake he made he instantly became angry and defensive. This is his usual response when he feels vulnerable and fearful that he's done something wrong. His anger and defensiveness could be interpreted by Jane as being conceited and unwilling to listen which again can damage the relationship.

Both Peter and Jane are not giving clear messages about how they feel, which directly affects their communication.

The inability to express what we are feeling in a direct, honest and safe way has major repercussions on the way we communicate and relate to each other.

Misunderstandings can also occur across other barriers besides gender. For example, people from different social classes, age, culture and race will all express themselves differently.

CREATIVE CONFLICTS

Conflicts are inevitable – any time we interact with another person there is the potential for a difference or conflict to arise.

Most of us though are scared of conflict – a common belief being *things will get out of hand and end up badly*.

There are a number of reasons why we fear conflict. Many of us grew up in families where conflicts were not dealt with well. Some of us learnt that *it's important to keep the peace at all costs* and we hope that by doing nothing, maybe the conflict will just go away. However not tackling a conflict in the early stages often means that we end up having to deal with a crisis later on. By then a history of hurts and misunderstandings has developed which makes the conflict far more complex and difficult to deal with successfully. This reinforces, for many of us, the belief that conflicts are scary and destructive.

Besides being inevitable, conflicts that are handled well are healthy. When people are tussling with each other it demonstrates that they haven't given up, that they still hope to work things out. Sometimes an unhealthy organisation is one where people are always *nice* to each other and where there

are never any conflicts. Either they're too fearful to risk tackling differences because they don't feel they have the skills to handle it or they have given up and believe there is no point in trying to speak out.



Dealing with emotions

Before any conflict can be worked through successfully, we must become aware of our underlying feelings and thoughts. They may include:— *It's not fair . . . They're wrong and I'm right . . . I'll lose face if I apologise . . . I'm going to show them . . . I hate them . . . How dare they treat me this way . . . Who do they think they are? . . . I'm not going to let them get the better of me . . .*

Probably the biggest obstacle to resolving conflict successfully is the belief that *I'm right and you're wrong*. Holding on to these thoughts and feelings keeps us stuck in a fixed position and prevents us from being open to resolving a conflict.

If feelings are not dealt with early in a conflict the resolution process will be hampered.

By talking through a conflict we can gain an understanding of the feelings we're experiencing, what buttons have been pushed and what behaviour patterns are operating. Often another person can help us recognise our patterns better than we can ourselves.

Peter's comments about Jane's weight really started to annoy her. She was beginning to resent Peter and his smugness. Combined with the break up of her marriage his negative comments were affecting her self esteem.

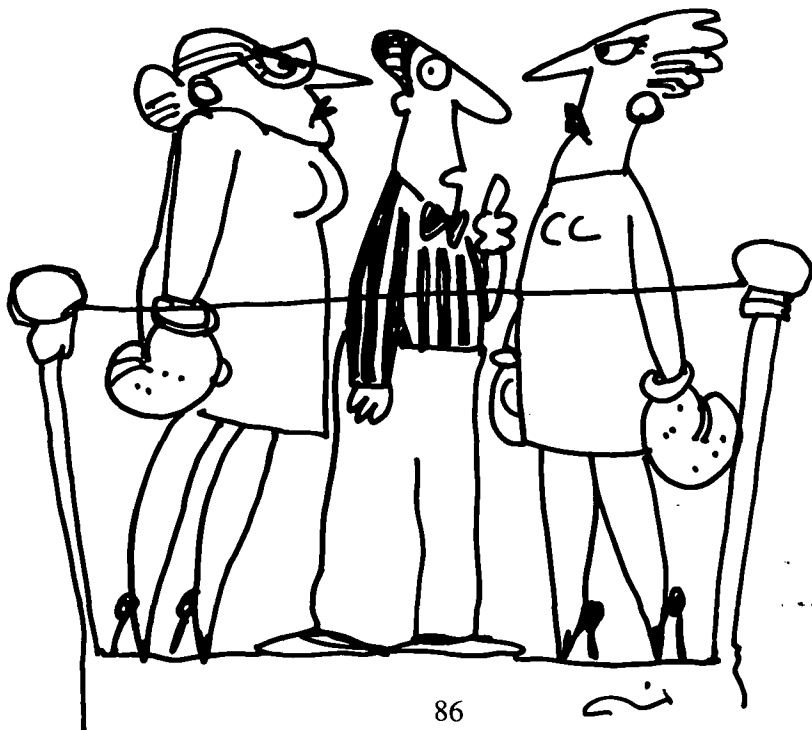
Jane was seeing a counsellor about her marriage. When she spoke about Peter and her work she realised that she was feeling disrespected and humiliated. The counsellor helped her get in touch with her anger and past grief about the years of shame she endured as a fat child. She was able to cry and talk about hurtful incidents that she hadn't spoken of for many years.

She also identified a rebellious pattern, which was an old defence mechanism. She realised that she deliberately ate fattening food when Peter was around!

After discovering these insights, Jane was able to speak to Peter about her feelings. She asked him not to comment on her weight anymore. He was surprised – he had never intended to hurt her. He thought it was just a bit of fun, but he readily apologised and agreed to stop his comments.

Fair fighting

By managing our feelings in a conflict, as Jane did, we are much more likely to fight fairly. We will be able to think more clearly and then choose the best response to the situation. **Fair fighting is a legitimate and important part of communication.** It values the process, that is, how the conflict is conducted, as equally important as the outcome. After all, after a fight you will only remember about 20% of the content but what will stay with you was whether it was fair, and if you felt angry, upset or satisfied afterwards.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

To work through conflicts successfully and to fight fairly we need to develop effective communication skills. **Besides managing our emotions, assertiveness and active listening are the most important skills of communication and are essential “tools” for all workers today.**

1. Assertiveness – how to confront respectfully

When you want to talk to someone about a problem, it's important to state how the situation is affecting you, how you feel about it and what changes you would like or suggestions you have to deal with the problem.

John worked for a radio station. He loved his job in which he went on air every night at 8pm. However a constant problem was that of co-ordinating a smooth change-over time. The program before him was supposed to wind up promptly so he could come in and set up and be ready to go to air at 8pm sharp. What frequently happened was that the previous on air person, Barb, was seldom ready to leave the studio for John to take over. Her mess was still everywhere so that often he had no time to settle in himself before it was time to go to air.

John approached Barb and said “I feel annoyed when I don't get into the studio on time because I'm concerned I won't be prepared when I have to go to air. I would like to discuss how we can ensure a smooth take over time which will enable me to be ready to go to air”. After talking together, the solution they came up with was to do the change over on air, chatting to each other. Barb then put John's first CD on and vacated the chair, having tidied up in advance.

John expressed how he felt and why, and what he'd like. He wasn't aggressive and didn't use blame or loaded words such as "always" and "never" which would have got Barb on the defensive. He was respectful and didn't "tell Barb off" or belittle her in front of others. Consequently John had a much better chance of initiating an open discussion and ultimately developing some thoughtful strategies with Barb that suited them both. And even when Barb lapsed several times in her agreement, John continued to challenge her respectfully but firmly.



When we're aggressive we're often caught up in righteous feelings and we tend to lash out. Our body language is threatening, such as hands on hips, a pointing finger, a red face and yelling. This behaviour will probably produce a defensive response from the other person because they feel under attack. They will most likely attack back, which lessens the chance of a productive interaction, with an open flow of communication.

In contrast to aggression, is passive or submissive behaviour. This is when people have trouble raising a concern, or when they hint instead of being direct or when they profusely apologise for saying anything – not the best way to initiate good communication either.

It's scary to confront someone and our feelings must be dealt with first before we tackle a problem. It may be useful to role play the scenario with an impartial person before we confront, to help sort out our feelings and what we want to say.

2. Active listening – not just hearing the words

Skilled listening requires an intricate balance of paying 100% attention, selective questioning, paraphrasing and reflecting back, encouraging, summarising and allowing for silence.

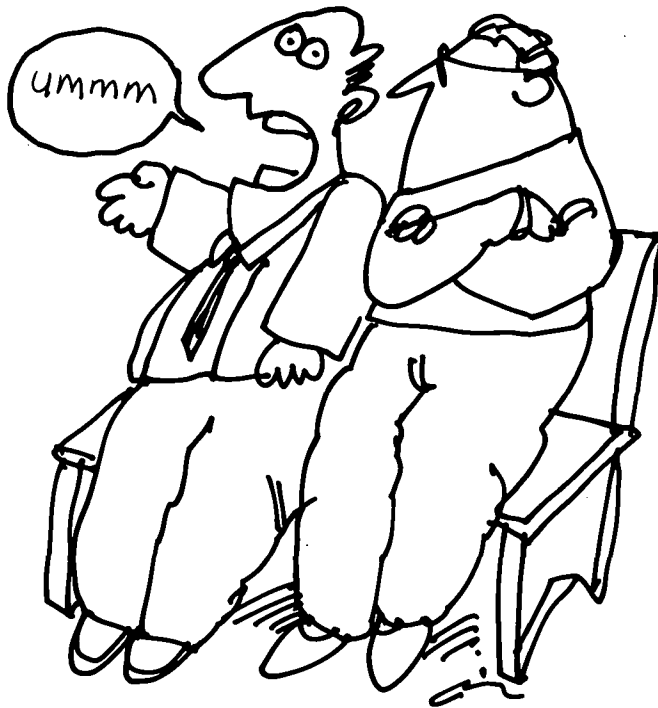
Our normal way of communicating is a very back and forth exchange of words where each person seldom gets to finish a train of thought. While we're meant to be listening much of our attention is following our own thoughts and feelings, making all sorts of assumptions, judgements, and connections from what's being said. We're able to do this because we think much faster than we can talk. Sometimes we're so far ahead of the person talking that we finish their sentences for them!

In my **Communication Skills** workshops I talk about "me too" behaviour. This is when we listen to someone else's experience and it triggers off thoughts, ideas and feelings of our own. Then because we think we will forget our train of thought we butt in with *"I know just what you mean, I – my neighbour – friend – work colleague had the same problem!"* This in itself is not a bad thing. Bouncing ideas off one another is an important and useful activity.

Active listening however allows for uninterrupted thinking and feeling time. It gives one person an opportunity to talk through a problem or issue without being interrupted. The other

person is the listener and gives his or her full attention to the person and to what is being said. Active listening also involves reading the speaker's body language, giving eye contact, listening to the tone of voice and observing any feelings that are present. (Keep in mind the use of eye contact. Some cultures do not give eye contact when talking because it is considered rude, intrusive and disrespectful.)

Remember there are variations in the way people express themselves, the language they use and the style in which they communicate – depending on their age, social background, culture, or emotional state at the time. **The listener must show patience and acceptance for the speaker at all times.**



Active listening then is much more than just hearing the words. Malcolm discovered this recently in a conversation with his wife Marie.

Malcolm told Marie he wanted to take up a new hobby. When he asked Marie what she thought she said “No, I don’t mind, suit yourself.” Unfortunately Malcolm only listened to the words. If he’d read Marie’s body language it was clear that she did mind very much.

Clear communication is the responsibility of both parties. Ideally Marie would have been assertive and said how she felt about Malcolm spending more time away from home. However the underlying belief that got in her way was “If he really loved me he would know how I feel!”

Reflect back. An important part of the listening process is to check that you have understood what has been said. By paraphrasing what you have heard, both the content and the feelings, you show the speaker that you’re really engaged in the listening process. Paraphrasing is saying back to the speaker in your own words what they have said, in a summarised form. For example, in another conversation between Marie and Malcolm, Marie, on listening to Malcolm talk about his concerns, could have reflected back by saying,

“So you’re saying that you want to take up abseiling but you have doubts that we can afford it. And you’re feeling anxious about my reaction.”

If done succinctly, this can be helpful to the speaker by putting in a nutshell all that she or he has been grappling with, and it can assist in getting an overall picture. If you’re on the wrong track the speaker has the opportunity after you summarise to say,

“No I’m not worried so much about the expense, although that is a factor, but more that I’ll be away on weekends and won’t spend much time with you and the kids. And yes, I do feel uneasy about raising it, because we have so little time together as it is.”

Allow for the Silences. We often feel uncomfortable with silences and we will say anything just to fill in the gap. However silences are a crucial part of the listening process. In fact in many indigenous cultures of the world silence is considered as valuable, or more valuable, than the speaking.

A silence is often the time when the speaker thinks over his or her previous thoughts and new connections, or re-evaluates a whole bit of the story. Whatever is happening, it's an important step and as a listener you must be patient. If you really think the silence has gone beyond being useful you may want to ask, "*What are you thinking?*"



Strategic Questions. A vital part of the active listening process is to ask strategic questions. These are questions asked not simply out of curiosity, but ones that will help the speaker explore their situation further and think more laterally. It can help them move past their "blocks."

Tom had started work as an apprentice cook in a country hospital. He was a quiet young man and he was homosexual. Although he liked the job he felt uncomfortable with the jokes and the language, particularly the subtle references to gay lifestyles. He was feeling very separate from the rest of the team. He didn't want to confront them with his homosexuality and he couldn't see any way of improving the situation.

When his supervisor, Doug, asked how the job was going, Tom decided to confide in him. Doug listened to his difficulties, noticed his fear, and asked "If you were not afraid of what people would think, what would you do?" When Tom explored this a bit he thought that he could tell a co-worker, Kate, that he was gay. He was reasonably confident that she'd keep it confidential and not be cruel about it. Doug then asked "What do you think might happen if you did that?" Tom said he thought it would be a start for him to feel more a part of the team and maybe Kate could help tone down the banter.

By asking strategic questions Doug enabled Tom to think through his possible options, and to develop strategies for dealing with his work situation. This was more effective and empowering than telling Tom what to do.

Strategic questions help remove the blocks that everyone of us has created out of our own reality, based on our life experiences. This reality includes barriers and coping mechanisms that we have developed which sometimes limit us in seeing all the possibilities before us.

Strategic questions can also help us to reframe a particular incident and remove the negative connotations. By asking the question "*What are you comparing it with?*" it may enable the

speaker to view the incident from a different perspective, using a different frame of reference. For example,

When Penny was trying to sort out her issues around caring, she was asked “What is your idea of a caring person?” She talked about her mother and her sister – both had built their lives around caring for others. When she was asked, “Have you known any other people who were caring?” Penny thought of one of her teachers who clearly cared about her students but was also passionate about her work. This gave Penny a different frame of reference for caring.



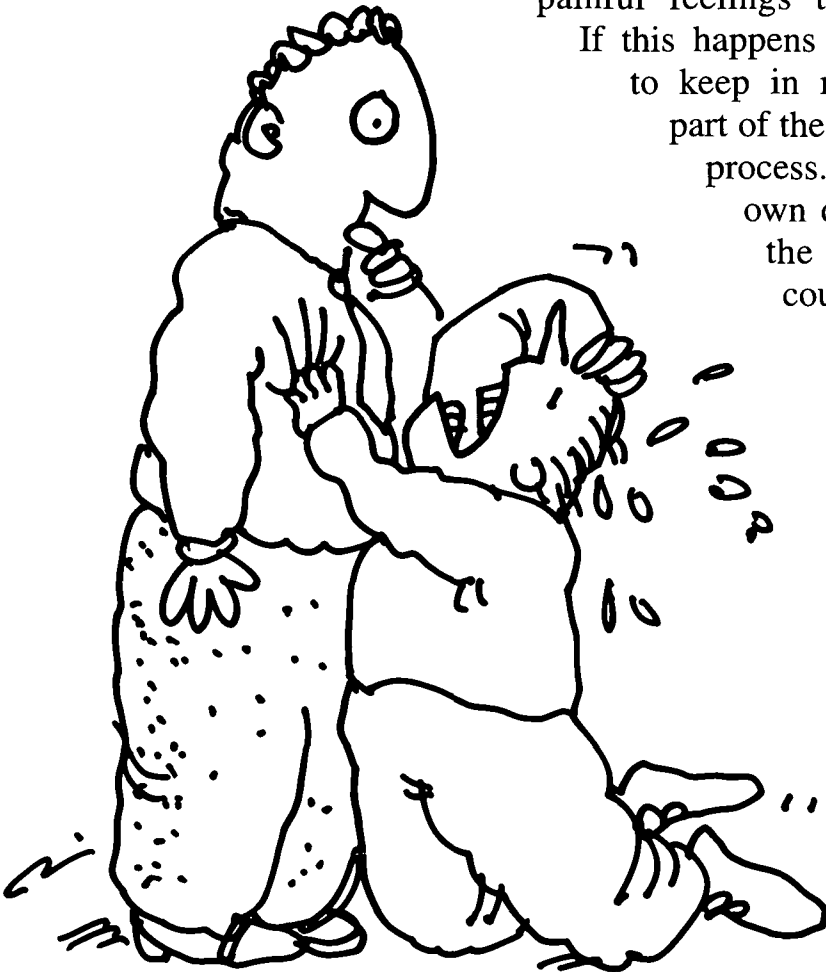
Affirm. It's well known that we learn and function better when we feel good about ourselves. **A healthy self esteem has never been built on criticism.** We've all experienced far more criticism, putdowns and negatives than we have ever received positives and affirmations. Our Anglo-Saxon culture has a collective underlying belief that people doing well are “*up themselves*” or are getting “*too big for their boots*” and it's our duty “*to bring them down a peg or two!*” So we point out to others what they're doing wrong but we seldom remember to equally point out what they're doing right.

It's far better to offer suggestions, to help people improve, than to criticise. When listening to others struggling with a problem it's helpful to encourage them to talk about their successes, however minor they may feel they are, and to say what they've noticed is going well in their lives. You may also wish to give them your positive feedback. Some people will feel very uncomfortable doing this, especially if they have an underlying belief which says "*when someone says something nice they're after something or they're sucking up.*"

Acknowledge feelings. Any genuine affirmation contradicts our negative self perceptions. These internalised messages of self doubt and criticism are like any other patterns we've learnt. When

they are contradicted it often brings painful feelings to the surface.

If this happens it is important to keep in mind that it is part of the natural healing process. Don't let your own discomfort stop the release. Of course it probably won't happen if you are uneasy with "emotional" people.



If the speaker does release some feelings, you may wish to validate them. *"I can see this has been very difficult for you."* It's usually not helpful to say *"I know how you feel"* because of course you don't exactly know and the assumption may be insulting.

Confidentiality. Much of what we hear should not be repeated. As you become a skilled listener people may disclose information to you that they would not normally do, partly because skilled listening creates a lot of safety. Maintaining confidentiality is essential. Anything said privately to you should be seen as belonging to the speaker and must be treated thoughtfully. If you're ever unsure whether something is public knowledge or not, always check it out first with the person concerned. **Confidentiality is an important element of effective communication.**

Do not advise, reassure or judge. None of these are helpful. By giving advice you are implying *"I know better than you do about what is right for you"*. This message encourages the speaker to stay helpless and dependent and ultimately it's of no help to anyone. The other major pitfall with giving advice is if your idea doesn't work out, then the receiver of your wisdom will probably angrily blame you. *"You told me to do this and I'm in a worse mess than I ever was."*

Helping to develop options or giving useful information to enable someone to make an informed decision is different from giving advice.

Not giving advice includes not providing the solutions or playing psychoanalyst and interpreting the speaker's experience for them.

When Tony met with his colleagues they listened to him talk about the difficulties he was having in his new job. The biggest problem was being unfavourably compared to Wendy, the previous boss. His colleagues listened as he shared his frustrations. Someone asked “What’s your next step?” They all thought about the possible options and Tony finally decided on organising a team building session.

If instead, someone had said, “You should do this to fix it” without allowing Tony to think through the problem and come up with a successful option himself it would not have been nearly as useful. This way, Tony was empowered by the session and took ownership of the solution.

Reassuring people takes away the space for them to feel just how hard it’s been. To say “*It could have been much worse*” belittles the speaker’s experience. **We mostly reassure others because of our own feelings of discomfort.** This means we’ve stopped listening effectively because we’ve allowed our own responses to intrude into the process.

During Dennis’ long convalescence he had time to mull over his life. When Jack, a friend, visited and listened to him talk about his feelings, Jack became very uncomfortable. He kept reassuring Dennis that he was almost better and everything would work out OK.

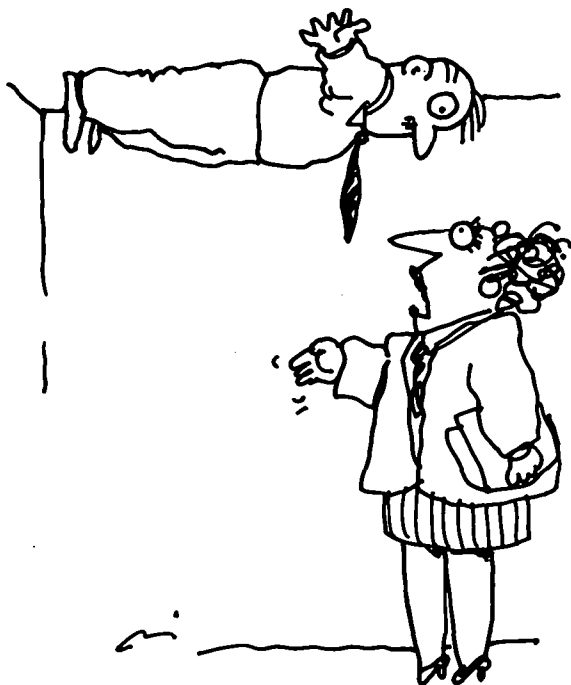
Although Jack meant well, his reassurances were really said because he was feeling uncomfortable listening to Dennis struggle with his grief and his regret. What it did was to stop Dennis from talking further – he put on a brave face for his friend. Consequently Dennis was robbed of the space to show his vulnerability and to heal some of his past hurts.

Making **judgements** is an obvious barrier to building safety or trust. Rather than judging anyone, assume that they have done the very best that they could, given the circumstances at the time.

When Sheila and Ian talked, they shared their different perspectives of Danny. Although Ian did not deal well with Danny when he caught him stealing, Sheila made no judgements of Ian. This allowed Ian to talk openly about his feelings and his concerns for the way he treated Danny.

During this conversation Ian made some very important connections about his own childhood which helped him to understand some of the difficulties he was having with Danny. Had Sheila been judgemental Ian would not have felt safe to talk so honestly or reveal his feelings.

Touch. Always be thoughtful about touch. Don't assume that it's OK to put a hand on a shoulder, give a hug or hold a hand. Unless you know the person well and you have some agreed understandings, always ask before touching anyone.



Initially, active listening may feel awkward and uncomfortable. It can be very difficult to resist pursuing your own thoughts and feelings while you're listening. Or it may be even harder not to interrupt and tell the speaker what you think they should do. However to provide an effective thinking and feeling environment, the listener has to develop the habit of fully paying attention to the present and of putting aside her or his own emotional responses to what's being said.

PEER SUPPORT-DEBRIEFING SESSIONS

If we want effective communication to occur it's critical that we create a culture that acknowledges the validity of emotions. Workplaces can set up structures such as peer support-debriefing sessions as a tool to facilitate this. Basically these are structured, timed sessions between peers. In practice this means that one person has the space to think and feel with attention, to access what went well, what could have been done better and to review further ideas and strategies. While this is happening the other person is the listener. After an agreed upon time, as short as five minutes or as long as one hour, the roles are exchanged.

Structured listening is a useful habit to adopt. Knowing that you will get a turn at being listened to without interruption, takes the urgency out of many conversations.

Although talking through problems with fellow workers happens in workplaces already, it's usually in an ad-hoc fashion and is often not valued as legitimate work time. Because of this many people are reluctant to ask to be listened to and without a structure there's also the danger the sessions become watered down and turn into chatting.

Peer support-debriefing sessions can be incorporated into the workplace in several ways. Firstly they can happen spontaneously whenever anyone needs to be listened to. This means that there wouldn't necessarily be an exchange. Someone can ask another "*Could I debrief with you for 5 or 10 minutes*". This could happen for workers on all sorts of occasions. For example, if they feel stuck with a problem they're grappling with, or they've just had an unpleasant interaction with a difficult customer, or they want to think through an important meeting they're soon to attend.

The other way these sessions can be incorporated into the workplace is in an official capacity. For example, first thing every morning when people arrive at work they take 10 minutes listening to each other think through the day. This enables them to let go of any negative feelings they've brought to work and to discuss their goals for the day. At the end of the day, before they go home they can swap time again to review their successes, what got done and what must be carried over to the next day.

We all have the capacity to think clearly and to make good decisions for ourselves. By having a space where we can explore our ideas, have our thinking validated, release negative feelings and be asked questions that remove our internal barriers, we can make this possible.

Support sessions are an excellent management tool. Some managers have weekly, fortnightly or monthly supervision sessions with their staff. These sessions allow for an exchange of information to occur, problems to be identified and dealt with, goals to be set, and an examination of any other issues that either the worker or manager wish to discuss.

Managers who have regular support sessions with their staff find that it improves their relationships – both manager and staff get to know each other better. It also develops trust which helps when they have to deal with the difficult issues.

It is equally important that management set up the same peer support structures for themselves.

Summary

- Misunderstandings often occur at work when we don't communicate how we are feeling.
- Conflicts are inevitable – rather than fear them we can see them as an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and others.
- Most of us haven't learnt the skills to fight fairly.
- Managing emotions, assertiveness and active listening are all important communication skills.
- Support-debriefing sessions are excellent workplace practices to enable effective communication to occur.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING

Robert Bolton, Ph.D., *People Skills*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979)

Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand* (Australia: Random House, 1990)

Nancy Kline, *Women and Power* (London: BBC Books, 1993)



Would Someone Tell Me What's Going On Here

EMOTIONS AND THE CHANGING
WORKPLACE

*By gaining as much information as possible
about an impending change and by
managing our feelings, we will be in a better
position to keep thinking about our options*

The ability to adapt to change, and manage ourselves in the process, is one of the most important qualities we need for the world today.

We live in times of continuous change. No wonder we sometimes feel so overwhelmed that we long for the *good old days* (which of course weren't so good – they just seem that way on looking back!) At least the pace of life felt manageable. In my youth the biggest social changes I had to deal with were:

- A black and white **television** becoming part of our family life and the excitement of sitting together watching Elliott Ness in *The Untouchables*.
- Four young men from England with hair down to their collars coming to my home town. I remember as a teenager standing alongside thousands of others and getting a glimpse of the **Beatles** on their hotel balcony.
- Teaching in the country and giving my grade one class the afternoon off to go home and watch the first man **walk on the moon**. This was such an incredible feat, more so

because during my childhood a popular saying to emphasize the impossible was, "Oh yeah, that's about as easy as flying to the moon!"



NEW WAYS OF THINKING

Little has prepared us for the world today, certainly not our education system. In fact a lot of the education I received is either useless or out of date. Any basic computer can now hold far more facts than I could cram into my head in a lifetime of education. And the range and ability of technology increases daily. **Our future depends on us learning an entirely new set of thinking tools – where we grasp new concepts and make new choices.**

We know that the brain stores material inside existing files. So when a new problem is tackled, we're conditioned to go down the same track of previous answers. One thing we have to learn is how to break old concepts and try different combinations – sometimes called **conceptual block busting**. An example of breaking away from an old concept was when consulting engineer William Gordon was given the task of finding a new way to open cans. When he briefed his engineers and designers, he deliberately didn't use the word can opener. This encouraged unlimited thinking – many ideas were played with including the way banana's peel. The final solution was the ring pulls that are on tear-tab cans! **Using the word can opener would have limited their ideas.**



One of the best ways to encourage new ways of thinking is to incorporate movement and humour in the learning process. It has been proven that good moods enhance problem solving – laughing actually improves the ability to think flexibly and with more complexity.

In this age of instant communication and technology explosion, the major educational need is for new forms of thinking. We need to learn how to conceptualize problems and solutions, we need to have an openness to change, and we need to learn how to manage our feelings, so that they don't block our thinking. All the skills that robots don't have – yet!

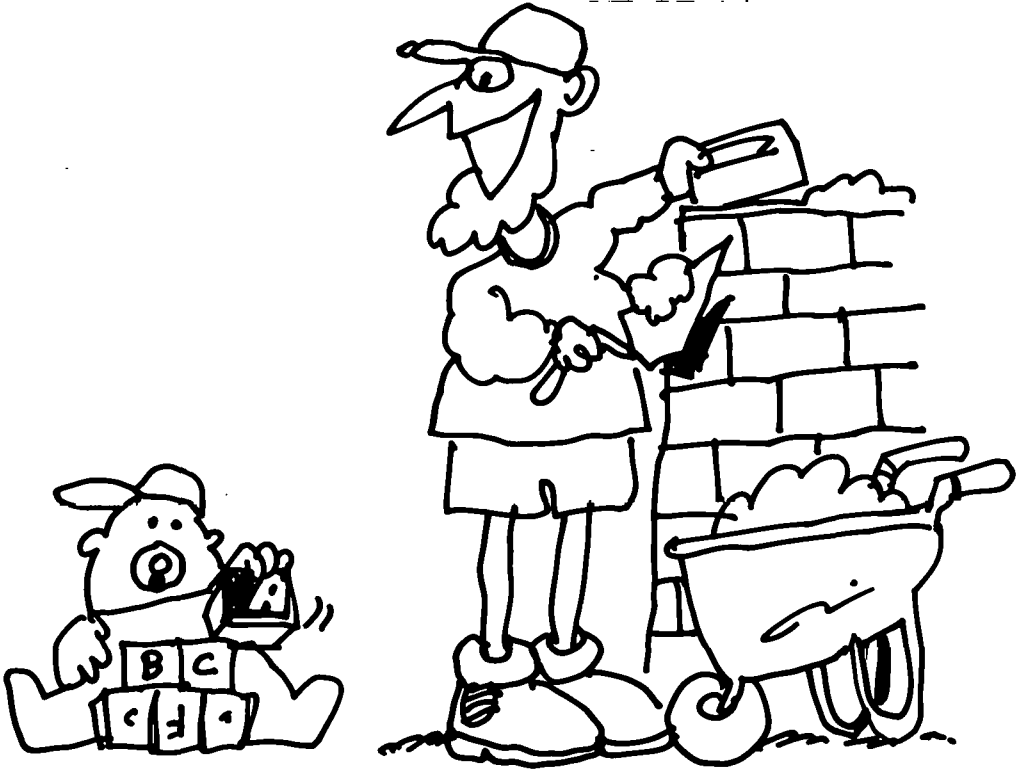
THE CHANGING SHAPE OF WORK

Attitudes to work

In the past, work was seen very narrowly. It was defined as what men did, for pay, usually following strict procedures with little room for personal interaction. Of course women also worked, often as secretaries, mothers, housewives, nurses, and assistants generally. This work, both paid and unpaid, was, and still is, often about the personal and seen as inferior and of lesser value and importance.

These attitudes to work have begun to change. Parenting and other caring occupations, are starting to be seen as productive work. Both women and men are moving into occupations which were previously closed to them. Home-based work is more and more a possibility and people accept the idea that they may

work in several occupations in one lifetime, instead of seeking a job for life. The concept of **self-managed careers** is becoming a reality.



Changing structures of workplaces

In the past manufacturing age, work was defined as people selling their physical labour. Now we're in the information age where the most important commodity is intellectual labour – thinking, information and communication. This requires a whole different outlook. In order to survive, organisations are undergoing major changes – adopting a whole new *mind set* or “paradigm”.

Old ways of working

In the old paradigm organisations operated on a hierarchical model – the boss at the top of the pyramid with the workers at the bottom.



The front line people were there to do a narrowly-defined job – they were not encouraged to think, to show initiative or to take responsibility outside of their role. If they messed up they were ordered into the boss's office, which was possibly the only time they'd ever been in there, and they got a dressing down or if it was a serious mess up, they were fired. It was a very paternal relationship; "daddy" would generally provide as long as you were good and did as you were told.

In hierarchical organisations the boss was the only one who made decisions, but of course it's hard to make an accurate

decision when you're so removed from the shop floor and insulated in your "ivory tower", which was often called bull sh....t tower! He had to rely on his supervisors and middle managers, his "guards", to keep the workers in line and to make sure that his orders were carried out. Middle management often found themselves in a very tenuous position, only one step away from demotion and joining the front line workers again. Their fear of this happening meant they often reported to the boss what he wanted to hear rather than what was really happening.

If the front line staff were faced with a problem it usually had to go all the way to the top for an answer. This brought all sorts of problems for both staff and customers. For example, when a customer with a problem contacted such an organisation they were either fobbed off with "*It's company policy*" as the reason why they couldn't be helped, or they were transferred from department to department because no-one had the authority to solve the problem. This often resulted in a very irate customer demanding to speak to the manager, knowing he was the only one who could make any decision.

There are still organisations operating like this. However such hierarchical organisations are increasingly becoming today's dinosaurs – they are slow, inefficient and outdated. **If workplaces wish to continue to operate and compete on a global market there needs to be a "paradigm shift".**



New ways of working

One major change that is happening widely is the fading away of the authoritarian manager. The successful modern manager now works in a more co-operative way and has highly developed interpersonal skills. She or he asks for support, is no longer removed from their staff and doesn't pretend to know everything. He or she is more approachable and listens, rather than tells. Of course there have always been managers that have managed like this, but they were rare.

Another change which is making organisations more efficient is the flattening of their structures. Basically this means having fewer positions between the boss at the top and the front line staff at the bottom. Many middle-management positions have been made redundant and people in the front line are being asked to do more or take more responsibility. Often this has occurred without any recognition in their pay packet. Understandably the results have sometimes produced feelings of resentment.

Two other changes that are symptomatic of the new paradigm are *empowerment* and *self-directed teams*.

Empowerment

Although this concept has become a "buzz word", the idea is important and has an impact on every employee. The basic intention of empowerment is to encourage every worker, regardless of his or her position, to take full responsibility and initiative for everything she or he does – ending phrases such as, "*It's not my fault!*", "*I'm not paid to think*" or "*It's not my job*".

Nordstrom, the hugely successful \$1.9 billion retailer, believes so strongly in the empowerment of workers that their policy manual has only one sentence: "**Use your own best judgement at all times**".

Many workers however, have undergone years of conditioning on the general theme of *"Just do as you're told."* *"Keep your mouth shut."* or *"Don't rock the boat."* The concept of empowerment requires a different way of thinking and can result in a mass of feelings bubbling to the surface. Some feelings and thoughts that employees may have are anger, a sense of betrayal by management, a belief that some of the changes, like multiskilling, are simply ways to get more out of workers and an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and negativity. **These feelings and thoughts must not be dismissed.**

Self-directed teams

In the past, organisations have always rewarded people for their individual efforts. Their salary systems and performance review systems actually encouraged people to compete with each other. Now, we're being asked to give up aspirations to be the company *star* and to embrace the team concept. Once again, employees will have a mass of feelings about this change.



As workplaces become more focused on teams rather than on the individual, skills that help to harmonise a group are more valuable than ever.

These concepts of empowerment and self directed work teams, and others such as co-operative managing, are radically changing the workplace, actually redefining work itself.

Many organisations are still in the transition stage where they have let go of some of the old ways of working but they're still in the process of developing effective new ways. This understandably brings chaos and feelings of confusion for those involved.

FEELINGS ABOUT CHANGE

It's crucial that the emotional side of any change be addressed, preferably before, or at least during the changes, even if there's been an intellectual acceptance of the change. Change requires facing an ending, which often means dealing with the painful feelings of loss. It can be very hard to let go of the familiar, with its memories and its history.

I've been noticing feelings of loss in my life in the last few years. I sold my house after fourteen years and although the house I now live in is much more comfortable, I have a feeling of loss for all the memories and the history attached to the

old house. I particularly miss the old walnut tree in the back yard – I loved watching it change and grow with the seasons.



Sometimes too when I'm with my grown-up daughter I have a sense of loss for the little child I once parented, who was uninhibited and spontaneous – even though I delight in the adult person I now know.

These feelings of loss must be dealt with or they will hinder the full engagement of the new.

When Len, Paul and Jack lost their jobs in the re-structuring process they needed assistance to deal with their feelings – of grief for the loss of their jobs and the status it brought, shame that they had failed,

and anger and a sense of powerlessness towards those who were “pulling the strings”. Because they have not properly grieved for their loss they still have unresolved and painful feelings years later.

STAGES OF CHANGE

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in her work with terminally ill people, identified certain stages that a patient goes through as they come to terms with their impending death. Research has shown that people go through similar stages when dealing with organisational change. Although it differs with the individual, where some may have difficulty at a particular stage and get stuck and some may go through a stage more than once, generally the four stages that people move through are **denial, resistance, adaption and involvement**.

Denial. When people and organisations are in this stage there's usually no understanding of the impending change or its impact. If there is a recognition there's often a denial of the effects or a denial that things ever actually change. Denial can be a useful coping mechanism, a form of self protection from the feelings of deep loss or grief. However although *ignorance is bliss*, this doesn't help in the long run. As we have seen, feelings don't just go away and unless they're dealt with they will eventually cause harm.

People move through the denial stage when their awareness develops – either by gaining more information or by a critical incident occurring. As much information as possible should be made available to everyone formally throughout a change, either via staff meetings or individual sessions. In many organisations, distribution of information is often not done as well as it could be. What can happen instead is that people hear different stories via the grapevine, or through rumours and gossip. One employee told me she heard the latest information because the CEO was standing

by her desk when he was discussing a meeting he'd just attended. This unequal distribution of information is divisive and destroys a team's spirit.

Some managers feel they shouldn't disclose anything until they have the full picture. They fear that until something is definite they don't want to lose credibility by getting it wrong. However this is the old paradigm of managing, where the manager has to know it all. Keeping people in the dark only builds a fear of hidden agendas and mistrust. It is much better to tell staff *"This is what we know, as of today."*



The confusion generated by a change needs to be addressed. Employees should have time to talk and explore their feelings, such as what the change means to them, what must be given up, what needs to be done differently, and what it will look like?

Maureen refused to acknowledge the impending change of new computers at her work. When she was confronted with having to learn new skills she was overwhelmed by her feelings. She felt inadequate and stupid, as well as angry that she had to learn something new. She was already overworked, and she didn't feel she had the time to play around and make mistakes while she was learning.

One afternoon she was reduced to angry tears because she couldn't get the new program to work. She didn't feel there was anyone she could ask to give her a hand. Here she was confronted with a change that she felt was forced on her without the right amount of information or a chance to deal with her emotions. She was overwhelmed by her feelings of discomfort of the new, and by her affection for the old and familiar.

Resistance. Resistance may follow denial, and can range from a negative attitude to solid opposition and/or sabotage, such as poor work, strikes, illness, and work slowdowns. Feelings which may surface at this stage include helplessness and powerlessness, fear that there's some danger involved with the change, anger at whomever may be responsible and feelings of loss and grief. **They're all legitimate feelings and need to be addressed.**

Graham found it hard to adjust to his new boss, Terri. He showed his resistance by disruptive and aggressive behaviour. He felt angry at Terri, and inadequate to deal with the new situation. He believed his only option was to resist and fight. Graham's confusion and intense feelings showed that he recognised the inevitability of the change – however without assistance he was unable to think rationally about his behaviour.

If people move through the first two stages of denial and resistance and process their feelings, they can move on to the third stage, which is **adaption** to the change by setting goals and problem solving. Ideally they will then move to the final stage of becoming fully committed and **involved**.

Passive/Aggressive

Probably the hardest behaviour to deal with is when someone pretends to co-operate with a change but is really resisting. Threats and coercion simply won't change such attitudes. Nor is it helpful to dismiss resistance as unimportant, or to try to deflect it so that it's not expressed. Resistance must be brought out in the open, even though this may provoke conflict of the type which some people prefer to avoid at all costs.

Paul was acting manager of a department store. However he wasn't chosen to fill the position permanently. Instead Gordon, an outsider won the position. Paul was very upset that Gordon was now his manager, doing the job that he believed he should have had.

Although Paul behaved pleasantly to Gordon, he began white-anting – undermining Gordon in different ways, such as, not giving him information and not doing some things that he'd agreed to do.

When Gordon realised what was happening he confronted Paul. Gordon listened as Paul spoke honestly about his feelings of disappointment and resentment, and Paul heard the effects his behaviour had on Gordon. Paul thought through his options. He chose to stay, apologised to Gordon and together they discussed future agreements to improve their working relationship.

Despite common belief, when an emotion is felt and fully expressed it loses its sting. Emotions that are not expressed will fester and cause the most problems.

In the workplace today, many people are feeling overloaded by the changes imposed on them. Less job security, more part time and casual work, downsizing, multiskilling and other changes can all pose a threat. With any impending change it's important to keep thinking and to ask questions like *"Is this a change that I want to embrace or resist?" "What do I stand to gain or lose?" "Is it one I have some control over?"*

By gaining as much information as possible about an impending change and by managing our feelings, we will be in a better position to keep thinking about our options.

Organisational Rituals

Managing change within an organisation is helped by developing and celebrating rituals. These can be as simple as having a cake for saying goodbye and for welcoming new employees. Milestones to mark progress can also be celebrated. The more occasions that can be built into the change process, the more opportunities everyone will have to talk about and process their feelings. Rituals can bring people out of denial because they see something physical going on around them. It can also help

decrease resistance because it gives people a transition to move from the old to the new.



Mike's staff were all struggling with the proposed changes to their workplace. Many people felt overwhelmed and most were unable to see any benefits in the change. Mike asked me to facilitate a team building session with him and his staff to help them cope with the changes.

One exercise we did was to create a 30 second commercial advertising their changed workplace. This generated a lot of discussion and questioning with much laughter as each team presented their efforts to the whole group.

After the session everyone felt clearer and more positive about their ability to cope with the changes. One of the highlights given in the feedback, was how good it was to have some fun together.

Change is never over. It is a myth to think "*once this change ends we will be back to normal*". **Today, continuous change is normal.** Some changes are exciting while others are frightening. There will always be emotions with any change. Even if they are not visible they must be brought out in the open and dealt with to enable people to keep thinking about the situation they face and the choices they have.

Summary

- Dealing with continuous change is now a reality in our lives – in the workplace many changes have occurred.
- How we manage and accept a change will depend largely on how we manage our feelings about the change.
- People often go through various stages when grappling with a change.
- Rituals and celebrations at work can assist in the change process, by acknowledging endings, beginnings and transitions.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING

Tom Peters, *Thriving On Chaos* (Great Britain: Macmillan London Limited, 1987)

Gordon Dryden and Dr. Jeannette Vos, *The Learning Revolution* (New Zealand: Accelerated Learning Systems, 1994)

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death And Dying* (Great Britain: Tavistock Pub. Ltd. 1970)



I Can't Have Fun At Work Anymore

VALUES AND EMOTIONS

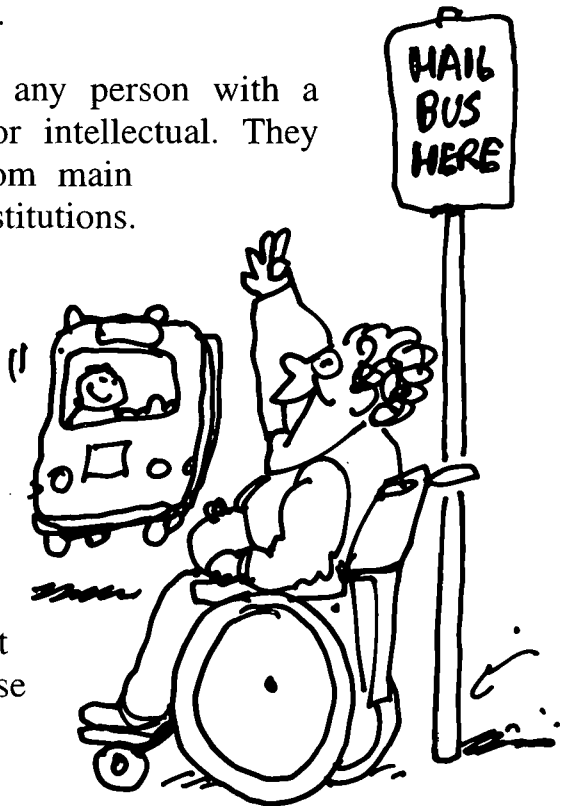
*Organisations must develop firm rules
against the expression of prejudice in the
workplace — people need to learn to act as
though they have none —*

Values and Beliefs

Many changes in the workplace and society are challenging our fundamental values and beliefs. As we question our old values, and sometimes discard or adapt them to enable us to live and work successfully in this changing world, we're often confronted with uncomfortable feelings.

Examples of this include:

- When I grew up the average family was a mum, dad and four children. Now it's 2.4 – with many children part of a blended family. In the International Year of the Family, in 1994, the question "*What is a family?*" was discussed. One query was – can two men or two women raising children be considered a family? With an estimated one in ten people homosexual, the possibility of such families are very real, whether they are officially recognised or not. Understandably, this is very confronting for those people who have strong views against homosexuality.
- As a child I seldom saw any person with a disability, either physical or intellectual. They were mostly segregated from main stream life and housed in institutions. Consequently I didn't have the opportunity to ask questions or learn about their lives. Now, as more people of different abilities take their rightful place in society, and in particular, in the workforce, temporarily able-bodied people must learn how to relate with those who are different.



I was confronted by my lack of awareness when a woman with no arms was a participant in a workshop I facilitated. Her mother must have taken thalidomide during the pregnancy and this young woman just had deformed hands growing out of the stumps of her shoulders. My first reaction was, "*Oh my gosh, how will she cope.*" I rapidly thought through the activities that I had planned.

I felt uncomfortable – I didn't know whether to address her disability directly, ignore it or discreetly make allowances for her, which may have been patronising. As it turned out she participated fully – she had driven to the workshop, took notes and had coffee, all with her feet. She was the telephonist for the company. (Talking with her, I learnt a lot that day).

- My youthful experiences of people racially different from me were mainly limited to books where I saw illustrations of different tribes, including Aboriginal people of Australia, and learnt about their way-of-life. The concepts that I was taught were that they were primitive and that our white society was more advanced and therefore superior. Of course these beliefs have had to radically change as I'm exposed to our increasingly racially diverse culture and as I learn more about other races and cultures and develop an appreciation of different customs and beliefs.
- As each generation lives longer and in better health we have to look at the issues of age and employment. For example, if the average longevity is 75 or 80 years then it is reasonable that people may wish to continue working well after the accepted retirement age of 65 years. Legislation has now made this possible by most States deleting the compulsory retirement age. This means that a worker can keep her or his job as long as she or he is capable of doing the job. However in a climate of massive youth unemployment, this challenges not only our attitudes and assumptions about ageing, it potentially breeds enormous resentment towards older workers and subtle pressures to resign.

Here is an example of how values have changed as reflected by government legislation, and individuals have to deal with their feelings about these changing values.

The negative emotions bound up in stereotypes and prejudice, the pre-judging of others, are learnt early in life. They take a long time to change. Diversity training programs of one day won't change deep seated prejudices. What can be changed however is what's done with those prejudices.

Organisations must develop firm rules against the expression of prejudice in the workplace – people need to learn to act as though they have none.

There are good business reasons for this. The changing workforce and their customers are becoming increasingly diverse. There's enormous potential in diversity if it's managed well.



In Australian workplaces Equal Opportunity legislation now makes it unlawful to treat another person less favourably on a range of grounds varying from State to State. These grounds include age, gender, sexuality, race, pregnancy, marital status and physical and intellectual impairment. This legislation is intended to make sure everyone is given "a fair go". It also forces each one of us to revisit our old values and beliefs and decide if they're still appropriate for today's changing world. Along with the challenge to reassess our values we're faced with managing the mixed emotions that surface.

CONFUSION AROUND GENDER ROLES

A principal area in which much change has occurred is in the roles of women and men, particularly in the workplace. These changes have resulted in a range of emotions, leading to confusion, conflicts, misunderstandings and claims of sexual harassment and discrimination.

In the past there was a general understanding about the way in which men and women should behave towards each other. The rules were clear and our roles were fixed. Men did "male" jobs and women did "female" jobs. Men were expected to do things like open doors for women, carry heavy things for them, not swear when women were present, pay for their meals, and stand up when they came into a room. With the changing times many of these rules are no longer applicable and misunderstandings may result. For example,

Joe held open a door for a woman recently, and she angrily told him "I'm just as strong as you are!" He was very hurt by her response because he had been brought up to believe it was a courtesy to hold open the door for a woman. On the other hand she may have seen it as a patronising gesture which came as the last straw in a day of a series of sexist put downs.

Bob puzzled about why he shouldn't whistle at women.

"I whistle at fat women and old women and any woman to give her a boost! Why don't they like it?" Of course the confusing thing is that some women do like it and even take it as a compliment.

Peter never knows whether to extend his hand to a woman for a handshake or not. Many men seem to prefer to wait and see if the woman does, a bit like the cowboy waiting to see who draws first! Peter said the other day he felt a right idiot when he extended his hand to shake a woman's hand and she did not respond. To cover his embarrassment he lifted his hand to smooth his hair, acting cool.



Sexual Harassment

Michael is part of an all male work team. He says the seven of them got on well, they all knew how to relate to each other. No-one worried about the language and the swearing and they could all have a laugh with each other. Sometimes at lunch they checked out a new magazine someone had brought, like Playboy. A few of the single guys kept the others entertained with stories about their Saturday night exploits. It was all in fun – they knew there was a lot of exaggeration and no-one meant any harm. This all changed when Barbara came to work with them. Michael talked about the resentment and confusion that developed within his work team.

“When Barbara came it completely split up the group. Some turned into real gentlemen and cut out swearing and got on to the other blokes about it. They started giving her special favours, like she didn’t have to do the heavy work ‘cos she was a woman. Well I reckon that’s not on because she was getting paid the same as us. Some of the other guys tried to come on to her, asking her out and sort of testing her to see if they could get a rise out of her. None of us felt comfortable poring over our magazines anymore. This really pissed off a few of the guys and so they started leaving the books where Barbara would come across them. All up she was trouble.”

Barbara’s story was a very different experience.

“I just wanted to get on with my work. This job was important to me. It was my first real job and I wanted to do well. But when I started I didn’t know how to behave with these men, as a work colleague. I didn’t know whether they expected me to act like them and swear and tell dirty jokes or be a lady and stay separate from the rest

of the gang and mind my own business, or act extra feminine and flirt with them. I felt they were testing me out. Some acted as if they resented me doing a “man’s” job and were waiting for me to fail. I didn’t know if I found the testing of me and the resentment the hardest or the fact that Dave made so many allowances for me it implied that I wasn’t up to the job.”

It all blew up when Barbara complained to Ted, the supervisor, about the pictures of naked women that were being left around. Ted tried to sort it out by talking to each of the men. However this wasn’t an area that he had ever received any training in and he felt unskilled to handle the situation. The level of ill feeling and resentment towards Barbara has increased – she is now seen as a dobber. She has put in a sexual harassment claim against her employer and has gone off on stress leave.

Ideally the whole work team should have been given the opportunity to talk about the change in their work team **before** any change was imposed. They needed the opportunity to discuss what it would mean to work with a woman and how they felt about it. They also needed information about sexual harassment legislation. Barbara should have been given some coaching prior to joining the group and then on-going support. Once the appointment had been made the whole team needed a team building exercise, in which they could discuss what constitutes appropriate behaviour in their workplace.

We now have words to describe sexual harassment – unwelcomed and unwanted behaviour that makes a person feel intimidated, offended or humiliated.

Helen is 34 years old and recently divorced. She’s worked as a secretary for a small engineering firm for the past

8 years, as the only female working with three male partners. Six months ago Jim, 38, joined the firm.

Jim asked Helen out several times, but she always made up excuses for refusing him. Recently, he's been coming into her office, and standing very close behind her. He's also been asking her about her sex life and hinting that he could "help her out". Several times he's relayed his own sexual exploits after a night out.

Although Helen has hidden her feelings, her work performance has suffered. She's frequently gone home upset, which has had a negative effect on her family. She eventually resigned from work.

Helen had become increasingly uncomfortable with these sexual-comments-and-innuendos-but-she-didn't-know-what-to do about it. Her organisation had no policy in place addressing sexual harassment and she and Jim were unaware that what he was doing was unlawful.

Sexual harassment can happen to anybody – men or women. It comes at a high cost to an organisation with loss of productivity, low morale, and loss of good workers, who resign or take time off on stress or sick leave. The cost to the individual is even greater because the emotional turmoil it causes spills over into their personal lives and affects their families and friends.

Sexual attraction

Unlike sexual harassment, sexual attractions and office romances are not unlawful. In fact, many people meet their future partners through work. However there is still the potential for relationships to sour and emotions to run riot and disrupt a workplace.

Rod, a senior manager in a large government organisation, was going through a tough time with his marriage. Elaine, a team leader and a member of his staff, was a good listener and was very supportive of Rod. They became close and eventually began a sexual relationship. Although they were often indiscreet, sending love notes by e-mail, they were both anxious to keep their affair quiet – Rod because his relationship with his estranged wife was still unclear, and Elaine because she didn't want her career path ruined through the repercussions of an affair with the boss.

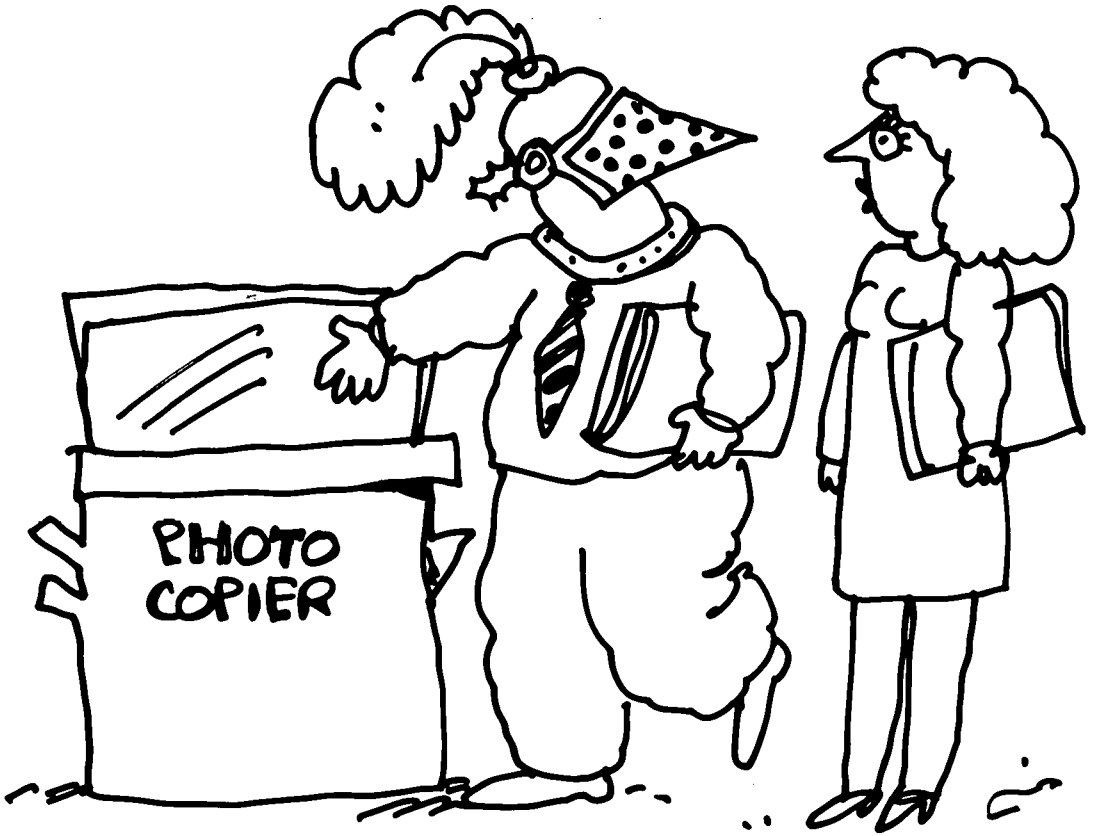
One day however a love note was intercepted by another staff member and soon the whole office knew. The gossip grapevine began working overtime. Everyone had an opinion. Not long after, Rod began dating his wife again. The result was an entanglement of emotions. Rod was torn between his wife and Elaine, Elaine was distraught about possibly losing Rod, and the staff had a range of feelings, supporting either Rod, Elaine or the wife. As can be imagined work performance suffered.

Some reminders for men when working with women

Women are still not equally represented in the top positions where decisions affecting the whole company are made. They may be unaware of the male rules, written and unwritten, that especially govern the top echelons and that these rules may disadvantage women in different ways. Women also have a very different conversational style to that of men and the speech patterns they use frequently give them less credibility. In addition many women still have the dual role as a worker and parent.

Men who are over-protective of women and show a great deal of respect, although meaning well, may actually harm a women's

image because the messages that these chivalrous men convey are often interpreted as saying women are weak, vulnerable and incompetent and we must treat them carefully.



Some reminders for women when working with men

Men who are steeped in their traditional masculinity find it very hard to have an equal relationship with a woman. Usually the only role models men have had for women in authority were either their mothers or their teachers. Consequently a woman may either be put in similar roles or else a man may see her as a sex object and come on and flirt with her. It will take time for us all, both women and men, to become comfortable with strong powerful women.

Men also have more difficulty than women in asking questions or seeking help. Consequently, even though a male colleague may look very self-assured, this may be masking a great deal of confusion and self-doubt.

Very few women or men in the work force today have much of a picture of what an equal relationship between the genders looks like. Ideally, we can learn from each other.

Neither gender should make assumptions about the other or say “*That’s just like a woman/man!*” This is not only disrespectful, but it does not give credit for all the ways both women and men are challenging their stereotypical behaviour. We need to base our relationships on mutual respect and a certainty that we will be able to work things out together.

CHANGE IN LANGUAGE

The meaning and usage of words constantly changes as the world changes. Words that were once acceptable may now be out of date or even offensive, especially in the workplace. For example, the term *New Australian* was used to describe anyone coming to live in Australia from another country. However this term set people apart and implied that people here for ten years are not as Australian as people here for fifty years. And of course compared with indigenous Australians we are all new Australians. A better and more current term to use is *Australian* – this refers to any Australian citizen regardless of their ethnic or cultural background or country of birth. Then use a qualifier such as *Vietnamese-born Australian* or *Arabic-speaking Australian*.

Because of these constant changes confusions and sometimes ill feelings can result. For example, some women may feel very angry if they're referred to as a "girl" while other women are flattered to be called girls and many women refer to themselves and other women as "the girls".

In **Communication** workshops I explain that using the term boy or girl for adult men and women can be demeaning and patronising. For example, in South Africa under apartheid rule, black men were always referred to as "boys", regardless of their age, as a method of keeping the racial dominance in place.

A complication is that if you are part of a group it is usually OK to use a term that may otherwise be offensive if used by people outside the group. It can be a way of challenging people's attitudes and taking the sting out of a word. So for example, women can call other women *girls*, gay men can call each other *poofers* and Italian Australians can call each other *wogs*.

And in the language of intimacy we generally have permission to use language we wouldn't publicly use. For example, calling your grandmother an *oldie*, or a good friend a *silly old bastard* may be a term of endearment. **Much depends on the context, the power dynamics of the people concerned, the way the word is said, as well as the particular relationship between the people.** There's much more leeway when there's a high level of trust which isn't always the case at work!

A guide to keep in mind – use language that's inclusive and non-discriminatory, and avoid using stereotypes, which are usually negative generalisations. For example, use the word *chairperson*, instead of *chairman* and avoid saying *he* when you mean everybody. Use the phrase *managers and their partners* rather than *managers and their wives*, because all managers are no longer only men, nor are they all married or heterosexual.

If you need to correct someone about their use of language, do so thoughtfully, with the aim of raising their awareness by informing them of why it offends you. For example,

“I know you didn’t mean to put me down when you called me “love”, but I want to be called by my name. Calling me “love” discounts my position as a worker and makes me feel uncomfortable.”

Political Correctness

There is generally much more awareness now about inappropriate words that may exclude, discriminate or stereotype a person or group than there ever has been. However there is also more resentment about *politically correct language*. I often hear people refer to the **thought police** in their organisation.



Unfortunately the term political correctness implies that there is a list of do's and don'ts, right and wrong, and if you get it wrong you'll be in trouble. Accusing someone of being politically incorrect is not helpful. Many people are confused or unclear about the rules of language because they keep changing – just as language keeps changing.

I believe it's much healthier to create a work culture that encourages people to think about these issues – a culture where it's safe enough to debate, ask questions, make mistakes, disagree and share information about why different terms may offend and what is more respectful language.

Rather than thinking, “is the language I am using politically correct”, we need to ask ourselves, “is what I’m saying completely respectful of others.”

HUMOUR AT WORK

This poses a real challenge for us all around humour because much of our Aussie humour is based on put-downs.

In one of the all-male workshops I was leading there was a very short participant, David. From the beginning there were lots of jokes about short people and good natured ribbing, with David joining in. Whenever any paper had to be stuck up high on the walls, of course everyone volunteered David! This went on throughout morning tea. I watched the dynamics of the group with interest. As lunch time drew near it was clear that the jokes were

wearing thin and that David had almost had enough. The interesting thing was that the whole group read the non-verbal communication and backed off. There were no other short jokes, the humour had moved on!



Sometimes it's said in the **Equal Opportunity and Harassment Awareness** workshops I conduct that this EO legislation is taking all the fun out of work. While it's true that like everything else humour is changing too so we're having to rethink what makes something funny or offensive, it's certainly not intended to create dull workplaces. There are many opportunities where we can have fun in the workplace.

Pat is a manager of a large team in a welfare department. She uses humour a lot to help her team deal with the daily stresses they all face. She says good humour is an excellent way of breaking down barriers, it never puts other people down and it's a chance to be silly, to play and

to let off steam. Pat points out however that you must be prepared to make a fool of yourself to make humour work!

Sitting in Pat's office is her toy penguin, Frank. All the staff have developed their own relationship with Frank, and there's much curiosity whenever anyone enters her office to see what Frank is up to. He's been found stuck in the files, up on the ceiling fan and on his head in the corner.

There have been numerous tales about his exploits and many opportunities for Pat and her staff to have fun together. A memorable time was when Frank was kidnapped and a ransom note was sent. The whole staff became involved in tracking him down. A deal was finally fixed when all the staff gathered at the local restaurant and Frank was returned!



Pat knows the value of humour in building an effective team. Healthy humour allows everyone to have a laugh together without resorting to putdowns.

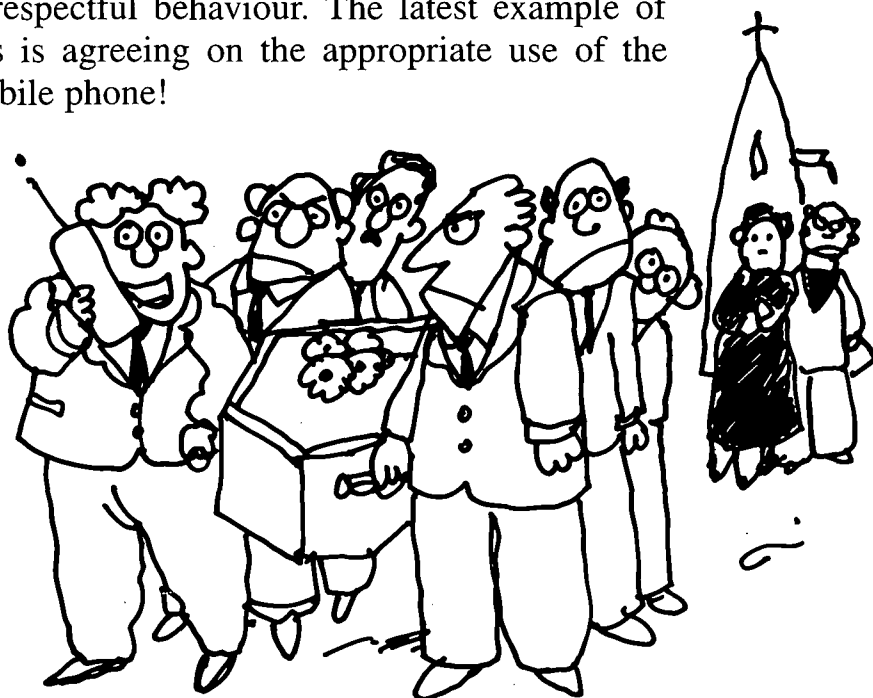
Often, when someone is confronted by his or her inappropriate behaviour, she or he will say it was only a joke. Unfortunately the

joker is probably the only one laughing. It's also common to accuse another person of not having a sense of humour when they don't go along with the jokes.

WORK ETIQUETTE

In today's changing world we have to rethink how to behave with each other and ask ourselves, "*What constitutes good manners? What are acceptable terms and language to use? How can I have fun without offending others?*" Behaving like ladies and gentlemen is out-dated. Instead good manners is about respectful behaviour between people. At work that includes holding doors open for anyone, shaking hands when you meet new people, regardless of age or gender, and being aware of language that's offensive, discriminatory, exclusive or gender specific.

Good manners also means negotiating on things that are unclear, such as who pays for the lunch, and taking turns in keeping the office kitchen tidy. Unlike the past, good manners is not a set of fixed rules, which means we are having to regularly question what is respectful behaviour. The latest example of this is agreeing on the appropriate use of the mobile phone!



Managing the increasing diversity within the workforce is challenging. We're all having to learn new ways of interacting and communicating. It is management's responsibility to deal immediately with inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. Whether this means talking to the employees concerned and developing agreements to change the problem behaviour or introducing some staff awareness training, the manager is responsible for seeing that all staff work in a safe environment, both physically and emotionally. As well, managers must model impeccable behaviour themselves.

It is good management practice to develop strategies to manage inappropriate behaviour, by acknowledging and dealing promptly with negative feelings and by encouraging discussions between workers about how they want to be treated and what they find acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the workplace.

Summary

- Many of the changes in society challenge our fundamental values and beliefs which will most likely result in strong feelings surfacing.
- The meaning and usage of words has also changed – language that was once acceptable may no longer be so.
- This has direct implications for humour – many of our jokes have been based on put-downs.
- We all need to think about what is acceptable and respectful behaviour between workers.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING

Charles Handy, *The Age Of Unreason* (Great Britain: Arrow Books Ltd, 1991)

John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are from Venus* (London: HarperCollins Pub. 1993)

George F. Simons and G. Deborah Weissman, *Men and Women – Partners at Work* (California: Crisp Publications, 1990)

*Emotional management
is the key to success*

A FINAL WORD

The value of managing our emotions in the workplace is still a relatively new concept. Many managers for example, continue to believe their work demands only their heads, not their hearts. Yet more than ever before successful workers today need effective communication skills to negotiate the continual changes they face and skills to sort out conflicts and to problem solve. **And an important ingredient of successful communication is emotional management.**

As organisations acknowledge the enormous costs of emotional mis-management, more emphasis will be placed on creating emotionally healthy environments – one where feelings are acknowledged and talked about like other work-related matters such as occupational health and safety and where the skills of emotional management are taught to all workers.

Imagine how much more productive and effective an organisation would be if everyone was able to manage their emotions, was sensitive to other people's feelings, was able to resolve difficulties and conflicts effectively and felt happy and pleased to be at work. By managing the emotional aspect of our lives we are also better able to balance work with all the other important parts of our personal lives, such as elderly parents, sick children, school and social events.

If there is one idea that I would want you to take with you, it is that by learning to manage and live in harmony with your emotions you will be better able to shape the kind of life that you want by making good choices for yourself, your workplace, your loved ones and ultimately the world.

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Kaye Cleave is director of **KAYE CLEAVE & ASSOCIATES**, a highly successful company that has worked with thousands of people in workplaces throughout Australia, assisting them to reach their full potential.

Kaye's academic studies include **Dip.Teaching, B.Ed., Grad.Dip.Arts,** and **M.A.** She has taught in schools both in Australia and overseas and been a TAFE lecturer and University tutor. She has also taught self defence, circus skills, peer counselling and line dancing as well as

being a student of different therapies including Gestalt, Psychodrama, Transactional Analysis and Co-counselling.

Kaye began her working career at the age of 10, as a contortionist and entertainer. This established her *flexible* outlook which led her from working in a bank at 16, to a variety of jobs including driving taxis, being a croupier in London, a hostess in South Africa, selling encyclopedias in Germany, and working in a factory in Israel.

Kaye now brings this wealth of experience to her work as a professional speaker and workshop leader. She is dynamic, informed and entertaining and is much in demand for her powerful presentations.

THIS BOOK WILL GIVE YOU

- an understanding of why you do the things you do
- tips on how to be in the driver's seat with your emotions
- some tools to sharpen up your communication
- hints on how to handle difficult people and situations
- ways to lighten things up around your workplace

By reading this funny, practical book you will strengthen your *Emotional Intelligence* and learn why emotional management is the key to success.