



## Topics:

- It's a whole new ball game. About management.
- Just be yourself. Advice.
- Consistency is the best policy..... Or is it?
- Proud-belly. Treat with dignity.
- Two heads are better than one? Groupthink.
- Horseplay (monkeyshines). Stress.
- Ignorance is thriving. Motives drive behaviour.
- Damaged goods. Problem employees.
- When you make a mistake that's an error. Reducing errors.
- Karma – what you put out, you get back. Relationships.

# Understand Behaviour



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## It's a whole new ball game. About management.

There are three main components to managing the workforce – technical, conceptual and human. Most managers are most competent at dealing with the technical issues. They find the conceptual issues somewhat more challenging. And it is the human issues with which they have most difficulty.

This is not surprising when you consider that under technical we are dealing with concrete things where 2 plus 2 equals 4. As we move into the conceptual issues and, even more, the human issues, we go from the concrete to the abstract where 2 plus 2 can equal anything. As far as I know, there are no absolute, fail-safe formulae to explain or predict human behaviour.

This explains why many managers don't. Don't what? Don't actually manage. They are far more comfortable dealing with concrete things and prefer to avoid the abstract things where life gets a bit tricky.

My experience is that managers who are qualified in disciplines that are based on the laws of exact sciences and that are underpinned by logic and rational thought tend to struggle most with the notion of management. One reason being that people don't always behave rationally. Which is in fact, one reason we need managers. To deal with irrational behaviour.

The 'people' issues are referred to as the 'soft' issues. This is unfortunate because it is these issues which are the hardest to deal with and resolve effectively.

When a person moves into a management position, their role changes dramatically. Their relationship with people takes on a new focus. Unfortunately, too many people can't make that vital shift. Why is this so?

These are some of the reasons. Their temperament or psychological wiring is out of kilter with this role. They have never had effective training in dealing with the human issues. They don't see that the human issues are important or if they do, they don't care. They have low self-awareness with little idea of the impact they have on others.

And another major reason is to do with relationships. Most of us like to be liked. If given a conscious choice between relationships which are happy and harmonious and relationships which are unhappy and tense, most of us will choose the former. This is where the problem begins. A manager is accountable for the performance of his or her workgroup. When someone's performance is unacceptable, the manager must take action. This can be an uncomfortable experience for both parties and for other people in the workgroup. It can often result in conflict, damaged relationships and create tension. So, many managers take no action or do something totally ineffectual so as not to upset the relationships.

Of course, when handled in the right way relationships don't have to be damaged. In fact, relationships and the level of respect a manager receives can be enhanced.

Our focus in our tools and opinion blog is to show managers a variety of ways to deal with the conceptual and human issues which all go to make life so exciting, challenging and rewarding.



### Just be yourself. Advice.

**Can you imagine taking Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Amin, Hussein, Mugabe, et al aside when they first displayed signs of their evil and deranged selves and advising, “Hey Adolf, just be yourself” or, “Joe, baby, be yourself” or, Idi, my man, take it easy bro’. Just be yourself”?**

What we would have preferred is that these people were anything but themselves.

Unsolicited advice is generally a waste of everybody’s time. And one of the most useless bits of advice I have heard people give is, “just be yourself “.

Being ‘themselves’ is probably what has lead them to their predicament or feelings of discomfort in the first place. The thing that will move them from their current predicament or feelings or avoid the same experience in the future is to adopt some **new** or **different** ways of thinking and doing. In other words, not being themselves.

Another conundrum about advice is that the people who could most benefit from advice are usually the people who least heed advice or who never seek advice. This is one of the reasons why they are who they are. Balanced people who want to mature, grow and become enlightened seek and act on advice most of their early and adult life.

Managers are placed in a position where they can provide counsel to their staff of their own initiative or they may be asked for counsel by one of their people. Many a career can be enhanced if the person is provided with the right counsel early in their career.

One piece of advice I remember reading when I was 22 which has stayed with me was from Peter Drucker – arguably the world’s pre-eminent management consultant and writer. It was to do with the many people who get into a rut in their lives and stay, unhappily, in that rut the rest of their lives. They seem to accept that it is their lot to be in this rut. The gist of the advice was that if you find yourself in a rut (as I did at the time) and your job is unfulfilling; don’t see the experience or yourself as a failure. Pick yourself up and point yourself in another direction and try that experience. And if that doesn’t work for you, try another experience, and another, and another until you find the right situation for you.

And, if you spend your whole life searching it doesn’t matter because you’ll live a very interesting life full of a variety of experiences. (I’m sure Peter Drucker explained it better than I have, but this is what I remember and it worked for me). I am also sure that Prof Drucker would acknowledge that this is a simple concept that becomes more difficult in the execution. However, it is a freeing notion that will begin you on the path to take the action only you can take to get you out of that rut.

The performance of some of your people may be suffering because they are in a rut or in danger of falling into one. It may well pay them to consider other work experiences within their organisation or in an entirely new environment.

You may be wasting your time trying to make a square peg fit into a round hole. How many square pegs sitting in round holes do you have in your workgroup?



### Consistency is the best policy..... Or is it?

"It is not best to swap horses while crossing the river." Abraham Lincoln, June 9, 1864

"There are those who would misteach us that to stick in a rut is consistency – and a virtue, and that to climb out of a rut is inconsistency - and a vice." Mark Twain, "Consistency" (1923)

"When a man you like switches from what he said four years ago, he is a broad-minded person who has courage enough to change his mind with changing conditions. When a man you don't like does it, he is a liar who has broken his promises." Franklin P. Adams, Nods and Becks (1944)

"I wish to say what I think and feel today, with the proviso that tomorrow perhaps I shall contradict it all. Emerson, Journals, 1841

**I knew a man once who was consistently inconsistent**, or so I thought. He argued, though, that he was inconsistently consistent.

Many a 'high energy' discussion has swayed around whether people have been treated consistently and fairly. This is particularly so in cases of non-compliance. If we deviate from being consistent it is often perceived by staff as being unfair.

Every situation requires us to examine the individual circumstances in isolation before we make any decision. Our course of action is then determined by the findings of our examination.

The processes by which we examine a situation and then make decisions must be consistent. It is useful to make these processes transparent and to inform staff about how they are applied.

Ideally, during the daily operations of organisations, existing policy determines a course of action to follow. Systems and procedures are established. Unfortunately deviations, variations and non-compliance occur during the implementation of these systems and procedures.

When people don't comply with the policies and procedures, many managers turn a blind eye. Here is a list of reasons why managers do not apply a consistent process for dealing with non-compliance (again, we are exploring the beliefs managers may hold as this could be part of the problem):

- Concern over production / profits – the process of dealing with non-compliance may cause disruption or loss.
- The possibility of escalating industrial action.
- Potential for conflict – fear of other person's reaction.
- Lack of consistency of approach by others.
- Concern of being criticised for doing so.
- They don't think it is important.
- They may be placed in a position to enforce rules about which they may not have full knowledge or which are ambiguous.
- They don't see it as their role.
- They can't be bothered.
- They don't want to be seen as being the nag.

# Understand Behaviour



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- Embarrassment to them and / or the person.
- They don't know how to approach the conversation.
- Concern about damaging their relationship with that person.
- A perception that they are usurping someone else's role.
- Lack of clarity and consistency of the rules – they might not be right.
- They may be asked to explain and justify policy about which they do not agree.
- Cultural differences, e.g. between 'blue collar' and 'white collar' workers.
- The person will dislike me.
- Laziness – the amount of effort required to do so.
- Fear of being seen to be victimising the person.
- It will make little difference.
- Don't have the time.
- No consequences if they don't.



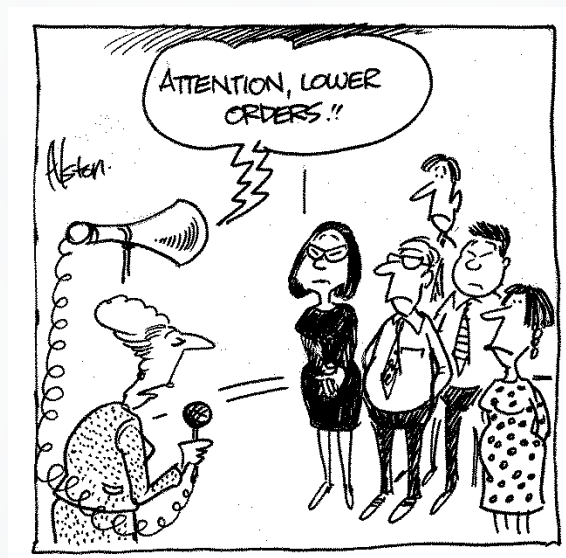
### Proud-belly. Treat with dignity.

**If there is one thing common to all human beings** regardless of our culture, our status or the nature of our work, it is the desire to be treated with dignity and to feel a sense of dignity about our lives. To treat somebody with dignity is to imbue them with a sense of self-importance. To convey to them that they matter, that they count.

If you listen to indigenous people who have been dispossessed of their land and their way of life by a more dominant race of people you will find that their loss of dignity is something that they feel hardest.

A person's sense of dignity is no less important to people in the context of their work life. But it is not always obvious when people experience a loss of dignity because it is a very personal and deeply felt hurt seldom expressed. However its expression will manifest itself in many other ways none of which are in the best interests of the employer.

It is possible to talk to and treat people in such a way that their dignity does not suffer. Equally it is easy to talk to and treat people in such a way that their dignity does suffer. In fact it is easier to do the latter because it takes no consideration and less time.



**For a manager to treat people without dignity, he or she would probably hold mindsets similar to these:**

- My way of seeing things is always the best way.
- She doesn't count because she is only a typist.
- I'm a qualified professional person which makes me superior to him.
- This person is so dumb that they haven't got a clue about anything.
- These people are inferior to me.
- If what I say hurts then that's his/her problem.
- The only thing these people respond to is their hip pocket.
- They're morons so you treat them like morons.



- I need to judge this person and let her know what I think of her.
- It's important to tell people exactly what you think of them.
- Putting people down is my way of putting them in their place and proving my superiority.
- These people are so ignorant their views are worthless.
- Your opinion is far less important than my opinion.
- You haven't done anywhere near as much with your life as I have with mine so you don't really count in my scheme of things.
- My way of thinking is far superior to yours.
- I know more than you about everything.
- They don't deserve any better than what they get.
- Their opinions are based on ignorance so they don't count.
- I'll show them how important my opinion is by showing them that their opinion is of little importance.
- I like to embarrass people.
- I'm far more intelligent than these people.
- I have much more worldly knowledge than these people.
- The customs these people practise are so stupid.
- If it wasn't for me, these people wouldn't even have a job.
- These people are so naive.
- This person hasn't accomplished anything near what I have accomplished.
- I am far more sophisticated than she is.

**Of course, to treat your people with dignity you will need to hold mindsets opposite to these or more considerate than these.**

"One who publicly shames another has done the same thing as shedding that person's blood."

Babylonian Tamud, BavaMetziah.

"One of the greatest diseases is to be nobody to anybody."

Mother Teresa, Roman Catholic nun and humanitarian, *Reader's Digest*, December 1987



### Two heads are better than one? Groupthink.

It is generally accepted in organisations that the decision making resulting from the combined thinking of a group is superior to that resulting from the sum of the individual's thinking.

This only holds to be so, however, when at least two key conditions exist. One – that there is no fear of repercussions or reprisals for speaking forth-rightly and honestly. Two – people are aware of the underlying causes and the consequences of choices.

There is a funny phenomenon that I have often experienced along my travels through the maze of organisation life. I meet a manager on a one-on-one basis and he or she (mainly he because I have met far more male managers than female ones – by a ratio of about 4:1) strikes me as an intelligent, aware, thinking individual with a reasonable outlook on life and people. Later on I hear stories from his or her staff about decisions made that suggest, to them at least, the very opposite. Management decisions resulting from group-think sometimes make you wonder what happened to those intelligent, aware, reasonable managers.

One of the perplexing characteristics of the human race is that we continue to perpetuate situations or decisions which most of the stakeholders will tell you do not work. Yet we all continue to play the game.

Let me digress. A case in point is prison. Talk privately to all the players – the prison officers, the prison management, the justice administrators, the social workers, the psychologists, the prisoner welfare groups, the lawyers, the judges, the police, the politicians (depending on whether they are in or out of government), the victims (all of us), the families of the criminals, and especially the inmates themselves – and they will tell you, if they are speaking honestly and with awareness, that prisons don't work.

Sure they work from the point of view of deterrence for most people. But, they don't rehabilitate. The rate of recidivism is as high as 65% in many prisons. Prisons churn out angry, frustrated, resentful men (mainly) who go back into a society that doesn't really want them and expects them to live peacefully and lawfully. Ask yourself this question? Are we building less prisons now per capita than we were, say, 10 years ago? Are we housing less prisoners?

Crime touches everybody's life at some point in some way, often at many points in many ways. No one is immune to crime. It costs the world trillions of dollars – every year. In Australia, population around 22 million, crime costs \$13 billion per year. It cost another \$8 billion in public and private efforts to prevent and counter crime. That's more than \$1000 per year per man, woman and child, around \$2800 per household. (In fact, the costs are higher because these estimates were made in 1996. Source: Australian Institute of Criminology. Visit their web site at [www.ozemail.com.au/~born1820/coststi.htm](http://www.ozemail.com.au/~born1820/coststi.htm)).

Now it is a complex problem and there is no simple solution – probably a multitude of simple solutions implemented in concert with each other. But why perpetuate an action that is demonstrably ineffectual?

Governments of both the left and the right tend to be reactive to this problem. What would happen if governments were to take a pro-active stance and organise a summit on crime?



Invite the best thinkers and doers in the nation. Not just those players directly involved including the criminals but people from other spheres of life – the brightest minds, the best scientists, the best leaders in alternative thinking, captains of industry, prominent unionists, the movers and shakers of society.

Give the nation's most prominent thinkers and doers the brief to come up with creative, innovative and feasible strategies and tactics to address the underlying causes of this major social problem.

Wishful thinking? Probably, for it would take a rare body of politicians with the vision, the courage and the stamina to push through and implement an initiative of this nature. Be a great election platform and potential vote grabber though, wouldn't it?

So what does all this have to do with managers? Organisations (groups of managers) do the same thing. They continue to perpetuate activities that engage no one (think of formal Performance Appraisal Systems) and/or don't address the underlying causes. Why? Because it is too hard to find a better way. Or because the political and psychological climate within the organisation creates a lemming-like, groupthink mentality where individual insight, awareness and wisdom is sacrificed on the altar of short-term financial gain.



### Horseplay (monkeyshines). Stress.

**F**unny word 'horseplay' if you stop and think about it. HORSEPLAY. Horses playing? A play about horses? A play for horses? A play starring horses?

Horseplay means rough, rowdy or boisterous play (Collins English Dictionary). Or, if you prefer, Roget's International Thesaurus has buffoonery, buffoonism, clownery, harlequinade; clownishness, buffoonishness; foolery, tomfoolery; shenanigans, monkeyshines.

So my question is, "To what extent should a manager allow monkeyshines in the workplace?" Now I know that this is not a burning question in the minds of most managers and, if you're still with me, you're probably wondering where this is going. To tell you the truth, as I compose this very sentence I don't know myself, but hang in there and we'll see what happens. Have faith.

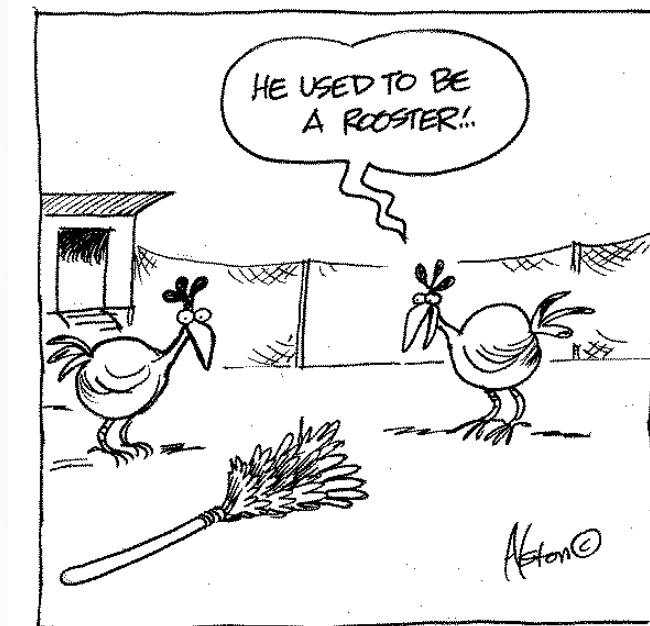
What degree of tolerance should a manager extend to horseplay in the workplace? None - zero tolerance - if personal injury, damage to property or equipment, violation of other people's rights or loss of quality, service, productivity or efficiency is possible.

However, consider this view. People at work are subjected to various degrees of stress. At its worst, stress is a killer. Less dramatically, it affects people's health, it affects relationships in and out of work, it contributes to poor decision making, it contributes to low motivation, it contributes to staff turnover, it contributes to inefficiency, waste, rework and errors and loss of productivity.

People need to be able to let off steam in the workplace. Laughter is the one of the best stress release responses available to we humans. (It may be available to animals as well – consider hyenas, monkeys and kookaburras as just a few that come to mind, and I reckon I've seen the odd dog grinning too – but it doesn't appear to be as widespread).

Humour, especially when directed at oneself, can be a great way to diffuse a tense moment or to allow an avenue for stress to be released. A happy, unstressed workplace is usually a more productive workplace. Provided none of the above consequences are possible, it will probably pay a manager well to turn a blind eye to the odd bit of horseplay in the workplace.

As the Readers Digest has told us for decades, and as was recently scientifically verified, humour is the best medicine. So next time you spot a bit of **harmless** horseplay show your human side and join in the fun. Respond rather than react. If the monkeyshines (what a neat word) transgresses the boundaries, put on your manager's hat and agree with your staff what is acceptable and what is not.



It is better to bend than to break.

Aesop, c. 620 – c. 560 B.C., Greek fabulist, The Oak and the Reeds.

Humour is just another defence against the universe.

Mel Brooks, Comedian, writer and director, *Rowes, The Book of Quotes* (Dutton, 1979).

(Burnout) is one of the greatest dangers facing us. If you lose your sense of humour and the ability to step back, you will go nuts.

Sam Missimer, Vice President, Clancy-Paul Associates, *Computer and SoftwareNews*, April 17, 1987.

Twenty five years ago, we had more intermittent stress. We had a chance to bounce back before we encountered another crisis. Today, we have chronic, unremitting stress.

Geneva Rowe, Psychotherapist, *Newsweek*, April 25, 1988.



## Ignorance is thriving. Motives drive behaviour.

**U**nderstanding the atrocities that human beings continue to commit to other human beings all over the world takes some deep thought. It is sad to reflect that despite our great advances in technology, in one sense, we have not evolved much from primitive humankind. We don't know how to overcome the pursuit of property, to overcome the political, ideological and religious barriers to feed the world population and we don't know how or have the will to live in peace.

Are there simple reasons to explain the Holocaust, the rape and murder by the Japanese in Nanjing, the killing fields of Cambodia, the torture and murder in Kosovo, the slaughter in Rwanda, the atrocities in Stalin's Russia, the purges in China, the human rights abuses in Iraq, Zimbabwe, Algiers, India, Indonesia, Afghanistan, South Africa, Australia, Columbia, Timor, Argentina and America – to name but a few? (Don't panic. If your country is not listed here, it probably could be.) Or are the reasons why we do these things to each other more complex?

And while there is no comparison, the mind sometimes boggles at the ways we treat each other in the less bloody workplace. For a manager to be effective, it helps to have an understanding of self and others. While it may be complex, let's try and keep it simple. Here are some basic concepts to think about to aid your understanding.

**FEAR** - Much counter-productive behaviour is based on fear – not physical fear so much, but psychological fear. Fear of losing something. Anger, bullying, violence, conflict, oppression, aggression, cowardice, abuse, obstinacy, vulnerability, resistance, sabotage, negativity, and other counter-productive behaviours are manifestations of fear. It helps to ask this question, "What are people fearful of or fearful of losing in this situation?"

**MOTIVES** - Motives drive behaviour. To gain understanding of other people's behaviour, think about their obvious motives and their hidden motives. It is the latter which can give you great insight. Think about their (and your) needs and wants as a human being in terms of giving their life a meaning, making sense of their world, responding to perceived threats, maintaining their dignity and self-esteem.

**UNMET WANTS** - In any situation where people are behaving counter-productively, think about the things they want from the situation. Describe their wants from their point of view. Make a list. Again from their perspective, rate the extent that they would perceive that their wants are being met. When your own emotional temperature is rising or you feel your inner tension increasing or you are feeling wronged, ask yourself the same question, "What are my unmet wants in this situation?"



The one thing to do is to do nothing.... You survive humiliation and that's an experience of incalculable value.

T.S.Elliot, 1888-1965, English poet, critic, and playwright, *The Cocktail Party*.

Experience does not err; only your judgements err by expecting from her what is not in her power.

Leonardo da Vinci, 1452-1519, Italian artist, inventor, and scientist, *Notebooks*

Experience is the child of Thought, and Thought is the child of Action.

Benjamin Disraeli, 1804-1881, English Prime Minister and novelist, *Vivian Grey*

The most brilliant persons are not always the happiest or the most esteem'd; more rarely still the best loved. Too much presumption in their excellencies, too little indulgence to the defects of others if it does not totally destroy our admiration certainly eliminates our affection.

Elizabeth Montagu, 1720-1800, English essayist, *The Letters of Mrs Elizabeth Montagu*



### Damaged goods? Problem employees?

**M**ost people respond reasonably when they believe that they are treated reasonably. During your career as a manager, you will meet some people that despite your best efforts continue to be a thorn in your side. You may find that you inherit 'damaged goods' among your staff. If you have tried every means at your disposal and these people are maintaining their stance, then shift your focus to the rest of your workgroup and concentrate on maintaining or developing their performance.



My point is that you may have to accept that these people are unchangeable and that you may be stressing yourself unnecessarily by thinking that you must or can win them over.

By 'damaged goods', I refer to people who have been damaged somewhere along their journey of life and work. Deeper exploration would probably reveal that they are bitter and resentful about something that happened to them or didn't happen for them in the past. They probably have many unmet wants in terms of their desires and expectations about their life and their work. Low self-esteem will probably be lurking in there somewhere. They will probably be the result of poor parenting.

#### 'Damaged goods' reveal themselves in a number of ways.

- They tend to have an external locus of control. That is, when things go wrong in their life or they make mistakes, they tend to blame factors external to themselves. It is always somebody else who has caused the mistake or created the problem. Or it will be a fault in the system or in the equipment that they are using. Someone, but never them, is to blame for all their problems.
- They tend to have narrow perspectives or underdeveloped beliefs.
- They tend to have ineffectual ways of dealing with criticism or suggestions that they could do something better. They close up quickly and get very defensive.



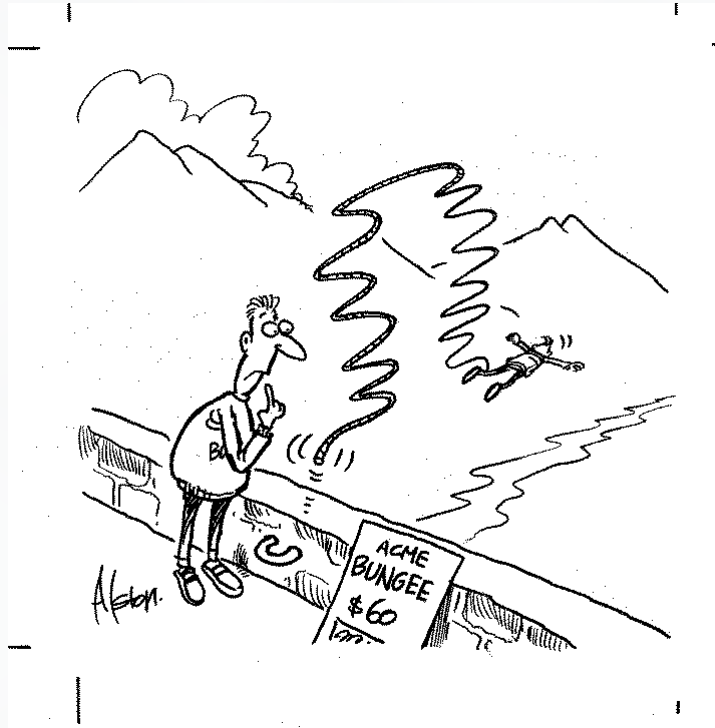
- They are not inclined to embrace change or new initiatives. They resist and block change even when it is transparently obvious that it is for the better.
- They will disparage the efforts of management. Often they use sweeping generalisations and exaggerations when referring to past deeds of management.
- They adopt a negative position easily and early often without finding out the facts about a proposal or before even giving a new initiative a chance to work.
- They are very good at telling you what is wrong with everything, but they come up short with feasible ways to make something better to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.
- When given an opportunity to voice their opinion in a constructive way in an open forum, they often stay silent. But you will hear them running down the person or the proposed change or the new initiative behind the backs of the proponents of the new initiative or change.
- Their general conversation is peppered with complaints or bitching about one thing or another. Not much appears to go well in their life. The glass is definitely half empty from their perspective.

So what do you do about 'damaged goods'? Shooting them could be kind. You may well be putting them out of their misery. If that is part of your human resource management policy, do nothing. (Provided you have made competent attempts to get them on the program). Act as though they are your best employees. Pretend their negativity is not there. Talk to them as you would to your other reasonable employees and, hard as it may be, don't be part of their game.

Importantly for your own well-being, accept that 'damaged goods' sometimes go with the territory of being a manager and that after all is said and done you may have to adopt a 'live with it' approach.



**When you make a mistake that's an error. Reducing errors.**



"To make a mistake is O.K. To make the same mistake twice is unforgivable."

Anon.

"Intelligence is not to make no mistakes, but quickly to see how to make them good."

Bertolt Brecht, *The Measures Taken* (1930)

"Man must strive, and striving he must err."

Goethe, "Prologue in Heaven", *Faust: Part I* (1808), tr. Philip Wayne

**"When you make a mistake, that's an error."**

No, not a Confucian saying but an infamous quote from an old football coach I used to know. Another way of looking at it is:

"When you make a mistake, that's a dollar."

There wouldn't be an organisation where mistakes haven't happened and there wouldn't be a mistake that didn't have some cost attached to it. To err is human but human error is avoidable in most situations.

To the average worker the link between the errors they make and the dollars they cost is not always obvious. They seem, for the most part, totally dissociated. Because of that perceived dissociation, when you are aiming to reduce errors, it is worthwhile to point out the actual associated costs in time and dollars.

Just about all improvement processes aim to reduce errors. Some are more successful at doing this than others. Some cost more to implement than the actual cost savings made. When we set out to reduce errors a good starting point is to analyse why the errors occur in the first place.



Errors occur because:

- The instructions are unclear.
- The goals or objectives are not discussed or explained.
- The processes and systems are inefficient.
- The employees lack the skill or knowledge to do the job.
- The employees lack motivation.
- The planning is inadequate.
- The materials are sub-standard.
- The equipment being used is inappropriate.
- The time constraints are unrealistic.
- There are not enough people to do the job.
- There are no quality checks in place.
- There are no training processes in place.
- Productivity demands over-ride care.
- There are internal distractions to the employee – stress, sickness, fatigue.
- There are external distractions to the employee - family problems, financial difficulty.

Errors appear in many ways. Do any of these things happen in your organisation?

- Unsatisfactory service provided.
- Faulty product produced.
- Incorrect product produced.
- Excess product produced.
- Wrong product provided.
- Damage to plant or product.
- Injuries to workers.
- Environmental harm.
- Wasted resources.
- Wasted time.
- Orders filled incorrectly – too many, too few.
- Equipment break-down.
- Breach of policy, regulations and legislation.



- Excess stock on hand.
- Unavailable stock.
- Incorrect stock ordered.
- Undercharging for services.
- Overcharging for services.
- Incorrect quotations.
- Reworking faulty product.

And of course there are the people side effects as well.

- Frustration.
- Anger.
- Annoyance.
- Stress.
- Demotivation.
- Boredom.
- Disharmony.
- Distrust.



### Karma – what you put out, you get back. Relationships.

**A** passenger had turned up late to catch his flight from Sydney to Los Angeles. His flight was about to leave. He had lost his cool and was beginning to take out his frustration on the traffic officer (as they were referred to at the time) who was processing his baggage and ticket. There must have been a hitch because it was taking the traffic officer some time to process his boarding pass. The visibly angry passenger lost it completely and started to abuse the traffic officer.

Now during the entire transaction, the traffic officer was unruffled. He stayed calm and composed and even managed to keep smiling while the foul-mouthed passenger let fly.

Finally, everything completed, the passenger stormed off swearing loudly as he went. The next passenger who had observed this disgraceful behaviour commented on the traffic officer's calm and smiling manner. The traffic officer replied, "Well, you see that guy's on his way to Los Angeles. But what he doesn't know is that his baggage is on its way to London."

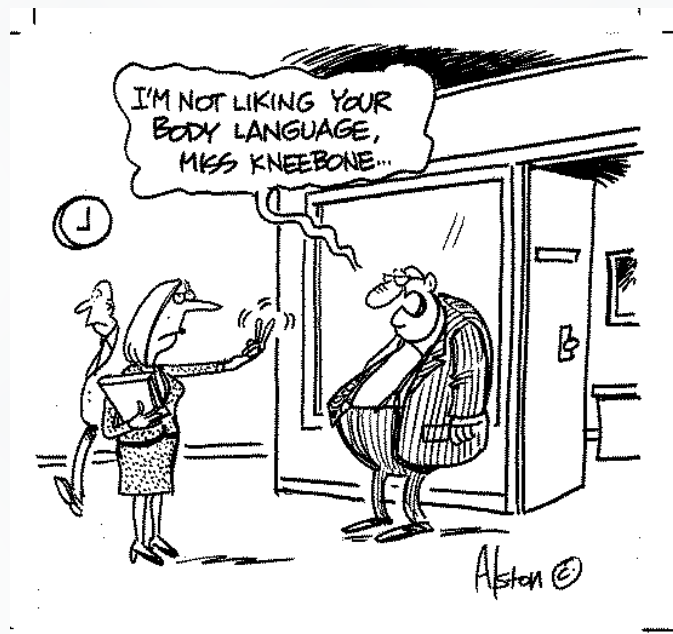
It never ceases to amaze me when I am at a restaurant and the waiter makes it obvious that he/she doesn't like having to be a waiter and doesn't like having to serve you. What is amazing is that the waiter would like to get and probably expects a tip. And then she/he is indignant when he/she doesn't get what she/he expects.

People's attitudes are on display all the time and are easy to read if you are observant. A large amount of the messages we give out are non-verbal so that what we are feeling often shows. People serving customers need to keep this in mind. So should the customers, maybe more so if they want good service.

No doubt that there are some rude, ignorant customers who sorely test your patience. They are suffering. They're having a bad day. Probably a bad life. But unfortunately for them they lack the awareness to realise that they are creating their bad day (and life). Of course, that's no reason that they should take it out on you.

If you find that, as a manager, your relations with people are strained or you find it hard going to get people to respond positively to you, you may need to consider what messages you are putting out. What seeds are you sowing that are producing an unwanted harvest? Why do people react to you the way they do?

When everything in life seems too hard, and not much seems to be going well for you, it is time for some courage, reflection and self-analysis. It takes courage and a high level of insight to realise that we could be the cause of our unsatisfactory work relationships or other stress in our life.



Unfortunately, too many people lack the integrity, the courage and the self-awareness to accept that they may be to blame when people turn off them.

What is your usual level of frustration or dissatisfaction or anger or anxiety or stress? What things are not right in your personal life? How wide are the gaps between what you desire in your life and what you are getting?

How might you be showing your thoughts and feelings about gaps in your life in your relations with work colleagues? How do people hear your tone of voice? How do people interpret your facial expressions? How do people interpret the way you talk to them?

You might ask this question of somebody you trust to give you an honest and balanced answer, "What is it about me that seems to rub people the wrong way?"