

Manage the People Stuff



Topics:

- Tend the garden, pick the flowers
- Ask me no questions and I will tell you no lies
- Damned with faint praise
- Sell yourself or else
- Can you judge a book by its cover?
- Make no enemies
- Read and digest
- Knowledge is power
- Patience is a virtue
- Write right



Tend the garden, pick the flowers

Growth is the only evidence of life.

John Henry Newman

Apologia pro ViatSua (1864)

Man is not the sum of what he has already, but rather the sum of what he does not have, what he could have.

Jean Paul SATRE 'Temporalite,'

Situations (1947-49),v.1.

Performance management is an on-going function of managers. Performance appraisal tends to be a planned, formal event happening every 12 months.

Explain to your people the purpose of performance management. Explain that it is about:

- helping us to be better at our job
- personal and professional growth
- supporting staff in their endeavour to improve
- providing meaningful training and development
- creating a desire for staff to willingly make the improvements needed
- increasing productivity
- improving quality of work-life

Here is a step-by-step performance management process you can use with each of your people:

- Agree the areas of staff performance which will be managed.
- Link these areas to the strategic goals of the organisation or your team goals.
- Identify and document the competencies required in these areas.
- Discuss and agree the importance of each of these competencies in assisting each staff member to do their job.
- Discuss and agree the extent to which these competencies are currently being performed by each staff member.
- Analyse the perceptions of the manager and the staff member and identify the competencies that both agree are important and not happening as much as they should.
- Select an agreed number of competencies upon which to focus for improvement.
- Discuss the actual meaning of the words that are written down to ensure a common interpretation.
- Agree the actions to take to demonstrate these competencies are being applied.
- Record these actions on an action plan.

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- Check that the staff member is capable of performing the identified competencies - if not:
- Explain what is required there and then
- Nominate yourself or another qualified staff member as a mentor or coach
- Offer specific training related to the specific need
- Ask the staff member what support they need from you to make the improvement.
- Record all things agreed during the discussion, stating the what, by whom, by when
- Inform staff that you will be meeting regularly (every 2 weeks) to review progress and so they can report on the things that were agreed to be done.
- Conduct these meetings every 2 weeks.
- Limit these meetings to 15 minutes per person.
- Ask the staff member to provide verifiable examples of what they have done so far.
- If they have made progress praise them
- If they have done nothing ask them "What do you intend doing between now and the next meeting?"
- Record anything that is agreed to be done by either you or the staff member.
- Ask them if they are having any problems and provide support where needed.
- Continue with this area of focus until you are both satisfied that the required improvements have been made.
- Select a new area for managing performance and start the process again.

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Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies

If you ask people confidentially what they want most in their job - if they're paid anything decent at all - they will say that they want a greater sense of self-worth.... And I think this giving of responsibility and respect and authority is one of the things that motivate people.

Fritz Maytag, President, Anchor Brewing Co, Harvard Business Review

There's no telling how far a person can go if he's willing to let other people take the credit.

Robert Woodruff, Chief Executive Officer, Coca Cola Inc. Magazine, August 1987

A manager was once asked, "How do you know if you are doing a good job?" His response was, "If I'm not getting a kick in the pants then things must be okay." Unfortunately, the only time some workers get any feedback on their performance is when something goes wrong. This is an example of negative reinforcement. That's probably not the intention of most managers, but that's how it comes across to the worker.

A business owner each year distributed a Christmas bonus to his work force. This caused complaints from some of his people because they got less than others. When they complained to him, he explained why. With each complainant, he went through a list of the things that they had done during the year which were examples of poor job performance or examples of low commitment or co-operation. Now (too late) they learned what the criteria were for getting the better bonuses.

People thrive on recognition and acknowledgment. We all know that, but we seem to take for granted the good performance of our workers and forget to acknowledge their efforts regularly. "Thank you. You did a good job there" delivered sincerely and when deserved costs you no time or effort, but has a powerful impact. This is especially important when staff have had to overcome unusual obstacles to succeed.

People have often mentioned to me that they would really welcome getting feedback on their job performance from their manager. And they often stress not just what they are doing well, but what they are doing that was seen to be unsatisfactory.

Recognition and feedback are important to maintaining and improving individual performance. Here are some things to do:

- Identify the expectations and perceptions of staff concerning the degree of recognition and feedback they receive. Ask them. It might be uncomfortable for you and them, but no pain, no gain.
- Ask staff to suggest ways to provide recognition and feedback.
- Conduct regular 'recognition and feedback' meetings or have this as an item on the monthly agenda.
- Look for opportunities to acknowledge the good performance of staff.
- Identify the aspects of their job that each person does well.
- Identify the aspects of their job that each person could improve.
- Provide each person with regular feedback covering things done well and things to improve.

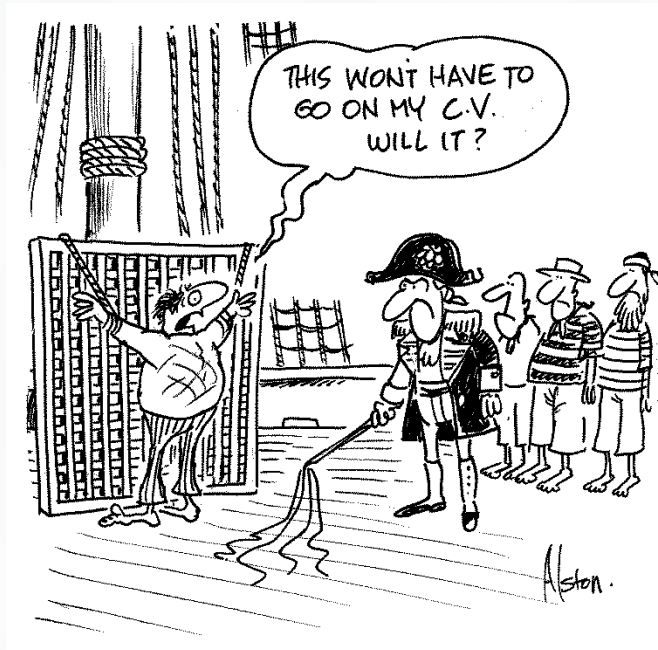
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- Acknowledge 'right efforts' as much as 'right results'.
- Seek regular feedback on your own performance. To make this easier on both parties ask them to tell you things they would like you to do more of and to do less of.
- Make provision for rewards and recognition to be given.
- Praise in public, provide constructive criticism in private.
- Direct feedback toward behaviour that the other person can do something about.
- Describe the actual behaviour rather than evaluating it when giving feedback on performance – omit judgemental terms if they are negative.
- Maintain a balance between positive and negative feedback
- Check to see that the message about future expectations was received as intended.
- Give feedback about the particular behaviour to be addressed at the earliest opportunity.
- Discuss and agree standards of performance.
- Ensure that your expectations of each person are clear and accepted.



Damned with faint praise



When you conduct a survey of staff to identify things they would like to see improved related to how they are managed, recognition and feedback always ranks high on their list.

Here are some ways to improve recognition and feedback:

How to praise

- Give your praise as soon as possible after the event.
- Make it personal - use the employee's name.
- Be specific and objective about what you are praising.
- Explain why their performance is important to you, to themselves and to the company.
- Be positive and sincere in manner and tone of voice.
- Don't give with one hand and take away with the other by asking for an even bigger and better effort next time.
- Make it short and sweet and don't embarrass them.

What to praise

- Give appropriate praise to employees for :
 - (a) outstanding performance
 - (b) consistently good performance
 - (c) standard performance when usual performance is below standard
 - (d) improvement in performance following counselling
 - (e) right efforts even if the right results aren't there just yet.



- Know what your people are doing so that you know when to praise.

How to give constructive criticism

- Maintain self-esteem. Separate the aspect of their behaviour from them as a whole person.
- Focus on the behaviour rather than the person.
- Use a counselling approach.
- Do it in private.
- Do it as soon as possible after the event.
- Review one problem at a time.
- Give credit for what is being done right.
- Be specific and objective about what concerns you.
- Agree the facts.
- Discuss the reasons.
- Look for solutions together.
- Agree on an action plan for both of you.
- Show your confidence in the employee.
- Leave the door open for further discussion.

Everyone who does the best he can do is a hero.

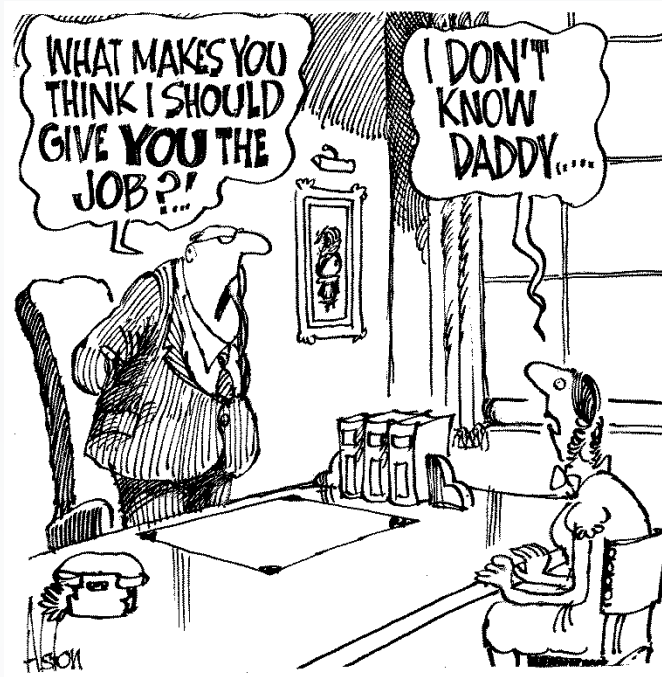
Josh Billings (Henry Wheeler Shaw), 1818-1885, American writer

If you must deal in criticism, confine your practice to self-criticism.

The Little Red Book of Alcoholics Anonymous



Sell yourself or else



If there is ever one time in your life when it does not pay to be humble, it is when you are being interviewed for a promotion or a job. This is the time to promote you and sell your features, advantages and benefits. Don't rely on the interviewer to ask you the right questions to bring out your strong points. There are good interviewers and bad interviewers.

Don't get the wrong idea. Bragging is to be avoided. Just demonstrate with verifiable examples how and why you meet or exceed the selection criteria for the job. You don't know the selection criteria for the job? If you can't find out beforehand by asking the person conducting the interviews, then analyse the job advertisement and list the criteria you would have to demonstrate to win that job.

Don't like selling yourself? Tough. Because if you don't who will? It is not the interviewer's role to convince her that you are the best person for this job. That's your role. And don't rely on your resume. That really only gets you to the interview. Everybody can look good on paper. And while I'm at it, don't rely on your referees. It's good to be able to nominate referees as opposed to not being able to nominate a referee - but that's about all they're good for. No one ever nominates a referee who won't speak highly of them. Your best referees are your previous bosses and long standing customers. Don't nominate your long term 'drinking buddy'.

Now if you're half way normal, you'll be nervous before and possibly during the interview so if you prepare thoroughly you will feel less nervous and increase your chances of winning that job. One way to prepare is to consider what the interviewer is looking for during an interview.

The interviewer will be most impressed by the candidate who can:

- provide verifiable evidence that they are the best person for the job.
- demonstrate (as far as possible) during the interview that they can meet the selection criteria.
- get on with people and fit into the organisation and work group.

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- demonstrate honesty.
- demonstrate reliability.
- demonstrate their experience in resolving likely problems associated with the job.
- analyse a question before answering.
- demonstrate good listening ability by responding to the question asked.
- express their opinion clearly.
- provide evidence of achievements in previous jobs relevant to the criteria.
- back up any claim they make.
- ask intelligent questions about the job and the organisation.
- demonstrate a stable job background or can explain why they may have had many jobs.
- readily provide answers to questions to show they are prepared.
- answer hypothetical questions.
- display knowledge of the organisation.
- show a genuine interest in and awareness of the job.
- show potential to advance to a higher position (possibly).



Can you judge a book by its cover?

It is said that interviewers make up their minds about a candidate for a job within the first 4 minutes of a job interview. They then spend the rest of the interview looking for evidence to reinforce their impression.

This can make it tough for the candidate who might not impress at first sight, but would be quite capable of doing the job well.

Most professional recruiters are aware of this ‘first impressions’ tendency and are able to resist the impulse to make an early decision. They stay objective and continue to look for verifiable evidence of the candidate’s suitability for the duration of the interview.

Here are some things to say and do to help create and confirm a positive impression:

- Arrive 5-10 minutes early.
- Sell your features, advantages and benefits - don’t rely on your achievements to speak for themselves or the fact that it is all in your resume. Be aware that the interviewer may not have absorbed all the information contained in your resume.
- Give a brief summary of the reasons why you can excel in this job, even if not asked.
- Demonstrate with examples your personal attributes, e.g. honesty, reliability, trustworthy, hard-working, etc.
- After answering a question, ask “Have I satisfied your question?”
- If you don’t understand a question, state your interpretation of the question and ask if that is what they mean.
- If you don’t know how to answer a question, say “I don’t know from experience, but my opinion is....” Don’t try to bluff your way through an answer.
- Wear neutral clothing. Leave your green, striped suit, canary yellow shirt with purple poke-a-dot tie for another time.
- Don’t rely on the interviewer to ask the appropriate questions.
- If you are nervous (everybody is) don’t calm your nerves with alcohol.
- Maintain normal, direct eye contact without glaring or staring.
- Tell the interviewer the true reason behind your separation from an employer.
- Be yourself because that’s all you can be.
- Refrain from swearing, complaining about your current or last job.
- Check that - your nails are clean, your breath is fresh, your teeth are clean (no food stuck between them) your hair is neat (no dandruff), your deodorant is working.
- Articulate clearly by focussing on how you are saying word beginnings and endings - avoid slang like ‘gunna’ (going to) or ‘dunno’ (don’t know).
- Thank the interviewer for their time and the opportunity to meet with them.

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- Check that a follow up response to the interview has been discussed.
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the organisation and your enthusiasm to work there.
- At the end of the interview say, “Look you’ve answered all my questions to my satisfaction, when would you like me to start?” (No – just kidding.)

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Make no enemies

In dealing with cunning persons, we must ever consider their ends, to interpret their speeches; and it is good to say little to them, and that which they least look for.

Francis Bacon, 1561 – 1626, Lord Chancellor of England, Of Negotiating

Forewarned, forearmed; who threats his enemy lends him a sword to guard himself with.

Louis de Dorfort, c. 1640 – 1709, French-born English statesman and general,

Arden of Feversham

Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead

Benjamin Franklin, 1706 – 1790, American printer and statesman,

Poor Richard's Almanack.

If you are planning a long career in the corporate rat-race, you will need to be adept at corporate or office politics. Don't get me wrong, job performance and learning potential are essential factors in career advancement, but many a bright flame has been extinguished by the murky waters of office politics.

'Politic' is defined in the Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary as (relating to a person) - sagacious, prudent, (of actions, etc.) judicious, expedient; scheming, crafty.

If you assume that everybody is honest, forthright and to be trusted, you will, unfortunately, be disappointed. Hopefully, the majority of people you will meet are all these things. Just beware that some people will look you straight in the eye and, with all the sincerity that they can fake, will lie through their teeth. It is nice to be wise after the event - it's even nicer to be wise before the event.

Playing the political game occupies a fair amount of the time of people in bureaucratic organisations in both the private and public sectors. Based on my own experience, however, I'd say that it is rife in the latter.

As politics is a fact of organisational life, you may as well be aware. Here are some things to consider:

- Most people, when push comes to shove, will operate in such a way as to protect or further their own interests. If it is a choice between your interests being served and their personal interests, which choice do you think most people will take?
- Some people have long memories. At the time of an incident where you did not behave according to their expectations, their reaction might be low key in public, but that incident will be stored away for future use when you have long forgotten it.
- People will not always tell you exactly what they're thinking, but they will convey to you an impression that they are.
- Check around, discretely, and find out the likes and dislikes of senior people within the organisation. Observe them in the workplace and try and gain an idea of their idiosyncrasies. Watch their reaction to the behaviours of other people and mentally note what seems to annoy them and what they seem to favour.
- Find out who are the 'friends' and 'champions' of the bosses and cultivate a relationship with these people.

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- Keep your opinions about the performance of higher management to yourself.
- Without being obsequious, take time to acknowledge and thank the personal assistants and secretaries of the bosses.
- Be aware of what you are saying and who you are talking to in social situations or at office or factory functions where you are consuming that old tongue loosener and judgement destroyer - alcohol. Many a career limiting comment has been noted while somebody was under the influence of the demon drink. Don't confuse increased social intercourse aided by alcohol as an invitation to tongue-kiss the boss or as an invitation to quietly tell the boss where he or she is going wrong.
- Think carefully about the message your boss is giving you. Some people don't like to be directive or precise. A vague question or a subtle hint might be their way of saying to you 'this is what I want you to do.'
- Don't contradict or challenge the boss in public unless you are very sure of his or her willingness to let that happen without repercussion.
- Along your travels through the organisational highways, make no enemies.
- Don't judge or criticise the contribution of other managers in public. Instead of making judgemental evaluations of their contribution, ask open questions.



Read and digest

Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.

Francis Bacon, 1561-1624, Lord Chancellor of England, *Of Superstition*

A man ought to read just as inclination leads him, for what he reads as a task will do him little good.

Samuel Johnson, quoted in Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, July 14, 1763.

What is reading but silent conversation.

Walter Savage Landor, 'Aristoteles and Callisthenes,' *Imaginary Conversations* (1824 - 53)

Did you know that the average adult reads at the ability level of a 12 year old? To succeed as a manager we need to be better than the average. More importantly, it means that there are some skills required for effective reading that some managers do not possess.

How do we balance the need to gain full meaning of what we are reading with the need to limit the time we actually spend reading?

To state the obvious, reading is an important skill for managers to have. You need to be able to read quickly and to get to the heart of the matter without having to wade through reams and reams of text. Skimming and scanning are ways to do this that will enable you to focus on the content without having to read every word.

There are many types of speed reading courses that train you to glean information quickly. Much of the methodology relies on some simple skills and the reader practising and developing those skills.

In no particular order, try these to help you read for a quick understanding of content.

- Remove any external distractions before you start to read.
- Read through the contents page before tackling the article, document or book - this will give you an overview of what it contains.
- Identify topics that relate to things you need to know about at that moment.
- Read any summary that may exist before reading anything else, e.g. the executive summary - this will provide you with a context for the rest of the text.
- Read the first and last chapter of the document / book.
- Read the first and last paragraph of every chapter.
- Read the first sentence of every paragraph.
- Look at the chapter headings or document title and brainstorm in your mind what you know about this topic before you start reading.
- Identify key words which are relevant and current to the information you want. Then read from the top and bottom of a page and locate these words.
- Use a high-lighter to help you locate clusters of key words - if there are a lot in one area then read all the surrounding text.

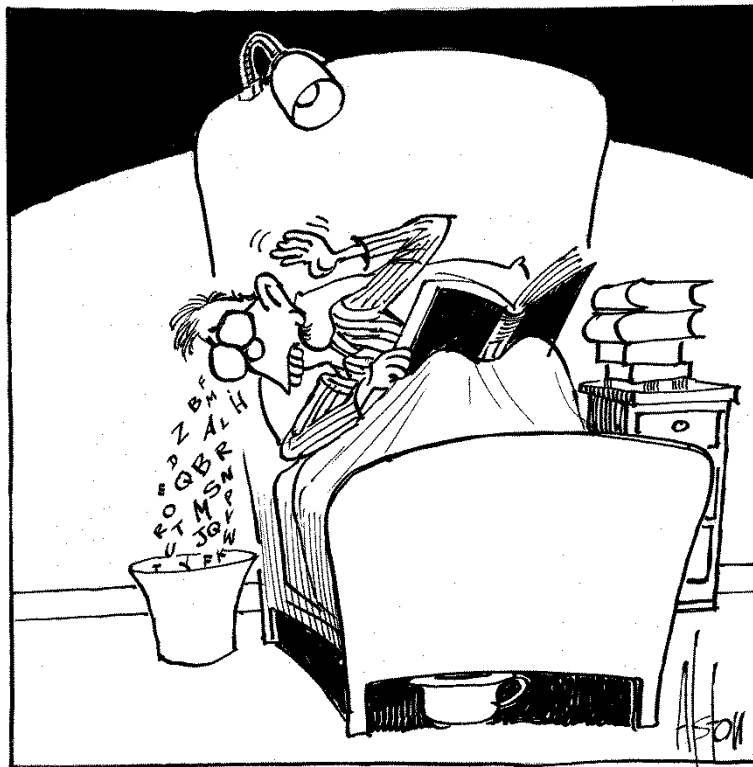
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- Locate words with which you are unfamiliar - jargon, acronyms or unknown. Then find out the meanings of these words before starting the overall task.
- Read the sentence before the one containing the words, the sentence containing the words and the sentence after the one containing the words.
- Use the index to locate key topics or text about which you may wish to find information.
- Read any glossary of terms that may exist.
- Make notes about key points for later reference.
- Mark (underline or circle) the important text so you can refer to it quickly at a later date.
- Discuss with other people, who have read the same text, their interpretations, understandings, impressions, thoughts, evaluations and opinions of what the content was about.
- Re-read the text where it has not made sense to you.



Knowledge is power



How do managers keep up to date with all the required reading that crosses their desk? If you are like most managers the answer is - with great difficulty. Yet you need to keep your knowledge base 'topped up'. Ever thought about planning how you read?

Most of us probably read in an ad hoc, reactive manner. There are benefits in taking a more planned, proactive approach to reading. You plan your recreational activities, you plan your holidays, you plan your family life, you plan your work day, etc. so why not plan your reading, i.e. the what, how and when you read.

It is fair to say that some of the things you have to read are outside your control, but most of what you read is within your control.

Here are some tips on proactive reading without loss of comprehension (Check your motive for improving your reading practices. If you have none, then read something else).

- Sort your reading into two piles - recreational reading and business reading. (Here we are mainly focusing on business reading – memos, reports, printouts, books, magazines, newspapers, periodicals, journals, etc., related to your business.)
- Sort your business reading into four piles. (1) - must read, (2) - should read, (3) could read, (4) - never read.
- Next, take the material in pile (3) and place it in pile (1), (2) or (4).
- Now take the material in pile number (4) and place in your rubbish or re-cycling bin. You'll enjoy that.
- As new material comes your way, immediately assign it to pile (1), (2) or the bin.

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- Allocate a set time during your day or night for business reading and put it in your diary or use your lunch break. Organise others so that you won't be disturbed during your allocated reading time.
- Read books, magazines, journals, etc. the same way you read a newspaper. Start a book at the beginning, but scan each chapter only reading headings or sub-headings which are of interest to you or which you need to read.
- Before you read a book, for example, decide some questions to ask of the book. Write them down - make a list. If the topic is completely unknown to you, scan the list of contents and the subject index and then develop your list of questions.
- Start with your most important question and using the list of contents or subject index read only those pages of the book which deal directly with your question.
- Then choose the next most important question and repeat the process.
- Scan the relevant chapter for key words or phrases which relate to your questions.
- Go to the end of the chapter and read the summary of that chapter and only read the chapter if it interests you or you need to.
- When reading a page, decide what key words or phrases you are looking for before you begin. Using your finger to focus your eyes, move your finger from left to right going down the page only stopping when you find the key words or phrases you are looking for.

All I know is what I read in the papers.

Will Rogers, 1879-1935, American actor and humorist.

Knowledge is power they say. Knowledge is not only power it is good fun.

E M Forster, 1879-1970, English novelist



Patience is a virtue

If you will please people, you must please them in their own way; and as you cannot make them what they should be, you must take them as they are.

Lord Chesterfield, Letters to His Son, Dec. 5, 1749

We shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it.

Abraham Lincoln, Speech, April 11, 1865

Some people have an ability to tolerate fools more readily than others. Is this because it matters to them that they are liked by everyone?

Those people who do not suffer fools lightly, more often than not, couldn't care less what people think about them. Or they may take a view that to get the job done they do not need to put up with the 'rubbish' that is often spoken by these offending individuals. Whilst this attitude may have an upside it also has a downside.

Consider the consequences if managers are openly aggressive, rude, intolerant, abrasive or impatient with customers, colleagues or staff. Like it or not, sometimes we have to bite our tongue and humour the individual in question for the good of all.

Just how do people, who seem to be unruffled by the irritating few, do it? What mental thoughts do they possess that help them get through the conversation? If you are prone to low tolerance try some of these thoughts and actions.

- I am only going to be with this person for 'x' minutes.
- I know they are different to me, but let's look at the positive things they are saying.
- I am going to control the conversation by sticking to the point in question, setting the agenda, establishing and agreeing the time we will have together and bringing them back on task should they deviate.
- I will filter only the information I need. The rest will flow straight through. What they are saying is not personal and therefore does not need to ignite my negative thinking.
- I know this person is like this. I have an expectation therefore I can handle it. To get angry or irritated will be a weakness on my part and I am better than that.
- When they do things which annoy me I will say or do to counter its negative effect.



Or try thinking about these.

- Is it worth giving this person a hard time if the long term consequences are going to be worse?
- Identify the specific things which annoy you and ask them if you can have a frank discussion about how it affects you. Once this has happened discuss what alternative things they could do in place of that offending behaviour
- You may use humour to dismiss the 'ridiculous' things they say. You may change the subject to allow you to 'catch your breath' by saying "look, so and so, I'm just going to get a coffee would you like one?"
- Identify the underlying motive for their manner. Analyse this and draw a firm conclusion as to why they are like they are. When they do something which 'bugs' you, you have then got a rational reason for their 'irrational' behaviour.
- Ask other people how they refrain from 'losing it' with this person. Ask them what thoughts go through their minds when they are talking to them.
- Consider what the consequences are for you of the relationship not working. If the consequences are serious keep reminding yourself of this and adjust your behaviour accordingly.
- Everybody does the best they can according to their beliefs at the time.

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Write right

That writer does the most who gives his reader the most knowledge, and takes from him the least time.

Charles Caleb Colton, c. 1780-1832. English cleric, sportsman, and wine merchant. Lacon.

In language it is simply required that it conveys the meaning.

Confucius, c. 551-c. 479 B.C. Chinese philosopher and teacher. Analects.

Therefore, __ since brevity is the soul of wit,

And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes, __

I will be brief.

William Shakespeare, 1564-1616. English dramatist and poet, Hamlet.

When managers speak, their words, though possibly not forgotten, will disappear into the ether leaving no permanent record to praise or condemn them. However, when managers commit their thoughts to print in any form, their competence may be on permanent display.

For that reason alone it is important that a manager develops skill in written communication.

Preparation

- Why am I writing? What do I want to achieve by writing?
- What actions do I want to occur as a result of writing?
- What facts do I want to convey?
- What opinions do I want to convey?
- How much does the reader know about the topic?
- How will I get their attention in the first paragraph and create a desire to read on?
- Why is it important that they read what I am sending?

Getting started

- On a blank sheet of paper describe the topic in two to three words.
- Using the brainstorming technique, write down any thoughts that come to your mind. Write a few key words only that relate to the thought. Write randomly and quickly. Suspend judgment. Just try to write down all your thoughts as fast as you can. Anything goes. Go for quantity.
- Now go through each item on your list and delete those that are not relevant to your topic or to your purpose.
- Now look at the remaining items and put them into a logical sequence. What is the first thing you want to write? Write the number '1' alongside that item. Now what's the obvious thing to write next? Write the number '2' alongside that item, etc.
- Each item becomes the topic of each paragraph.

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- Now you have the structure for your letter or memo with a logical sequence of thoughts.

Check

- Does each paragraph lead on to the next?
- Have I clearly stated what needs to happen in the last paragraph?
- Have I clearly stated what I will do?
- Have I clearly stated what I would like the reader to do?
- Have I used sub-headings and highlights?

8 Rules

1. Decide what to say.
2. Put it in sequence.
3. A paragraph for each step.
4. Immediately identify the subject.
5. End by pointing the way ahead.
6. Use short simple sentences.
7. Use punctuation to help understanding.
8. Use short words.