What successful people really do: Part 2

How to have rewarding relationships

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Relationships – a key to success

We were taking a break in a workshop and the regional manager met me in the corridor. 'How's Jim going?' he whispered.

'He's doing okay.'

'He's got a problem talking with clients. We had one ring the other day and say, 'Don't send him again, we just can't relate to him.'

Jim was a well-qualified engineer, but now his boss was seeing him as someone to be hidden away from clients and much less valuable to the company. Some of his colleagues had come into the workshop, shaken my hand with a welcoming grin, asked me about my flight and the workshop ahead, then engaged those around them in conversation until it was time to start. Jim and a couple of others went straight to their seats and barely acknowledged even their colleagues.

I see the same contrast in relationship-building skills with sales people. Our firm has a long-standing relationship with Chris who sells us computers and attends to our more complex software problems. He impressed us from the start with his questions about our needs. How would we use our new computers? Would we be using graphics programmes? Which ones? His rivals just did a pitch – one of them very loudly, to show his enthusiasm for the product. Chris quietly advises us out of buying the deluxe model when the standard model will meet our needs just as well. We trust him. For businesses, relationship-building skills are the key to exponential growth.[1]

Trust is a common thread for all strong relationships, whether commercial, collegial, friendly, family or romantic, but all healthy relationships share several other threads too.

1.1 Natural attraction

The research confirms what you might have suspected: Opposites don't attract very often. We find people who seem just like us far more attractive and studies of couples have shown that we are attracted to people who are similar in many ways, including social status, attitudes, nationality, age, intelligence, height and even eye colour.[2] Studies of dating couples have also shown that they had similar attitudes on sex roles and sexual behaviour and the stronger that similarity, the greater the chance of them still being a couple a year later.[3]

While there's little evidence for opposites attracting, it can happen when the needs are complementary such as when people who need to be the dominant partner meet people who prefer to be relatively more submissive, but researchers have decided that it's usually the common factors that keep them together.

Here's the not quite-so-good news for most of us: Looks do count in starting relationships, and not just romantic relationships. Perhaps you always thought they did, but in surveys taken many decades apart, most people didn't rank physical attractiveness very high on the list of reasons for liking others.[4] So, people *say* they don't start relationships based on looks, but the research shows they do.

An interesting experiment with first-year university students suggested that looks were everything – for both men and women. Psychologists at the University of Minnesota invited the students to a dance and told them that a computer would match them up with a 'date' with the same interests. During the interview that was supposed to be about their interests, the researchers were actually assessing them for physical attractiveness, intelligence, personality and social skills. Then they paired the dance partners randomly. During a break in the dance they asked the students to fill out an anonymous questionnaire about their date to tell them how well the computer had 'matched' them. I.Q., personality and social skills had nothing to do with their ratings of the date's likeability. In this study, physical attractiveness alone was the best way to predict how satisfied the partners were with their dates.[5]

We don't even need to see people to be influenced by their attractiveness. In a revealing study, three psychologists asked men to talk to a woman on the telephone to help them with a study on 'how people become acquainted with each other'. Before the telephone call they showed each caller a photograph, supposedly of the woman they would talk to. All the men spoke to the same woman, but half were given photographs of a very attractive woman and the others a relatively unattractive woman. And as you'll have guessed, those who thought they were speaking to a particularly attractive woman rated her poise, sense of humour and social skills higher than those who thought they were talking to someone who looked more ordinary.[6]

It seems that being good-looking is an advantage that starts early. Karen Dion and colleagues from the University of Minnesota asked undergraduate women students to consider the cases of five and six year olds who were said to have misbehaved. A small photograph accompanied the outline of the children's misdeeds. The researchers reported that the women were much more likely to rate the less attractive children as more dishonest and unpleasant. They also tended to believe that what the good-looking kids had done wasn't really too serious and when asked to predict their future decided that the attractive ones were more likely to have happy marriages and be more successful in their professional lives.[7]

Psychologists say there's some evidence that physically attractive people also have more attractive personalities. It's hardly surprising. If they are treated better than everyone else, it's natural that they should assume that the world is full of friendly, encouraging people. It may not be just, but it's bound to help.

1.1.1 Basic instincts

If starting relationships on good looks seems shallow, it gets worse. An analysis of many studies, large and small, and across cultures, suggests the women are most interested in a man's resources or potential to earn. One study showed that physically attractive women tended to weaken men's commitment to their current partners. Physically attractive men didn't shake the women's confidence in their relationships, but men of high status and wealth did.[8]

So what should humans do to attract a mate? If they follow David Schmitt's findings published in the *British Journal of Social Psychology*, women should make themselves as physically attractive as possible and not bother criticizing their competitors, because that's ineffective. Men should display their intelligence, status and wealth, or at least their earning potential. They should disparage their competitors because, apparently for men, it works.[9]

American researchers have added a useful qualification: that we need to make a distinction between the *necessities* of attractiveness and earning power, and *luxuries*. Compare the necessities to water and oxygen. If we didn't have them, we would want them – we'd really want them. But most of us have plenty of both, so we're more focused on other things. We only need so much attractiveness or earning power in a potential mate and that still leaves us with plenty of choice, so we start looking for relative luxuries. The same study found that intelligence and kindness rated as necessities.[10] (Feeling better about being human now?) Luxuries included creativity and liveliness, but could be anything else that we value in a potential mate.

1.2 Strategies for starting relationships

The research shows that being similar in even trivial ways makes us more likable and finding common points of interest, shared experiences and shared opinions builds a bond. In the beginnings of a relationship, give information away as you gently probe for more about the other person's interests.

1.2.1 Starting conversations

Let's imagine that you're the new employee. You're now in the staff cafeteria and amongst the blur of heads, you notice vacant seats at a table in the corner. The one person already sitting there is facing the window as you arrive, a closed book in front of him. How do you get to know him? Try giving information away, using open questions, finding things you have in common and picking up on what the other person is saying. Maybe something like this…

> You: 'Hi. I'm new here. Is it always this difficult to find a seat? (Greeting, giving information away and reference to something you have in common.)
>
> Colleague: 'Yes. Usually. It's not so bad if you can get here before 12.30'.

> You: 'That might be difficult. (Nodding at a book on raising children.) I haven't read that one; what do you think of it? (Giving information way, picking up on visual cue, open question.)
>
> Colleague: 'Quite helpful. Some useful ideas. We've got two. The younger one's at Kindergarten.' (Giving information away)
>
> You: 'Our son's just turned three. He could go to Kindergarten soon. What are your impressions of it?' (Giving information away. Picking up on a shared interest in children. Open question.)

When the person you are meeting is giving information away, you have a cue to continue. Follow up with an open question. If you don't get that cue, or the body language suggests the person is unwilling to talk, ease back.

Giving information away without being asked is a valuable way to open up a relationship, but follow-up with an open question so that you don't end up dominating the conversation. Disclosing information gives you both an opportunity to pick up on points of common interest.

If you are asked a closed question, give more than it asks, then end with a question. For instance:

> Your colleague: 'Do you have extended family living near you?' (Closed question)
>
> You: 'Yes. We have both families within about 30 minutes of home and it's been a great help. Our parents have all been really supportive…What's it like having two pre-schoolers?

Psychologists call the sharing of information about ourselves, *reciprocal self-disclosure*.[11]

The reciprocal part is essential, especially in a new relationship. If you give away so much that the disclosure gets out of balance, you'll probably find that your partner discloses less, not more.[12]

Empathy seems to be a useful tool to encourage self-disclosure. The Buddhist concept of mindfulness – focusing intently on the other person's words and the subtle emotional content – provides a way to practise our empathy skills.

In intimate relationships share intimate information about yourselves in an equal way. Intimacy and trust will develop as you reveal more and you are able to discover that your partner is accepting and just as open about feelings, fears, hopes and past events.

Randall Colvin and Don Longueuil from Northeastern University in Boston report that men and women have different ways of encouraging other people to open up, at least when talking to the opposite sex. Women are most successful when they express sympathy, exhibit social skills, speak fluently and appear relaxed and comfortable. Men who get women talking tend to *interview* the other person and show their interest. Incidentally the least successful women were ill-at-ease, talked at the other person, used sarcasm, criticism or expressed self-pity. The least successful male conversationalists compared themselves to the other person, talked too much and expressed interest in fantasy or day-dreams.[13]

As we've noted, having similar attitudes does help in building new relationships, but different attitudes may be even more significant in the selection process. Our potential companions and partners are likely to use those differences to screen us out at an early stage. It's best to wait until the relationship has gathered some momentum before mentioning that we support a rival sports team or hate her favourite country music singer.

Compliments work and, if you can stand it, ingratiation, including flattery. Numerous studies show that we're much more impressed by flatterers and less suspicious of their motives, when they're flattering us than other people.

Roos Vonk from the University of Nijmegan in the Netherlands, reports that we tend to think the flatterers are wrong when we have low self-esteem and remarkably perceptive when our self-esteem is peaking, but in either state we find them likeable.[14] Vonk points out that in his language the closest word to ingratiation is slijmen, which is pronounced slime. He sees a connection. Fortunately, most people also find sincerity likable.

Being seen with the right people helps too. It works both ways in what Eva Walther from the University of Heidelberg calls the 'Spreading Attitude Effect'.[15] If you and I are seen together, your popularity (That's a bit of flattery) makes it more likely that the next people I meet will regard me positively, even after you have gone home.

The most remarkable thing is how far that reputation spreads, because having picked up kudos from being seen with you, I can then give some to other people seen with me.

Once we have gained or lost by being with the right or wrong people, other people take a long time to lose their initial impression of us. An emotionally intelligent person has the self-awareness and self-management skills not to be swayed by such a purely emotional and prejudicial process, but it's largely unconscious. Of course you have to know about it to resist it. Now you do.

1.2.2 Feeling blirtatious?

How would you describe your conversational style? Do you speak as soon as a thought occurs to you, or wait, consider the effects and maybe mention it later? *Blirters* not only respond more quickly, but speak more rapidly and more often than most people do. They are blirters in the sense that they score high on the Brief Loquaciousness and Interpersonal Responsiveness Test (BLIRT) which William Swann Jr. and Peter Rentfrow developed at the University of Texas at Austin.[16]

The acronym is so conveniently close to *blurting* that you could wonder if it's tongue-in-cheek, but theirs is serious research with significant things to say about strategies for beginning and maintaining relationships.

Quick and frequent responses make us seem attentive, interested, on top of things and competent. People are also more likely to think we are intelligent, likable and someone they want as a friend.

Blirting is a high-risk strategy. The research shows that it amplifies our qualities – good or bad. Whether we are truly interested and competent, or we are ill-informed, aggressive, surly or insensitive, other people will find out faster. Blirting pays when we are well informed, genuinely interested and feeling agreeable, otherwise it's better to hold back, talk a little more slowly and maybe not respond at every opportunity. You could use the same strategy if you are trying to establish your credibility in a meeting with people you don't know.

People who score low on the BLIRT scale are 'brooders'. Brooders can hide a disagreeable mood or scanty knowledge for longer, but being too restrained has disadvantages too. If your colleague or your partner says something that upsets you and you brood on it for a couple of days, raising your objection so late would do nothing for your relationship or your credibility. They might say, 'If it was so important, why didn't you say so right away? Are you sure you're not just in a bad mood today?'

1.3 Love and romance

Do we need to define liking and loving? Don't we just *know* when it happens? Perhaps so, but some researchers have gone to the trouble of analyzing the difference.[17] And this is love – what could be more important than that?

Liking	Loving
'I respect…'	(Attachment) 'It would be hard for me to get along without…'
'I admire …'	(Caring) 'I would do anything for…'
'…is a mature person.'	(Trust) 'I can confide in…'
'…has good judgement.'	

1.3.1 Kinds of loving

It's homespun wisdom that to love others you must love yourself first. But researchers are showing that the relationship between self-love and loving others is not as simple as it seems. What they have found reveals some significant information about our most intimate relationships.[18]

If by self-love we mean our self-esteem, then it's a useful addition to a relationship, but no guarantee the relationship will be healthy. There's research evidence that people with high self-esteem are *more* likely to reply to threats with anger and hostility and more likely to behave in a destructive way in a conflict. The angry reaction is particularly likely if the self-esteem is something the person has to strive to maintain, rather than an enduring trait.[19]

There is a second kind of self-love and it has very little going for it. Psychologists talk about the 'narcissistic personality'. It's based on the mythical Greek youth, Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection.

Narcissists have a grandiose sense of self-importance. They also crave admiration and fantasize about fame, power or love and associating with high status people.

Narcissists are not just self-confident dreamers. They are game-players – manipulating, exploitative, lacking empathy and focused on themselves. Their goals are status, power and sex, and they use their self-confidence and superficial charm to achieve them. They want everyone's attention and admiration and react to criticism with rage or a feeling of humiliation.

Narcissists have a strong sense of entitlement, but it only applies to them. They give you the impression that the world revolves around them. A manager once told me about a young staff member she had assigned to a project. The deadline was approaching so the manager checked on her progress. The young woman informed her that she hadn't started because she had decided that the project wouldn't help her in her career.

Narcissists want relationships, but not too close in case they lose control. They tell researchers that they like to keep their romantic partners guessing about their commitment and enjoy 'the game of love'. Their partners report discovering that the narcissistic one has lied, played 'head games' and controlled them.[20] The narcissist's deceptive charm and confidence makes people with low self-esteem easy prey.

Jean Twenge from the University of California asserts that narcissism is an epidemic in the United States. She is not using the term lightly. She rates its growth in that country at about the same as obesity.

In its more extreme form, narcissism amounts to the *narcissistic personality disorder* and the American Psychiatric Association estimates that about one percent of the population has it. Personality psychologists see narcissistic *behaviour* on a continuum, so it is possible to be a little bit narcissistic. Twenge and her research colleagues see growth in the full narcissistic personality disorder as about the same as the sub-clinical form of narcissism.

1.3.2 Romance and time

It's perhaps the most exciting time in our lives. The new romance takes the emotions on a roller coaster of anxiety and relief. There's the loss of appetite, light-headedness, the sudden loss of interest in anything else. (Okay, it affects some people more than others.) Before long, we relax into the relationship and it moves on to be based on attachment, caring and trust. There's still room for bursts of passion, but before long it's less demanding on the mind and body than in the first few weeks. We expect it. It's the natural progression of things.

One study compared American married couples, who had married for love, with couples in arranged marriages in Japan and found the early differences in passionate love and sexual interest soon dissipated. After 10 years, couples from both countries who were still together rated the love in their relationships about the same – and it was the *companionate* love we associate with long-term relationships in the West.[21]

1.3.3 Marriage and health

Men and women in happy marriages live healthier lives. A research team from the Ohio State University School of Medicine found that women from satisfying marriages had stronger immune systems than women who were unhappy in their marriages or were divorced or separated.[22]

One study in the 1970s revealed a significant difference in health with just one question about the quality of the relationship. The researchers asked 10,000 Israeli men, 'Does your wife show you her love?' The men who answered no were twice as likely to develop angina as those who answered yes.[23]

1.4 What makes successful long-term relationships?

There's a reasonable consensus about successful relationships. Researchers have looked at long-lasting and happy marriages and say that the key characteristics are goodwill, good communication and emotional warmth. Those results and many of their other observations seem to fit relationships with our children, friends and close colleagues just as well.

It's *common knowledge* that people with compatible personalities have the best hope of successful long-term relationships, but more than sixty years of research has produced only modest support for the notion that any kind of compatibility is essential.[24] One research team analysed 115 long-term studies that looked at the links between personality and the stability and quality of marriages. Their meta-analysis involved 45,000 marriages and the correlations ranged from nil to just .22.[25] (A correlation of +1.00 would indicate a perfect association.) While *like attracts like*, in the longer-term, having matching personalities or backgrounds, education or religious orientation doesn't seem to be important.

Robert Sternberg of Yale studied couples who had been together for up to 36 years and found that as the relationship continued, the partners found it increasingly important to try to understand each other's wants and needs, to support each other and to have values they shared.[26]

Two Canadian researchers interviewed 66 volunteer couples, married for up to five years, to explore which needs the most successful partners were meeting. They concluded that 'emotional warmth' was the strongest predictor of successful relationships.

The successful couples created their emotional warmth by being sympathetic, comforting, welcoming requests for help and readily doing favours. They also enjoyed the company of family and friends.

The least successful partners became angry easily and were critical of each other. They were independent to the point of making decisions without consultation and believing that the relationship should not restrict their freedom.[27]

The late business educator Stephen Covey uses the analogy of 'the emotional bank account' which describes the amount of trust that's built up in a relationship through 'courtesy, kindness, honesty and honouring commitments'.[28] When you support your partner through a rough patch or help a colleague with a report, that's a deposit in the emotional bank account you have with each of them.

You can make withdrawals from the emotional bank account too. If you tell a client you'll deliver in time to meet her deadline, then forget, that's a withdrawal from the account you have with her.

Covey points out that we need to keep topping up the emotional bank accounts simply to stop them getting into deficit. The closer the relationship, the more we need to invest. If you live together, the expectations for closeness, for unconditional acceptance, for courtesies and practical support will be greater. You can't meet every expectation every time and you need 'funds' in the account to cover the inevitable withdrawals.

Raising children, especially teenagers, creates opportunities for rapid withdrawals. You have your responsibilities as a parent and they have their need to rebel and learn from poor judgements. It's easy to go for days when everything about your relationship is negative. The safest top-ups are the ones that don't look like a bribe or suggest that the behaviour you were unhappy with yesterday is now okay. Usually, they'll have nothing to do with any dispute you may be having at the time.

Couples who contribute to the emotional bank account without much thought about what they'll receive in return, tend to have the most successful relationships. One may be happy to do most of the housework for months while the other is studying, or give emotional support even when the other is grumpy. Couples who need to see the contributions balanced either immediately or very soon, often relate according to the rule: 'I'll be considerate or pleasant, if you are'. Generally, their relationships don't last as long.[29]

Self-respect can make a useful focus for partners who want to develop their relationships.[30] A research team found that successful partners developed their self-respect by acting honourably when their partner or their relationship was under stress. If say our partner or colleague is upset and takes it out on us, we might choose to resist the impulse to respond with anger. Maybe we will choose to express our concern for the other person instead.

Principled behaviour should have some limits so that we don't become doormats, but the research showed that giving some latitude and developing a pride in being someone who does the honourable thing has payoffs for the individual partners and the relationship. More than that, it creates a virtuous cycle. Incidentally, the researchers found that partners who built their self-respect were better adjusted emotionally, in better physical health and more satisfied with their lives, than people who 'wing it'.

1.5 Successful intimate relationships

The research is producing some useful observations of the ways partners build successful relationships. Those observations suggest a useful model for our working relationships as well.

- **A reservoir of good-will**.
  It's generated through love, intimacy, kindness, thoughtfulness, being sympathetic, comforting, welcoming requests for help and readily doing favours.

- **Handling negative emotions constructively**
  Each partner looks for a positive outcome in the interests of the relationship.

- **Negotiating to achieve win/win solutions**
  Includes a genuine interest in understanding the other person's wants and needs.

- **Acting honourably**
  Each partner chooses to act in ways that build self-respect.

- **Accepting and valuing differences**
  It includes not wanting to change the other person to be like ourselves.

- **Respecting boundaries**
  It includes accepting that we can not expect other people to meet all our needs. Also accepting that people must be free to make their own decisions.

1.6 Let's get specific about intimacy

It's natural to assume that intimacy is inevitable in loving relationships, but a research team from Boston University has taken a more detailed look at intimacy and it provides some useful insights and a focus for improving the relationships we value most.

Kathleen White and her colleagues interviewed partners separately about their relationships and graded their responses on a three-point scale. Level 1 was for responses that suggested the partners were focused on their own needs. Level 2 was for responses that suggested that a partner saw the other primarily as a person in a traditional role – responses such as, 'He's a good dad'. Level 3 was for the most 'mature' level of intimacy, where the person valued the partner's special qualities.

Most partners in the study were level 2, which suggested that their relationships were not as intimate, or rewarding, as they could be. Asked about caring or affection, a level 2 partner might say, 'I support her when I can'. A partner with a mature level of intimacy would express concern in a way that focused on emotional support and could supply evidence such as, 'When he was struggling with his new job I thought it was really important to listen and tell him how much I believe in him.'

As they expected, the Boston University researchers found that men with high 'intimacy' scores were in more rewarding, better-adjusted relationships.

They also found something very significant: The women's scores told them nothing about the quality of the relationship. For example, women could be capable of mature intimacy, but be either satisfied or dissatisfied with the relationship. The real issue was the men's contribution to the relationship.

Men and women's perspectives on intimacy differ too. Men tend to find doing things together sufficient for intimacy. Women tend to prefer to talk things over and especially to talk about the relationship. The difference is greatest in traditional marriages. It's a big issue and men's particular focus on *doing* things together, suggests they are uneasy about the kind of intimacy most women need. The research leader Kathleen White says, 'The more comfortable a man is with intimacy, the more satisfied with the marriage the wife will be.'[31]

The five dimensions of intimacy

1. Being focused on the relationship
2. Being committed to the relationship
3. Caring and being concerned for our partner
4. Communicating well with our partner
5. Sexual intimacy

- Kathleen M. White and research colleagues

1.6.1 The emotional sex

It's women, right? It depends on how you look at it. It's certainly true that both men and women *believe* that women are more emotional in the sense of being more emotionally intense and more willing to express emotions. (The survey organisation Gallup found the same perception in 22 countries.)

Researchers have a different view of how emotional men and women are. They have shown that men and women are equally intense, open and sensitive to feelings of anxiety, sadness and happiness – when those feelings were measured from moment-to-moment.[32] One study revealed that changes in couples' heart rates matched exactly as they discussed emotional issues.[33]

If we are talking about being more *knowledgeable* – the nuances of emotions and words that describe emotions – women lead the way. The women whose heart rates matched their partners' rates were able to describe how other people would feel in particular situations in more complex and detailed ways. That emotional literacy is a key to empathy.

1.6.2 Empathy and communication

Empathy is the ability to understand another person's emotions, needs and concerns and develops from the time we are a year or two old. (Researchers heard one toddler say, 'You sad Mommy. What Daddy do?'[34])

Empathy is a very useful skill in communication and for building relationships throughout life. It's not surprising that women should be more skilled than men in cultures that encourage girls to be more aware of other's feelings and talk about them openly. But the research reveals that the difference may be more to do with motivation than innate ability. Men seem to be less motivated to be empathetic. Perhaps it doesn't fit the macho image.

Empathy is a particularly important part of successful intimate relationships. Men who believe that learning to read other people's emotions would be a threat to their masculinity are missing a valuable opportunity to improve their closest relationships.

We can improve our empathy skills by active listening and focusing not just on the facts, but the feelings. We can give the feelings names: angry, upset, apprehensive, frustrated, delighted, excited, annoyed, disappointed or sad. We can check that we have understood. We can listen for 'us' rather than just ourselves and train ourselves to listen all the way through, rather than hearing just the beginning, then waiting for a chance to respond.

A chief executive once told me that he found it very difficult to listen to less experienced colleagues because over the years he had heard the same issues aired many times. He was bored with listening and would move the conversation on to something more productive, especially solutions. His poor listening skills were being mentioned in his performance reviews. His colleagues were annoyed with his impatience and frustrated that they were not being heard.

After some discussion, the chief executive chose a range of solutions. The first was to declare to his colleagues that he intended to change. In some meetings he even put a stuffed toy with big ears in front of him to remind himself and them of his commitment, then invited his colleagues to let him know whenever he was not living up to his good intentions.

In more formal meetings he asked one supportive colleague to give him a pre-arranged, silent, signal if he was off course. He used questions more and built empathy by summarising the facts and feelings. How did he cope with the boredom? He found a new interest, not in the same old issues, but the challenge of developing empathy with a vital professional skill – active listening.

1.7 Worrying signs

Researchers who followed couples from the newlywed stage through the next 13 years have revealed that the most accurate predictor of divorce is not the inability to handle conflict or communicate, but disillusionment.[35]

The study is particularly useful because there are some risks in simply asking couples to look back over the years they have been together. It's very easy for them to think of behaviour that made them unhappy, but not so easy to know whether the behaviour was the cause of the unhappiness or the result of it.

The researchers saw the signs of disillusionment or 'future delight' within the first two years. Their study provides support for the notion of 'emotional warmth' being the key to success. After 13 years the disillusioned partners saw the other as unresponsive, ambivalent and lacking affection. The happy couples had a strong sense of belonging and closeness. They also had compatible and high scores for 'responsiveness' – which in a relationship setting includes being pleasant, friendly, forgiving, sincere and generous.

Some of the 156 couples in that longitudinal study were still together after 13 years partly because they had very low expectations of the relationship. The research team described one type of relationship as 'passive and congenial' – in which the partners treated the relationship as a background to their lives and put their energy into other things. The other unrewarding but enduring relationship was dominated by conflict, but the partners saw conflict as inevitable and some seemed to enjoy their sparring.

1.8 Sex and work

An interesting study by colleagues at the University of Wisconsin questions the belief that when both partners have careers, their sex life inevitably suffers.[36] The belief certainly appears to make sense. We only have so much time and energy, but the Wisconsin researchers found that it's more complicated than that and their work reveals useful information about our relationships generally.

The Wisconsin researchers interviewed more than 500 couples on three occasions from pregnancy through to their child's first birthday. They reasoned that it's a demanding time for parents anyway so any additional stresses from being dual earners should show up then. They found no link between both partners being employed full-time and either the number of times they made love or how satisfying each partner reported their sex life to be.

They did find a link between the work the women were doing and the couples' sex lives and presumably their intimacy. Couples reported the greatest satisfaction with their sex lives when both had satisfying jobs – whether they worked full-time or part-time. The least satisfied couples were not those where both had unsatisfying jobs, but where the woman had a satisfying the job and the man didn't.

The researchers also reported a strong link between fatigue and decreased libido, but found that women who were full-time homemakers could be just as fatigued as women in employment.

Other researchers report that having a range of roles appears to provide people with more resources to help them reduce stress. Their stress and dissatisfaction in one role can be balanced by satisfaction in another and they may also benefit from being exposed to a wide range of viewpoints. Many women in satisfying work have a feeling of increased power, which reduces depression and their contribution to the family income reduces tensions about their finances.[37]

1.9 Handling the rough patches

The current research is showing that differences in the ways that couples handle negative emotions such as anger, sadness, depression, or anxiety have a major effect on their relationships.[38] People who score high on tests of negative emotions such as depression, anxiety and anger tend to be more defensive, more inclined to stonewall or to be more critical of their partners, even contemptuous. All those behaviours are particularly damaging for intimate relationships.

We can use the re-framing skills that help us to handle disruptive emotions and create alternative ways of handling tense moments in all kinds of relationships. In processing disruptive emotions we can look at situations from a different perspective so that we can come up with a considered response, rather than just react.

Playing the 'sceptical supportive friend' can help us to question whether a colleague's sudden aloofness is really evidence that he and maybe the rest of the team have turned against us. Perhaps he has a family problem or is preoccupied with a looming deadline.

Is our partner's cool response really evidence that we've said or done something to offend her or is she tired or reacting to something that happened at work? It does, of course, make sense to ask, but the re-framing helps to stop us matching the other person's anger with anger or withdrawal. It can help us to avoid taking the other person's behaviour personally. (See Part One of this series for more on re-framing.)

1.9.1 Optimism and tension

Re-framing also helps us to see the current state of our relationships in more optimistic ways.

Pessimistic people are more likely to see behaviour they don't like as what usually happens and a reflection of their partners' personality. They may believe that the conflict is permanent and think, 'He'll always be selfish' or 'I'm too old to change'. The most pessimistic partners also believe the problems in their relationships will affect everything else in their lives – 'I can't be happy or successful because my marriage is such a disaster'.

Couples in successful relationships tend to describe their partners' good and bad points in ways that are similar to the optimistic self-talk we saw in Part One of this series.

They see the good points as enduring and a part of their personality, so they'll think, 'She's a loving person' or 'He's a great supporter'. It's similar to the belief we create in ourselves with the assumption: 'I'm on my way to being a first-class leader, parent or public speaker'. We can see lapses in our partner's behaviour as temporary and caused by something that will pass or can be dealt with – not evidence that the relationship is collapsing. Of course, it's possible that our partner, or colleague, has changed from the reasonable, generous, admirable person we knew yesterday and will remain irritable, angry or withdrawn for the rest of her life, but surely that is less likely.

1.10 How typical is your relationship?

These observations are taken from a survey conducted in 22 countries and numerous studies of couples between 17 and 86 years and in their relationships for up to 36 years.

His side	**Her side**
Perceived internationally as being more aggressive, ambitious and courageous.[39]	Perceived (in the same international survey) as being more emotional and affectionate.
Relatively positive view of the relationship, including listening to each other, tolerance, sex and finances.	Less rosy.[40] Even in happy marriages reports less agreement on finances, affection, friends, sex etc.[41]
Listening style: Irregular eye contact, nods infrequently, more likely to interrupt, uses questions to analyze the other person's contribution.[42]	Listening style: More eye contact, nods frequently, uses questions to find out more of the other person's perspective.
Speaking style: few pauses, more use of *I* and *me* yet self-disclosure rare, may change topics abruptly, speaks louder than his partner, humour expressed as separate jokes or stories.	Speaking style: frequent pauses, makes connections with what other person has said, more use of *us* and *we* yet more self-disclosure, matches the volume of the other person, weaves humour into the conversation.

Says he needs a partner who is not aggressive, anxious, critical or highly reactive to stress.[43]	Says she needs the same but *also* a partner who is able to express positive emotions and can control impulsive responses.
Believes the relationship is in trouble if they have to keep talking about problems.	Believes that being able to talk through problems is a sign that the relationship is working well.
Presents a flattering image of the relationship to friends.	More comfortable sharing a realistic picture of the relationship with friends.
Inclined to withdraw to avoid confrontation.	Wants to resolve the tension so that she can be closer to him.
Sees withdrawal as constructive.	Sees withdrawal as aloof or smug.
Even in happy relationships, not as skilled at finding a conciliatory end to an argument.	In happy relationships, much more able to find a conciliatory outcome.

Reframing so that we think more optimistically and generously about our partner's or colleagues' lapses is far more likely to create a pleasant atmosphere in which to resolve problems.[44] Optimism is a choice. We can choose to call on the supportive, sceptical friend to examine our pessimistic interpretations at any time.

1.10.1 Arguments

Researchers have found couples they couldn't provoke into an argument no matter what they tried and the couples appeared to have a strong bond and to be able to sort through differences of opinion very effectively.

Whether we argue or not is irrelevant. It's *how* we argue that counts. It takes determination and emotional skill to avoid being swamped by negative feelings, trying to win at all costs or withdrawing.

John Gottman and his colleagues have studied thousands of relationships over the last 30 years and found that couples in successful relationships handle disagreement very differently. They tend to come in three types: those who listen effectively and compromise, those who argue passionately and often, but are more affectionate and romantic than most couples and those who avoid or minimize their problems and focus on the positive qualities of their relationships.[45]

In happy relationships, at least, women are generally more comfortable with arguments. They want to settle issues and they are more skilled at finding a way to end disputes in a conciliatory way.

Most of us have come across men who don't mind confrontation as long as they are winning and who shout and bully till they do, but generally, men tend to avoid confrontation. They don't want things to escalate and the typical male withdraws, either to let things cool off a bit, or to avoid facing the conflict. Withdrawing is a risky manoeuvre when your partner wants to resolve the problem. Women find it aloof or smug and researchers have found that women will retaliate by raising the tension, which encourages the men to withdraw even more.

In intimate or close working relationships, if one of you has a problem, you both have a problem. That's true, even if you don't agree that it *should* be a problem. If your partner or colleague says he has a problem with something you are doing, that's at least a relationship problem and it will grow if you refuse to hear about it.

Arguing well and coming up with a satisfying solution can be a bonding experience, but you have to cooperate on the rules of engagement. You and your partner or colleague must be prepared to commit yourselves to understanding the other's point of view and to looking for a positive outcome. The rules of engagement include showing goodwill, even when you are feeling hurt or angry.

Choose a time when you can talk without distractions and make sure that you are in a fit emotional state. When our bodies are in a high state of alert we can't concentrate on another person's perspective. It's better to agree to take the time we need to cool down.

Set the tone of your discussion carefully. Beginning with criticism or a contemptuous remark would set up confrontation. Try something constructive and low-key. Perhaps, 'I'd like to discuss something important with you'.

Some counsellors suggest giving each other up to 15 minutes of virtually uninterrupted time to explain your perspective, followed by a general discussion. If you do that, make sure that you listen attentively with regular eye contact and nods or encouragement to continue. It can be useful to interrupt just long enough to concede a valid point, but don't give in to any temptation you might feel to deny, correct or explain.

'I statements' can be a useful way to get into the issue from your perspective. An I statement takes the focus off the other person. Begin with an I statement about what you know.

You might say to your son or daughter: 'I've noticed that the pets were not fed till late all this week…'. Mention what effect that behaviour is having and what you want changed. 'When that happens it's unfair on the pets and I want you to make sure that they are fed before seven every night.' If you begin your sentence with 'you' you will create an accusation: 'You are trying to claim all the credit for the project' or to your teenager, 'You slam the door when you come home late.'

Use neutral language, aim at a solution, and avoid blame. It can sound artificial without some practice, but even if you are a bit clumsy at first, you'll be making it clear that you are trying to be constructive.

Sometimes it's useful to add questions so that the other person has a chance to explain.

> You: 'I noticed that when you came in last night the door closed very loudly. Did you intend that to happen?'
>
> Teenager: 'I was in a bit of a mood and I had some cans in my hands – and it just sort of slammed.'
>
> You: " When the door is slammed late at night it's very disturbing. Could you ensure that you close it quietly?'

1.10.2 Feelings not just facts

Men, generally speaking, find it difficult to accept that in resolving conflicts, the feelings are just as important as the facts. Most women need to express their feelings, not just state the problem, and they find it very irritating when a man just listens for the facts and the moment he thinks he has them, comes up with a solution.

In men's defence, I should say that they may be doing it with the best intentions. It can be a man's way of saying, 'I want to take away the thing that's hurting you'. Many women find that attitude patronising rather than supportive. They don't feel listened to until the man has heard their feelings about the problem. Many women have told me that they're often less interested in a solution than having the opportunity to tell their partners how they feel. They'll come up with their own solution when they are ready.

Make sure that you focus on one problem at a time. Dragging up faults of the past comes across as attack or retaliation and it's very difficult to keep a sense of goodwill. You'll lose focus too as the argument changes to 'everything that's wrong with our relationship'.

Many counsellors suggest that you stay out of touching range because physical contact can easily be misinterpreted as condescending, manipulative or prematurely intimate. Some suggest that you keep reminding yourself of the strengths of your relationship.

Think of blame as unhelpful. If one of you forgot to put oil in the car, it has happened. Now that the motor has seized and the repair bill has come in, your partner will be well aware of the mistake without regular reminders. If the children were not collected from your mother's till late, does it matter who didn't make the arrangement clear or who wasn't listening? Just agree on a better system next time.

The no-blame principle works with relationships between colleagues too. In my company we certainly expect people to learn from their mistakes and correct them, but it's not part of the culture for people to say, 'That was your fault,' or look for scapegoats. Not blaming is no soft touch – just more productive. We're happy to admit mistakes, even before anyone else knows about them. We have often discovered that our colleagues' mistakes were based on incorrect information so we've been able to make some useful changes to our systems to make sure they do have the information they need. Of course, even conscientious people make errors of judgement too, that's being human. It's the putting right and learning that count.

Blame is most damaging to relationships and morale when it's dredged up repeatedly – especially, of course, publicly.

John Gottman includes in his top suggestions, setting high standards of behaviour. 'The most successful couples are those who, even as newlyweds, refused to accept hurtful behaviour from one another. The lower the level of tolerance for bad behaviour in the beginning of the relationship the happier the couple is down the road.'[46]

Most counsellors include attacking, point-scoring, exaggerating, shouting and attempting to humiliate in their bad behaviour list. If you notice bad behaviour, name it right away and remind your partner or colleague of the aims of the discussion:

> 'That's point-scoring. It's going to be very difficult to talk this through constructively if we do that.'
>
> 'I feel intimidated when you shout like that and we both need a chance to explain our point of view.'

It's very difficult to continue bad behaviour once it's been named. Naming it, remaining calm and reminding your partner or colleague of the purpose of your discussion, is an effective combination.

We know from research with couples and from the experience of counsellors, that fighting fair as it's often called, is a feature of successful long-term relationships. It's part of maintaining the emotional bank account and emotional warmth.

If it all seems a bit 'nice' and you'd rather let it all out, ask yourself whether you would both have an equal opportunity to do that and what that has done for your relationships in the past.

These suggestions for resolving disputes come from a range of research and counselling sources. You could apply them to all close relationships, at home and at work.

Choose to be comfortable with a difference of opinion.
See it as perfectly normal and an opportunity to make things better.

Choose the time.
Make sure you can both hear each other's point of view without being distracted by other people or deadlines.

Listen actively.
Define the problem together as objectively as you can. Make sure that both of you have a chance to explain your perspective and your feelings. Check your understanding.

Watch the body language.
Keep your arms uncrossed and try to relax your hands. Avoid pursed lips or sharp intakes of breath. Try sitting back with your arms as relaxed as possible beside you.

Choose your words.
Use 'I' statements. 'When that happens I feel humiliated/hurt/angry/frustrated and I…' Use calming words such as, 'sometimes, I feel, I think, perhaps, one possibility would be to…, what if?'

Focus on one problem at a time.
If something new comes up. Park it.

Brainstorm some possible solutions.
Consider both separate and joint brainstorming. Look for several solutions to your point of conflict. As you are brainstorming trying to think of solutions your partner or colleague is likely to accept. If it's a big or complex issue, try coming up with solutions independently, then together.

Find a solution you can both agree on.
Genuinely looking for win/win together is a very powerful way to build the bond between you.

Agree how to make the solution work.

If one loses, you both lose
If win/win isn't possible, compromise or concede. Whether the context is intimate, collegial or commercial, the relationship is probably more important than the issue that's dividing you.

Put these strategies on your *banned* list

- ❑ Bullying, blaming, personal criticism, contempt
- ❑ Bringing up an issue in front of friends or family in the hope of shaming
- ❑ The silent treatment or stonewalling
- ❑ Inflaming, including: 'You always, you never, you can't, you don't' and name-calling
- ❑ Defensiveness
- ❑ Exaggerating
- ❑ Cross-complaining – answering a complaint with one of your own
- ❑ Storing grudges and bringing them out when there's a new conflict.
- ❑ Giving in, but seething inside and thinking, 'Wait till next time!'
- ❑ Walking out and slamming the door

2 Become an effective negotiator

A method to get what you need while building your relationships

Could we get through life without negotiating? It's very unlikely. Perhaps, if we were dictators or domestic bullies, or we were content to live and work alone it would be possible, but we would miss many of life's great opportunities.

The issue may be as simple as who will cook dinner tonight, as significant as which city to live in, as heart- rending as custody of the children, as pleasurable as which island resort to choose, or as intense as a wage negotiation with a union. We have the opportunity to negotiate, well or badly, most days.

Negotiation is a valuable skill and certainly not just an intellectual exercise. To be effective negotiators, we need a range of emotional skills, such as self-awareness and empathy. We need the ability to regulate disruptive emotions, particularly anger and frustration. We also need to value healthy relationships.

In this chapter you'll see a method that's used in some of the most complex negotiations and some of the simplest. Top negotiators use the same method to negotiate deals in commerce and international peace-keeping. You could use the method at work and at home.

We'll talk about negotiations with one person, but the same method will help you negotiate with several parties at once.

It's common for negotiators to say they are looking for a win/win outcome. It sounds admirable and fair, but is it really an effective way to negotiate? The anecdotal evidence says it is and the research confirms that negotiators who use cooperative strategies such as exchanging information and concessions and building relationships do achieve better results than those who compete.[47]

2.1 A method in action

Imagine this: Melanie and her co-workers are being relocated to a new floor. They won't be having separate offices any more because the new chief executive likes cubicles. The boss is even moving into a cubicle herself.

Melanie hears that she will be sharing a cubicle with Henry. He's not the cubicle mate she had hoped for, but she has nothing against him. They inspect the new space together and discover that there is only one window and it's narrow and near the corner of their cubicle. They've been allocated one whiteboard, permanently fixed to a section of cubicle wall near the window. Melanie wants the window. She needs a sense of space and hates the thought of being enclosed for up to eight hours at a time. Henry wants the window too. Unfortunately, Melanie also wants the whiteboard. It's essential for the kind of thinking she does.

> Henry: 'I need to have my desk near the window.'
>
> Melanie: 'So do I. And there's only room for one.'
>
> Henry: 'But I need to be next to the window. I need regular sunlight – for medical reasons.'
>
> Melanie: 'And I need it for my sanity. I made it very clear that I wasn't moving unless I had a window.'
>
> Henry: 'You'll have a window. It's just that you won't be right next to it.'

You can see where it's going. It's *positional bargaining*. Positional bargaining assumes that only one party can win. Melanie has a fixed position and Henry has his and they'll keep bargaining until one of them wins, they reach some compromise neither is happy with, or the process breaks down with shouts, sulks, a walkout or appeals to higher authority. It's hardly flattering and does nothing for their relationship.

Usually, both (or everyone) can win, and not in some weak compromise. Think of real negotiating as problem-solving. You look at the problem from both perspectives and brainstorm together until you find the solution that best meets each other's needs. It takes goodwill and emotional skills. It's easier if the relationship is already strong, but it works in the most difficult of situations.

2.1.1 Looking for win/win

Melanie and Henry could certainly use the problem-solving process. First, they would draw up a list of their individual needs – together. It pays to think what your needs are before you begin the process, but listing them together without defensiveness or criticism sets the scene for a cooperative approach to negotiation. It would be easy to say that they both *need* to put their desk by the window, but that's a solution. Set possible solutions aside until you have a full list of needs.

Perhaps Henry and Melanie will note that Henry does need regular sunlight for medical reasons. His doctor has told him that he has 'seasonal affective disorder' (S.A.D.) which explains why he is depressed and grumpy in the winter. They'll note that Melanie needs a sense of space so that she doesn't feel as if she is in a cell.

Melanie has her eye on the whiteboard because she had one in her old office and needs somewhere to write her thoughts and reflect on them. Henry doesn't. The whiteboard is near the window, which is another reason for Melanie to have her desk there, but that would be a solution, so they just note her need to have something on the wall to write on.

Both of them need somewhere to store files and the only filing cabinet is Henry's and it's stuffed with files. Both would also like to have the new chair that's been supplied.

Melanie has another need that might have led to an accusation if they were not cooperating. Windows have become a source of status and she is resentful that the men have grabbed or been given windows in the other cubicles. She feels that her pride is at stake. When she explains her need Henry admits that he, too, feels that that the window has status and that's one of his needs.

Let's sum up their progress.

Melanie's needs	**Henry's needs**
Sense of space	Sunlight to alleviate S.A.D.
Somewhere to write thoughts and reflect on them	
Status	Status
Somewhere to store a few files	Somewhere to store a large number of files

They brainstorm possible solutions. They let the ideas flow, without making judgements about them. They also look for possible combinations of ideas.

Needs	**Possible solutions**
Sunlight to alleviate S.A.D.	Henry by the window in winter.
	Henry to take a walk in the sun every lunch break.
Sense of space	Melanie by the window
	Place large poster of city or rural scene next to Melanie's desk
	Put Henry with his back to the window and place Melanie's desk opposite so that she can see out.

Somewhere to write thoughts and reflect on them	A1 size pad mounted on wall
	Move the cubicle panel with whiteboard attached
Status	Melanie by the window
	Henry by the window
	Henry or Melanie to try to swap with another colleague who doesn't care about windows or whiteboards.
	Whoever doesn't get the window, has the new chair.
	Both to explain to anyone who comments that they invited the other to have the window.
File storage	Henry purges old files from his cabinet and gives Melanie some space.
	Melanie stores files in a box near her desk

They examine the possible solutions carefully for the best one or best combination. For both of them, trying to find another colleague who doesn't care about a window or whiteboard may be the best option if they can't negotiate a solution. That *backup solution* is the standard they can use to measure any new solution that comes up in a negotiation. They can ask, 'Would I be better off accepting this solution or taking my backup solution?'

A strong backup solution can put you in a powerful position to negotiate. You will know that if you can't reach agreement, you'll choose your backup solution and the other person misses out on what she could gain through negotiation. Melanie and Henry probably realise that their backup solutions are the same and not particularly attractive. It's not likely that they will find someone to complement their interests exactly and it won't look good if they can't work out an agreement together.

Fortunately they don't need their backup solutions. They have a reasonably easy task finding some solutions to meet their needs. Perhaps you have spotted them yourself.

- They move desks every six months (which shares the status of a window seat).
- Henry has the desk near the window in colder months (which gives Henry sunlight at the time he needs it most).
- Melanie has a large poster of a city or rural scene for at least the autumn and winter (which gives her a sense of space, even if it is artificial).
- They move the cubicle partition with the whiteboard attached to wherever Melanie is sitting (which ensures that she has easy access to the whiteboard all year).
- Whoever isn't by the window has the new chair (which helps to share the status).
- Henry sorts out his files to create some space in one drawer.

They haven't used all their possible solutions. Henry taking a walk in the sun is not part of their agreement. They can still point out to anyone who comments that they both agreed on the arrangement, but they decide that status not such a sensitive issue that they need to discuss it again. They've come up with a combination of solutions that meet their needs. They've also shown that they can work together well, so their relationship is off to a good start.

In that simple example our negotiators have succeeded by taking a win/win approach, listing their needs without defensiveness or criticism, brainstorming some possible solutions without judgement, then looking for the solution or solutions that best meet each party's needs. They've used their backup solution to help them decide whether it's worth accepting any solution, or combination of solutions. Notice that the method works when people cooperate but at the same time are assertive about their own needs and self-worth.

2.2 What if the needs don't match?

You might say that Henry and Melanie were just lucky. Their needs were a good match and maybe the world isn't arranged that way. Sometimes there do seem to be only two solutions – the other person's and ours, but some goodwill and creativity can bring surprising results.

Often a compromise, just something in the middle of your bargaining positions, is a sign of failure.

What happens if you want your boss to raise your salary five percent and the boss says two percent sounds better to her? You might reach a compromise of, say, 3.5% but neither you nor the boss would be happy with the outcome and will try to drive a harder bargain next time.

Perhaps you can do better than your backup solution or a compromise. You and the boss could brainstorm and come up with non-monetary benefits that might reward you as much or more than three percent more in salary. Maybe you'd rather have the two percent plus five extra days as holiday to be taken in off-peak times, or maybe one day a week working from home. You might be happy to settle for two percent plus another three percent if you reach an agreed performance target. A client of mine accepted an afternoon a week to play golf because the company wouldn't let his boss pay him more.

Sometimes the possible solutions are not complementary, but both of you may still have options that could allow your negotiations to succeed.

If you are buying a car, you may have your price and the dealer his. You could say, 'This is my offer. Take it or leave it,' but you might be able to do better by suggesting some other possibilities. Perhaps you won't trade-in your current vehicle. Instead, you'll sell it privately or at an auction for what you hope will be a better price. Perhaps the dealer will let you know when another car of the same model comes in with your ideal colour and better extras, and sell it to you at something close to his price for the one you're looking at.

What do you do if the solutions really don't match the needs, after all your attempts to brainstorm? Consider your backup solution. How does the best alternative (including doing nothing) compare with the other party's offer? Take whichever gives you the best outcome.

2.2.1 Start so well they'll want to play

What if the other person doesn't know about negotiating for win/win, or doesn't want to play the game? Sell the idea of cooperation.

Begin by describing the negotiation in a neutral way.[48] Maybe, 'We are here to see if we can find a solution to our disagreement over the roosters'. It's more likely to encourage cooperation than, 'We are here to discuss whether you should be allowed to keep roosters in a suburban street'.

Make sure the other person can answer the question, 'What's in it for me?' You can say, 'If we work together on this we might be able to find some ways you can get what you need and I can get what I need – without even having to compromise.' You can also suggest goals you could both achieve. Sit next to the other person rather than opposite and use your own cooperative behaviour to sell the idea that it's a 'side-by-side' process. You could also point out that you are not likely to make much progress unless you can find ways of satisfying both of you.

There will be other incentives to cooperate that you might not discuss. It's clearly less expensive to negotiate than let the lawyers fight it out in court and the fact that you may have to work together in future makes cooperating now more attractive.

2.2.2 With respect your honour…

Roger Fisher and William Ury from the Harvard Negotiation Project suggest that we imagine two judges working together to decide a case on the evidence they have in front of them. I don't know about you, but I would be disappointed if judges didn't treat each with at least professional courtesy and examine the evidence with a cool detachment as they worked towards a decision that satisfied them both.

To build cooperation use questions to uncover the other party's needs and check your understanding regularly. You need to show that there may be more on offer through a win/win approach than taking a fixed position, but you do that through exploring needs thoroughly rather than being pushed into suggesting solutions too early.

2.3 Add some polish to your technique

2.3.1 Prepare

To be effective when the issues are complex, you'll need to think about your goals, the other person's perspective and the problems you're about to negotiate.

Consider your priorities. Make a list of your needs and how important each really is. What would happen if each need were not met? Now think about your backup solution. Be creative, but keep in mind the 'Do nothing' option. What needs would the backup solution satisfy? What can you do now to ensure that your backup solution is real and available to you if the negotiations don't go well? Developing an attractive and practical backup solution is the most effective thing you can do to prepare when the other person appears to be in a stronger position.

Think carefully about the other person's perspective. Are you aware of her backup solution? What are her likely needs? You'll be using the negotiation process to ask her about her needs, then explore them and perhaps expand the list, but it pays to go with some understanding of what the needs might be.

Think about what the other person has said about the problem before. Do those statements suggest values that might have a bearing on the negotiations? Do the statements suggest assumptions or incorrect information that you could examine in your discussions? What assumptions might you have made that you will need to test once you begin?

2.3.2 Develop your active listening skills

Active listening will help you ensure that you really understand each other's position. Avoid using the listening time to plan your reply. Make sure you listen for both the facts, and the feelings behind them.

Let's say you are a sales manager negotiating with the leader of your company's dispatch team. The dispatch team's slow performance is increasing the risk that your team will appear to be letting its customers down.

First, set the agenda.

> You: I'm hoping that we'll be able to come up with some solutions that both our teams are happy with. First, let's do some listening to see where we're both coming from.
>
> Dispatch leader: I suppose so.
>
> You: We should really take some notes so that we have a clear picture of what's important to each of us. Do you want me to do that?
>
> Dispatch leader: Okay.

Now ask your questions

You: As you know, we would like to find a way of getting products in transit to our customers faster, but I realise that it may not be as easy as it sounds. I want to get an idea of what concerns or difficulties that raises for you.

Dispatch leader: It's not easy at all. We're understaffed and we're under increasing pressure from the management team to keep costs down – on staff and everything else.

You: What effect is that pressure having on your team?

Despatch leader: Well, it's making matters much worse. We had one day with half the team on sick leave – I put it down to stress. And your team was sending us demanding emails. Ed and Christine rang us as well – as if we were just sitting around drinking coffee! I tore strips off Ed and it's kept both of them quiet since then.

You: Mmm. We're clearly adding to your stress. What else do we need to take into account?

Dispatch leader: Definitely the quality of the information we're getting.

You: From us?

Dispatch leader: And the rest, but Ed and Paul are the worst. They insist on missing essential information out – just don't bother to put it in!

You: Mmm. That would be frustrating. What other problems do we need to take into account?

Dispatch leader: Mistakes. That's another big one. Emma took half an hour to track down one of your people the other day to correct the information he'd sent through and then he had the cheek to say he hoped she wouldn't take too long processing it.

You: Okay that's helpful. If I've understood you correctly, your team is under pressure from management to cut costs, even though you are understaffed. We're adding stress and frustration with unnecessary phone calls and by leaving essential information out and giving you incorrect information. You'd like us to be more understanding of the pressure your team is under too.

You are revealing both needs and concerns – or *interests*. You are also reflecting your colleague's feelings which helps to show her that you really are listening. You might wonder about the wisdom of taking so much care to show that we fully understand the other person's perspective. Don't we risk giving unreasonable ideas legitimacy? Maintain the distinction between understanding and agreement. Even if you disagree with much of the other person's perspective, it is still real because that's what she believes. If you have shown that you have fully understood the facts and feelings so well that you can sum up the other person's case even better than she did, you will have established some credibility. That credibility will be particularly useful if you then begin to present a very different perspective. It will be difficult for the other person to assume that you are saying what you are simply because you don't understand her point of view.

2.3.3 Be specific

The negotiation can't be successful unless you are both open and specific about your interests. It's essential that you convince the other person that your interests are important enough for the other person to want to find a solution. Describe your interests in detail.

In your negotiation with the leader of the dispatch team, you'd list your interests alongside hers. Perhaps by the time you've finished your notes would look like this.

Your interests	Processing team's interests
More harmonious relationship with dispatch team	Reduce stress
Honour all commitments to customers	Cope with inadequate number of staff
Documents returned in order of priority	More accurate information from sales team
Accurate forecasts of when a product can be dispatched	Complete information from sales team.
	More understanding from sales team when under pressure
	Better explanation and justification of priorities so that time is spent more efficiently

2.3.4 Control your responses

It may be tempting to respond when the other person lists her needs, but comments like, 'That's not important surely', 'That's not true', 'That's ridiculous' only get in the way. Be unfailingly calm, confident, diplomatic and curious about the other party's needs and ideas for possible solutions.

There are benefits for you too in your calm, professional approach. You are more likely to hear the real needs. The other party might offer some creative solutions that appeal to you. You'll create an obligation to hear you out when it's your turn. You can insist on it, if you've set a good example.

Negotiation can easily be taken over by point scoring and 'clarifications' about things that happened in the past. It quickly becomes a charade – not negotiation, but a cover for war. It is relevant to look at what has happened, but only as a source of *interests* so that you can both concentrate on making things better in future.

Respect the other person, be courteous and understanding, but don't let diplomacy stop you being firm and absolutely clear about your interests. It's a trap to allow sympathy to get in the way of resolving the problem and your commitment to listing and explaining your interests is a key to the process. Welcome the other person doing the same.

Resist the temptation to jump in with solutions whenever someone mentions an interest or need. You should both hold back. Just list the interests, all the interests, then look at possible solutions. If you suggest solutions too early, you will invite objections and stall the process.

2.3.5 Build the cooperation

Your active listening and your interest in hearing the other person's possible solutions will encourage cooperation.

You can build on that cooperation by going for the easiest source of agreement first. Perhaps you can find a detail you agree on, or simply a perspective you share. Maybe you'll find it in the big picture. Leigh Steinberg, agent to 100 top sports people negotiates multi-million dollar deals and suggests trying to reach agreement on a general framework that's still sketchy, then working out the rest of the deal, 'Because at that point, conflict has been replaced by partnership, and both sides have dropped their defenses'.[49]

If you stop making progress, review what you've agreed so far. Go back to the needs and ask some questions to try to open up some more interests or more possible solutions, 'Tell me more about that. Why is that important? What would happen if we were not able to address that? Is there anything else we need to take into account?'

2.3.6 Think creatively

Brainstorm as many solutions as you can. Try to include some that would help the other person so that it's clear that you are looking for a fair solution, but most of all, try to keep the ideas coming as fast as possible without censorship. Make sure that the other person understands that you are only exploring possibilities and that adding an idea to the list doesn't suggest that either of you is recommending it. Later you can see whether any ideas on the list prompt you to think of others**.** You'll also think of possible combinations of ideas.

2.3.7 Preserve self-esteem

Preserving the other party's self-esteem makes negotiation more productive. Your cooperative approach and active listening will help the other person to feel heard and respected and less tempted to take an aggressive stance. Whatever the outcome, try to ensure that the other person ends the negotiations with some success. It's particularly important if he is representing a group and will have to report back to it.

Help the other person to concede a point. You may be able to show that agreeing makes sense now that he knows more about the background or because the circumstances have changed. You're also helping him explain his new position to himself and anyone he represents.

2.3.8 Don't react

Experienced negotiators talk about responding rather than reacting and even let insults, threats and ultimatums wash over them. It's difficult, particularly when the stakes are high or you're under pressure and tired, but controlling your emotions can be vital.

Susan Podziba, a professor of mediation at MIT and Harvard Law School, is involved in some of the most demanding negotiations around the world and states the risk strongly: 'Impatience or any other surge of emotion, can ruin a negotiation.'[50] A few moments of uncontrolled emotion can encourage you to concede something you'll later regret or damage a carefully-developed relationship at a sensitive stage.

If you sense an emotional moment coming on, try focusing on being curious about the other person's needs or suggested solutions. Take deep (silent) breaths.

If the tension is rising or you reach an impasse, go to the list of possible solutions you've created so far and review them together. Refocus for a while on your common ground. Talk about how you might both benefit if you can work your way through to a solution you are both happy with.

It's important to keep your focus on achieving win/win, even if the other person is unreasonable. Setting an example often calms the other person down, but if unfair behaviour continues, you can name it and ask him to stop. 'When you shout like that it makes it difficult for us to work towards a solution,' or name the behaviour and ask about his motive. 'I've noticed that you've adopted quite an aggressive tone since we started talking about possible solutions. Why are you doing that?'

Make it easy for the other person to back down and save face when you name unfair behaviour, 'Negotiating gets really tense sometimes doesn't it?' or 'I'm feeling tense too, but I'm sure we can find something that's fair for both of us'.

If necessary, take a break. When you come back, try changing chairs.

2.4 Make your agreement last

Most of the negotiations I've been involved in over the last few years have been so cooperative that they've been a pleasure. Supporting our negotiations over distribution and licensing is a clear and usually unspoken understanding: If it doesn't work for both of us, it won't last. We have to find a way to make the deal appeal to both parties. We'll have a legal agreement with 'easy out' clauses that allow us the freedom to abandon the arrangement if it doesn't work, so the success of our agreement will depend on being fair to each other and negotiating for the long-term.

Listening and attempting to match the other's needs, will give you a more satisfying outcome and also builds up a fund of goodwill that makes the agreement more durable. Even so, keep it businesslike and build in transparency and some objective measures to ensure that both sides know that they are keeping to the agreement.

2.5 The method in a more challenging scenario

Let's imagine that your grandfather is in a rest home. He's been happy there, but over the last two years one of his close friends has died and, though he puts a brave face on it when you arrive, he has become increasingly depressed and inactive. He admits to being bored and you've noticed that the staff organize everything for the residents – even the entertainment is passive.

Granddad resents the staff taking over things he could easily do himself. He confides that his resentment recently led to an angry exchange with a nurse who was treating him like a sick child. He doesn't want to make a fuss, but agrees to you approaching the owner to negotiate some changes, in the interests of all the residents. As you leave he shouts through the door that you won't get anywhere because the owner is a control freak who's just in it for the money.

The word spreads and in the next week other residents and relatives contact you at work to say they would like you to represent them too because they share Granddad's views. Almost all have suggestions for hobbies, outings and other activities and several say they want to have pets.

You call the owner, Mrs Johnson, from your office. You tell her that you are representing your grandfather and several other residents and would appreciate an opportunity to discuss some changes to their care. She says she always welcomes comments from residents and relatives, but questions you closely about the numbers you represent and the way you were appointed. You are relaxed and tell her that your appointment was informal, but the residents and relatives did take the trouble to track down your number and discuss the issues.

You explain the need for negotiation in a non-threatening way.

> Mrs Johnson: What changes are they talking about?
>
> You: They'd like to have more independence and more to do – a wider range of activities.
>
> Mrs Johnson: What activities? We're busy enough already, providing activities. Can you tell me what else they want?
>
> You: Well, they have some suggestions, but it would be a matter of finding things they like and that are practical for you and the staff. That's something I'd like to explore with you.

You think about the negotiation ahead. You consider the needs and issues the residents have told you about personally, or through their relatives and define your goal: 'To achieve more choice and a wider range of activities to improve their health and morale'. You rank the residents' needs according to how relevant each is to your goal.

1. They need more independence, specifically, the freedom to make more choices about what they do and when.
2. They need more activities they can organise themselves and which are more challenging than being an audience for other people.
3. They need to keep fit.
4. They need interests outside their own, such as doing things for other residents or looking after pets.

You decide that your backup solution is to complain to the authority responsible for the standard of care in rest homes or go to the media. You develop your first solution by ringing the authority's call centre to check that it's the kind of issue the authority would be willing to investigate.

You also think about Mrs Johnson's possible needs. You rank them on the limited information you have so far and by imagining yourself in her place. You remember her tone on the telephone.

Mrs Johnson seemed to be anxious, perhaps threatened, by your call, but making an effort to be professional. She seemed to think activities were important, but that they were already a source of stress. You remember her words: 'What activities? We're busy enough already, providing activities. Can you tell me what else they want?' Perhaps her needs will be to:

1. Avoid additional stress for her staff
2. Keep costs down
3. Keep control of the activities programme
4. Save face.

You decide that her backup solution is to agree to a few minor requests and hope that the residents will be satisfied that she listened and did what she could.

Your research reveals that elderly people who have opportunities to make choices about their lives, have regular exercise and keep pets, live longer and more healthy lives.

You decide that a satisfactory outcome for you would be to build a cooperative relationship with Mrs Johnson and for residents to be allowed to choose their entertainment and activities. Ideally you would like the cooperative relationship to lead to regular reviews to ensure that the benefits continue.

Next Wednesday afternoon, Mrs Johnson welcomes you without warmth, but retains her professional demeanour. You tell her you appreciate having the opportunity to talk over the residents' and relatives' concerns and that you would like to find some solutions that work for everyone.

You summarize what led you to ask for a meeting. You recall changes in your grandfather's morale since his friend died and refer to the comments from the elderly residents and their families about the passive nature of their existence.

Your tone and language are neutral to suggest that although it is a serious issue, it is something you expect to be able to work through. You suggest that you take notes so that you can go through them together later. You mention that many of the residents have said they want the freedom to make more choices of their own.

Mrs Johnson: What choices?

You: Routine things. Those things that are practical for them to do. We would need to discuss what's practical, but how do you feel about the principle of giving them some choices? (You've given her a sense of perspective, but avoided proposing solutions.)

Mrs Johnson: It's fine in principle, but I don't think it's practical. This is an institution and, for better or worse, we have to do things in an institutional way, simply because of the numbers. Most of the people are here because they didn't manage out in the community.

You ask the other person to raise her issues first.

Mrs Johnson says that she was disappointed to find that the residents were dissatisfied with the activities. It becomes clear that she is very experienced in arranging entertainment for elderly people and the current programme is based on one that she says worked well in a previous rest home she managed. She is worried about the cost of increasing the number of outings.

You go into active listening mode.

You: And from what you were saying on the telephone, I guess you'd also be worried about the workload for the staff?

Mrs Johnson: That's right. We're fully stretched. I don't have the budget or the people to provide different conditions for everyone. We'd have some residents exploiting the situation too. Some are quite demanding already. They'd expect us to provide a five star hotel service. I'm sorry, but it's just not practical to give them any more.

You: We might be able to find a way to give the residents at least some of what they need without stretching the budget or stressing the staff, but what else would we have to take into account?

Mrs Johnson: There's the risk factor. I can't have people doing things that might cause them injury and for some of them it could be as simple as taking a walk on their own.

You: Anything else?

Mrs Johnson: It's all I can think of at the moment.

You: Let's make a note of your concerns and the residents' concerns, then we can see if we can find some solutions.

You list the needs and concerns in neutral language, taking care not to discuss positions or introduce solutions at this stage.

As you make your notes, you continue to develop a better understanding of each other's needs and perspectives. At the end of this part of your discussion, your page looks like this…

Residents' issues	**Rest home's issues**
More activities they can organise themselves.	Avoid increased costs
More independence, specifically, the freedom to make more choices about what they do and when.	Avoid additions to staff workload
To keep fit.	Ensure the residents' safety
Have interests outside their own.	Ensure that residents' expectations do not exceed what the rest home can provide.
	Keep control of the rest home.
	Have satisfied residents and relatives.

You identify some possible solutions.

You: 'I find that it's more productive to just list as many solutions as possible without judging them. We can decide later which solutions or combination of solutions would be best to meet everyone's needs'.

You identify your possible solutions together and the list ends up like this…

1. Allow the more able-bodied residents to choose activities after consulting the others.
2. Form a committee of residents and staff to choose activities.
3. Allow residents to choose pot plants from a list of hardy plants prepared by the staff.
4. Allow residents to keep caged birds if they are able to feed them unaided.
5. Allow residents to keep a cat if they are able to look after it by themselves.
6. Provide one cat for the whole rest home.
7. Mrs Johnson to allow her own dog to visit residents who agree.
8. Ask staff to encourage residents to make choices about anything that does not add to the staff workload or to cost and would not endanger the residents.
9. Encourage residents to help other residents with a buddy system.

10. Introduce a 'keep fit' class for those able to walk to it unaided.
11. Ask if any residents or relatives would be willing to take a 'keep fit' class – unpaid.
12. Involve residents and relatives in taking hobby classes chosen by the residents.

Now you consider the value of the solutions and the possibility that a combination of solutions might give you the best outcome. Perhaps you'll eliminate the idea of a cat for anyone who can look after one because you don't want the rest home overrun by cats.

Mrs Johnson says that, on reflection, her dog wouldn't be suitable without supervision, but you both like the idea of one cat that's free to roam. You might decide that asking the staff to encourage residents to make choices is too ill-defined. Maybe you both like the buddy system to help residents who are less independent and can think of some, including your grandfather, who would benefit from being active buddies.

Eventually, you decide on the best combination of solutions. The staff will encourage the residents to form a committee with a clear brief that their role is to advise on the wishes of all the residents.

Mrs Johnson will make the final decision whether activities and entertainments are practical, but she agrees to welcome any suggestions that don't involve significant extra cost or stress for the staff. She will assign a senior staff member to organise a trial of the buddy system with a few volunteers. The rest home will collect a cat from the animal home by the end of the week and set up a basket for it in the laundry.

Both of you will ask if any relatives are prepared to volunteer their time to take fitness or hobby groups. The rest home will offer a limited choice of meals, hardy pot plants and anything else that doesn't involve significant extra work, expense or risk of injury.

You make commitments to implement the agreement.
A formal contract seems out of place, but you read out your notes on the key points of the agreement and offer to email Mrs Johnson with a full version so that she can add any corrections or comments.

You undertake to report the agreements that you've reached to the residents who approached you. You'll report that Mrs Johnson is cooperative, but has some significant constraints.

Mrs Johnson commits to all the changes you have agreed to and proposes that she invite the residents to form their committee. You decide to meet in six weeks to review how well the agreement is working out.

You would almost certainly have achieved more with the problem-solving approach than you could have by bargaining from fixed positions. You've built the cooperative relationship with Mrs Johnson you wanted and the residents will get most of what they need. It's not a compromise because you haven't given up anything significant and Mrs Johnson hasn't had to commit to spending money, increasing the workload for her staff or allowing activities or choices she would consider risky. Together you've identified the needs and met as many as possible.

When they're not interested in win/win
'What do you do when they just want to make demands?' It's one of the questions we are asked most often in training people in negotiation. The bargainer with plenty of power, an attractive backup solution, an aggressive manner and not the slightest interest in win/win, is a formidable challenge. Even so, there are ways to bring him around.

Sell the benefits of finding a win/win outcome. In what ways would your positional bargainer gain from having the issue resolved? Present those benefits in as constructive and balanced a way as you can – not so that it could be interpreted as a threat. Keep away from specific solutions. Maybe something like this: 'I'd like to see if we can find a way to get what we both need – so that we can at least reduce the tension between our two teams'.

It's also important to treat the other party's position as simply a possible option. Then look at what is behind that option.

Choose to assume that the other person is playing the game. It won't be true at first, but there's a reasonable chance that it will become true. Continue to treat every demand as just another option behind which there will be interests to explore.

Your pre-frontal cortex may be very busy helping you ignore the aggressive tone, the demeaning comments and the apparent intransigence, but keep probing.

Keep telling yourself that your diplomacy under duress and your determination to find a win/win solution makes you the emotionally intelligent one, because it's true.

3 Become more persuasive

Facts and logic are not enough

The ability to persuade is more than a useful skill. It's an outstanding characteristic of top achievers.[51]

The most successful persuaders don't rely entirely on facts or logic. They don't see persuasion as a one-off event. Nor do they use pressure. They use a wider range of strategies than most other people, but manage to remain genuine and altruistic so that the effect is persuasion, not manipulation.

Logical arguments can be influential, but persuasion is not a simple, logical process and hard-sell just creates objections.

There's now a large body of research to help us refine our skills of persuasion. The researchers have produced some techniques we can use with confidence to make us more effective persuaders at work, in the community and at home.

3.1 Why isn't logic enough?

What we say is simply part of the mix. We talk about being persuasive, but the research shows that we don't actually persuade directly. We influence people and they persuade themselves. Even if our logic is impeccable, our attempts to persuade may encourage them to move even further away from agreeing with us.

Researchers have found that most of us tend to hold on to an opinion even if when we can't remember the arguments we heard at the time we formed it.[52]

Sometimes there was never any judgement or reasoning involved. Just feeling good about a speaker, or even an advertisement, can be enough to convince us to accept the argument or buy the product. So our opinion may have no more logic behind it than, 'He was a nice person', 'She sounded as if she knew what she was talking about'. Even when we can't remember those irrelevant justifications, we're unlikely to question our decision, because it just seems right.

Even urging people to be open-minded doesn't work because most people believe they have an unbiased view anyway. Even the most ardent racists are convinced they have the facts and everyone else is out of touch with what's really going on in the world.

When researchers ask people to be objective, most will continue to consider new information with their usual biases. They may read or listen to contrary information objectively, then ignore it when they make a decision. They may also use faulty reasoning, such as seeing events that are associated, and assume that one *causes* the other. [53] It's as logical as: 'People I've seen shaving wear trousers, therefore wearing trousers causes hair to grow on your face'. Fortunately, there are some effective ways to overcome the obstacles of bias and faulty reasoning.

3.2 How to prepare to persuade

Jay Conger of the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business, says effective persuasion is a 'learning and negotiating process' and that the most effective persuaders consider their arguments from every angle, before they even start to present their case.[54]

Conger studied senior business leaders and team leaders for many years and found that effective persuaders establish their credibility first. It's essential for persuasive people to have both credible expertise and *relationship credibility* with their audience. Audiences may resist our arguments simply because we have no relationship with them or because we need to put some work into the one we have. It helps to be liked, but just finding common interests, experiences or values that draw you together helps to make you more persuasive.

Genuine consultation will help build your relationship credibility. Ask how other people see the current situation. What problems or opportunities do they have? Resist the temptation to suggest any solutions until you have asked about the size or significance of the problems or opportunities, 'How much of a problem is that for you? What effect is that having? How often does that happen? What would happen if we did nothing about it?'

Next, you could use consultation to explore some options, but you need to phrase the options to make it clear that you don't yet have a fixed view. You might say, '*One possibility* would be to dispose of most of the existing computers and issue everyone with a tablet' or, '*I'm looking at various possibilities*. We could paint the clubhouse roof, or use our funds to re-carpet the changing rooms. I'm also looking at the possibility of suggesting to the committee that we leave things as they are until we've raised enough money to renovate the whole building. Do you have a feeling about any of those ideas?'

When you present your proposal, enhance your relationship credibility by recalling what the people you consulted told you and emphasising what you have in common – perhaps shared experiences of working for the same company, shared pride in what your team does for customers or shared worries about the current economic trough. You can also acknowledge their doubts, caution and scepticism about your plans. Invite them to express their scepticism and choose to welcome it when they do.

Perhaps you *are* sure that you must reduce staff numbers, or close a division of your company, but you could leave open some of the issues, such as how you think it should be done and when.

3.2.1 The WIIFM question

Your consultation and openness will have developed your credibility with your audience and an understanding of their perspectives. It's now time to answer the question, 'What's in it for me?'

> 'If you tidy up quickly, there'll be time for a story.'
>
> 'This process will save us manufacturing costs and improve our bottom line by the end of the financial year.'
>
> 'If we buy our new car now, we can save money on the run-out model.'

If you are proposing that your company move offices from the centre of town to an industrial park, you might have heard in your consultations that some people would be concerned about the cost of transport. You could focus on the benefits of cheaper and more convenient parking. You could show how they could use the ring road for a quicker trip to the new location.

If you don't know how your audience might benefit, or you want to encourage them to think about the benefits of a solution, you can ask. 'If we did do it that way, what would be the advantages for you?' or 'If we did choose that option would it be enough to overcome the problems we've talked about?'

If you are preparing to persuade a large audience, you could ask the same questions of a few people who are typical of the group. Their answers should help you present your proposal in a way that highlights the real benefits – the ones your audience thinks are important.

Often it's sufficient to appeal to your audience's core values. You can make safe assumptions that most people want to do good work, to treat customers well and make high quality products. We can also sell the benefits of making a sacrifice for the good of others such as asking people to give up their time or money for a worthy cause, or to help others in the team.[55]

Sometimes there is no common ground in your proposal – you can't come up with any significant benefits for your audience. You may have to consider whether the proposal is saleable. An alternative could be to use the *salami method* – persuade them a slice at a time because your audience is not going to swallow the whole salami in one serving.

3.3 Engage the emotions

Emotions are an essential part of the decision-making process. Humans find it extraordinarily difficult to make decisions without knowing how they feel about the options and the facts and data that support them.

Most facts or data are emotionally neutral. We might have an instant emotional reaction to the figure of our new salary or a major plunge in stock market prices, but usually, facts need some help to do their work. We can provide a context – particularly what they mean for our audience or for other humans.

You can often introduce emotions or feelings by putting things in perspective. You might for instance offer reassurance that goes beyond simple facts or data.

A chief executive once told me that his fertilizer firm often takes calls from reporters who say, 'We've heard that your fertiliser has cadmium (a naturally occurring, but toxic heavy metal).' He says, 'Yes, that's true. It's present in many rock-based fertiliser. 'And,' say the reporters, 'The people at the works are condemning the kidneys of cattle raised on those pastures.' It's an emotional issue and the chief executive knows he must put the contamination in perspective.

The chief executive could offer figures in parts per million, but he needs to be more reassuring than that. He always has the figures handy, but he says, 'Yes that's true too, but even if you ate one of those kidneys every day for the rest of your life, it's very unlikely that the cadmium level in your body would exceed the World Health Organisation's guideline.' Kidneys for dinner every night for the rest of your life? How do you feel about the risk now? (His claim is consistent with the international research.)[56]

We can engage our audience's emotions by painting pictures with words. Orators have shown that they make key ideas memorable. Winston Churchill's iron curtain analogy became a media cliché. Martin Luther King's *I have a dream speech* in 1963 was full of memorable images and made a powerful case for the Civil Rights Bill.

The research shows that word pictures get audiences interested and encourage them to think more carefully about the arguments. There is one important qualification: The word pictures must match the listeners' feelings, preferences and interests.[57]

Ask your audience to imagine how different things could be. Give them detail. Make sure you put people in your pictures. If you want to persuade your management team to buy new software, give them the facts showing how obsolete the current programmes are, but tell them too about the irritation it's caused for the people who're using them. Tell them stories about people. Give them details and name names.

Here's an engineer persuading by painting pictures about people…

> 'The last time we developed a prototype using that method, it wasn't just slow, it was frustrating because the circuit board was riddled with problems.
>
> I came in one Saturday night to find John, Sue and Damien here working away in the half-dark, trying to get the project back on track.
>
> It turned out that it was their third six-day week. They're pretty laid back people as you know, but they were mighty tense that night – and there were more long weeks to come – all because we'd decided to take shortcuts to save a little money on the development.'

Feeling words like frustrating and tense give your dry facts a human dimension. You might also find opportunities to use others such as, annoyed, proud, delighted, upset, satisfied, angry, thrilled, exhilarated or anxious.

Use names and feeling words well and you'll be showing what your argument means in human terms. That's not padding: It's showing its relevance to your audience. But think it through carefully because if you use feeling words that overstate your case, you're into propaganda. You risk losing your audience's trust and your relationship credibility.

If you have any remaining doubts about the power of emotions consider the apocryphal story copywriters tell about one of them walking through a park and coming across a blind man with his hat out and a sign reading, 'I am blind.' The copywriter approaches him and says, 'I think I can improve your donations.' He changes the sign to, 'I am blind – and it is spring.'

3.4 What to do about objections

Sales research reveals some interesting information about objections. Most salespeople are taught to *handle* objections, which usually means having an answer ready for them. I once shared a suite of offices with an insurance agent who had the answer to every objection he could remember hearing in his long career displayed on his office wall. He would sit back in his chair as he spoke to his prospective customers and look across to the appropriate answers. Salespeople have been taught for decades that an objection is a sign of interest and the more objections, the greater the prospective buyer's interest and the chances of a sale. No doubt it helps to lift their spirits to believe it, but it's not true.

The Huthwaite Research Group observed 10 thousand salespeople and found that the most successful didn't handle objections – the objections didn't arise.[58] They were destroyed early in the sales process as the sellers listened carefully to what their potential clients needed and sought to find a solution to match. The Huthwaite researchers found that an objection is not a sign of interest and the more objections you get, the less likely the prospect will buy your product or idea. Handling objections or hoping they won't come up is far less effective than 'preventing' them early in the sales process.

Set out to remove the objections early. I like the term *pre-empting objections*, because it suggests a pre-emptive strike. It might sound aggressive, but it's a very honourable and open process that also focuses our attention on any weaknesses in our argument so that we can think of ways to overcome them before the audience raises them.

The alternative to pre-empting objections is to hope that your audience won't mention them. But the objections will be lurking there, ready to destroy or damage your argument. If someone does raise them, you will be forced into a defensive position. You may find yourself filling silences as you desperately search for an adequate reply. Your audience may think it suspicious that you didn't mention the other side of the argument yourself.

3.4.1 The process

Here's how you prepare to pre-empt objections.

1. Summarise your proposal at the top of a blank page and create two columns below it.
2. Think of any objections the audience might have to your proposal and write them in the left column. I always write their objections in the form of quotes and I like to assume that the people I'm about to persuade have a bit of attitude so often the quotes will qualify for an exclamation mark. It helps me to think of their objections in a more focused way.
3. Think how you might answer each of those objections. You have three options:
   - to answer the objection in a way that destroys it
   - to concede that it's a fair objection, but minor, considering the value of the proposal overall
   - to amend the proposal because the objection would be so strong that your audience would reject the proposal if you don't.

Let's see the *pre-empting objections* method in action.

Years ago, I was involved in a campaign to persuade people 65 and older to get vaccinated against influenza. It was a serious issue, because influenza can lead to fatal complications. It was serious for the hospitals too because elderly patients were exhausting their resources during the winter. The previous year patients had been waiting in corridors for beds. It was easy to discover the objections because doctors heard them regularly.

We used the objections to create a modest leaflet headed, 'Influenza. Mistakes many people make.' We quoted all the main objections and answered them.

Proposal: if you are 65 or older, get your influenza vaccine well before winter sets in.

Their objections	Our answers to the objections
'It's too expensive!'	If you are 65 or older, it's free.
'It's just a bit of 'flu'. Hardly worth worrying about.'	Influenza is not just a bad cold. It's a serious disease and it can lead to serious complications. You might die.
'I may be 65, but I'm very fit, so I never get sick.'	If you are 65 or older, your immune system is not as strong as it was. You could catch influenza no matter how fit you are.
'I had one last year.'	Influenza vaccines wear off in less than a year. You need another now.
'I'm too busy now. I'll do it later!'	You need to do it now so that the vaccine has time to work before the expected epidemic arrives.

Within a few weeks the inoculation rate for the region had gone from average, to the highest in the country.

3.5 One-sided or two-sided arguments?

If your audience already agrees with you, make your presentation one-sided – give them only the arguments that support your case. It's what politicians do at their party rallies and it's the right choice in that context. The research confirms that presenting an alternative point of view would only rehearse the partisan audience in counter-arguments they might not have considered before.

If your audience may disagree with you, a two-sided argument works much better and you can use your skills in pre-empting objections to help you prepare. With a two-sided argument you'll raise the objection and show how wrong it is.

Let's imagine that you want to persuade members of your neighbourhood support group to join you in leaving their cars at home and taking public transport to work. If you spend the next 20 minutes telling them that they will be helping to reduce pollution and the traffic at rush hour and they would save money on transport, your one-sided approach will encourage them to put up barriers. They'll probably have their counter-arguments ready and even if they don't, research has shown that just knowing that there is another side to the story would make them more resistant.[59] They'll also see your one-sided presentation as bias.

When you include arguments against your case you break down that resistance. Acknowledge that they would have the inconvenience of walking to the bus or train and that public transport doesn't have quite the same comfort or status as a car. You can then argue that the inconvenience of the walk is outweighed by having to park the car, the difference in comfort minor and that they would be making a useful contribution to the lives of their fellow citizens. Having conceded the other side of the argument, you can claim that when we take *everything* into account, catching the bus or train makes more sense.

Two-sided arguments come with a long-term benefit when the audience is likely to disagree with you. If you present both sides and someone else comes along to argue against you, the audience is less likely to be swayed.[60]

The more open approach will have given them the opportunity to consider points on both sides and build a fund of counter-arguments against the newcomer.

3.6 Positive or negative?

It's an old debate. Should you 'accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative' or give them a reality check by telling them how serious things could be if they don't accept your argument? It depends on their starting point.

Philip Broemer of the University of Tubingen in Germany believes that the key issue is ambivalence.[61] If your audience is likely to have conflicting feelings about your cause, choose the negative argument. Broemer tested negative messages in a study that promoted exercise and a low fat diet to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Most people are ambivalent about exercise and diet and the study suggested that emphasising the dangers of not changing our lifestyle is more effective than telling us how we will benefit. Broemer found that people who were ambivalent about using condoms to prevent HIV were much more often persuaded by messages about the dangers of unprotected sex than assurances that they would feel much safer if they used them.

Addictions offer a special challenge. Most smokers want to give up, but they also believe that smoking relieves stress and they find it pleasurable. According to Philip Broemer's research, we should keep telling them how dangerous it is. The strategy has helped, but millions of people around the world read messages as strong as 'Smoking kills' and 'Smoking causes fatal diseases' and still light up.

Earlier research suggests that our perception of risk is a significant issue too and it's clearly a factor in our ambivalence.[62] Positive messages, telling us how we'll benefit, work best if we think the risk is low or non-existent. There's no great risk, for most of us anyway, in walking to work, so use a positive message – say, 'Walk to work and you'll keep fit and healthy and save a fortune in transport. It should be more effective than the negative, 'Walk to work or you'll lose your fitness, get sick more often and lose a fortune in transport'.

Most people rate medical checkups as risky and researchers recommend negative messages to spur us into action: 'If you leave a tumour to grow, it may be too late to treat it. See your doctor for a check-up.' The research is confirming that negative information or messages about checkups tend to be more effective than similarly positive messages. Don't overdo the negativity. If you raise strong fears, you run the risk of your audience repressing the message because it's too difficult to face.

Effective persuaders can't assume that the natural human motivation to protect ourselves from harm is enough to change our behaviour. We need to show people that there is a real danger and that they are personally vulnerable. We also need to convince them that the action we are suggesting will help them avoid danger and that it's practical for them to take that action. We may need a series of messages targeted at those four issues.

Let's say you want to persuade new employees to use ear protection every time they are using machinery – not just when you are around. You might explain how prolonged exposure to noise damages the inner ear and that it's a gradual process. ('There is a real danger.') Perhaps you could arrange for them to meet, or hear about, someone who operated the same machines and became deaf. ('You are personally vulnerable.') You could provide information about the effectiveness of hearing protection and ask them to put on the industrial ear protectors you want them to wear while you start up your noisiest machine. ('The action will help you to avoid danger.') You might explain that their ear protectors will be stored within easy reach of the machines. ('The action is practical.')

With risky behaviour it's particularly important to focus on the consequences of the behaviour rather than harp on about the solution. People who, for instance, speed, drink excessive amounts of caffeine, smoke or are consistently late for work, may process your messages defensively – 'It won't happen to me. The risks are exaggerated. I heard that you can smoke till you are in your thirties then stop and it doesn't do you any harm.'[63] Work on those rationalisations. Show them repeatedly that their beliefs are false.

3.7 Inoculating against other arguments

Once you've persuaded people, you can help them to resist counter-arguments by encouraging them to rehearse their defences. The researchers call it inoculation and it does work in much the same way as a measles injection. A little of the other side's argument is like a weak form of the virus. It stimulates the defences.

Inoculation works best if you use three steps. Tell your audience that the other side is likely to attack soon. Offer some weak arguments that the other side might come up with. Encourage your audience to think about what they might say when they hear from the other side.

If it sounds manipulative, let's take an honourable use of it. Imagine that you've persuaded your teenager that smoking is a very unhealthy thing to do, but you suspect that the peer pressure to smoke will begin soon. Both of you could think of ways to respond to the pressure and jibes. You would alert your teenager to the possibility that her friends might offer her cigarettes soon and tell her she is *chicken* if she refuses. You could then brainstorm some replies – for instance, 'I'd have to be chicken to smoke just to impress you.'

A junior high school in the United Sates took on the pressure to smoke in just that way. The teachers also encouraged the children to respond to advertisements that implied that women who smoked were liberated. They suggested replies such as, 'She's not really liberated if she's hooked on tobacco.' They were prompting defensive responses, rather than hoping the children would develop them. Researchers found the programme to be twice as successful as more conventional anti-smoking programmes for the same age group.[64]

Ideally, you should leave people to come up with their own defences. They'll be more committed to them if you do.

3.8 Techniques the advertisers use

Infomercials, direct mail and advertising provide some useful examples of researched techniques in action. If you are repulsed by the idea, try to keep an open mind. It's easy to use some of the techniques at work in ways that won't seem commercial or manipulative.

3.8.1 Focus on the audience

Effective marketers never lose their focus on the audience. It's the golden rule of all communication and essential to persuasion. In your preparation ask yourself, what's important to my audience, how might they react to this idea, how would they benefit, what objections might they have? Speak and write to them as individuals, using the word you, and inclusive words such as us and we.

As you present your case, monitor their reactions constantly. Pick up on body language that suggests doubt or resistance. Do they need more information? Should you give more reassurance? Do you need to acknowledge their doubts or scepticism before going on to talk about the benefits? Try to make it two-way communication, rather than simply a presentation.

3.8.2 Everybody else is doing it!

I was once enjoying a cruise along the Seine with a boatload of other tourists from around the world. The guide was entertaining and professional and his audience appreciative. It was a very pleasant way to see the famous buildings and bridges of Paris. But my memory of that cruise more than 30 years ago is dominated by what happened as we filed out of that boat.

I was soon conscious of the steady rhythm of a bell. As coins fell through the slot in the top of the tips box, the bell would ring to announce to everyone that yet another passenger had been generous. The steady ding, ding, ding, rhythm continued. Would you break the rhythm?

Evidence that other people approve or are doing something can be powerfully persuasive in marketing too. It's such a standard technique of advertising that we rarely question the objectivity or motives of those who give their support to a persuasive message. In one American series of infomercials the producers asked people in the street to view the world through a brand of sunglasses. Americans all over the country would look around them and gush such lines as: 'That's incredible!' and 'If I had not seen that with my own eyes, I would not have believed it!' In New Zealand, television commercials include taciturn farmers praising, with low-key rural credibility, the virtues of brands of fence-posts and sheep drenches. You can even see people in the street praising the quality of prunes.

The need to compare ourselves with others is so strong that it's easily exploited, but checking what others think or have decided can provide us with useful information. If your consumer organisation reports that 96 per cent of its members found that Brand A smartphone is reliable, it's surely only sensible to take that into account. If your friends enjoyed a book, maybe you will too. It's only sensible to draw on our networks of relationships and particularly those people whose opinions we trust.

It makes sense to add a list of testimonials from satisfied clients to our proposals. It makes sense to mention that other branches of our organisation or other teams in our sport are already doing successfully what we are advocating. We are answering the natural questions, 'Has anyone else done this before?' and 'What happened?'

Referring to what others are doing or thinking also adds human interest to facts. It can be a legitimate way of appealing to the emotions. If for instance you were shooting a commercial for your town, you'd want your audience to see plenty of people enjoying themselves. Your message would be far more effective if you could show that it's already a place other people like to visit.

But how about this? Imagine that you are preparing an anti-litter commercial for television. To highlight just how widespread littering is, you're thinking of showing some particularly disgusting shots in what would otherwise be beautiful locations. Would that be effective? The research suggests it wouldn't. You'd be mixing two messages: 'Stop littering' and 'Lots of people are littering.' *Lots of people are littering* suggests that we might as well join in.

It's easy to confuse our messages when we ad lib and we find ourselves saying, 'Everyone's been leaving dirty dishes in the staff room so let's make sure it doesn't happen again,' or 'Hardly anyone is sending their reports to me on time and I want to see an improvement.' Instead, thank those who are already stacking their own dishes in the dishwasher and sending their reports to you on time.

3.8.3 Use endorsements

Producers of commercials and infomercials love endorsements from celebrities and authority figures. Why not use them too? There are some significant ethical issues, but endorsements can be very persuasive.

You may need an endorsement from an authority figure to support your 'expertise credibility'. It can help your audience as much as it helps you. An expert, especially one who is genuinely objective, helps us cut through all the available evidence. The expert need not appear in person – maybe a relevant quote will be enough. Experts help us reach the decisions we might have made ourselves if only we had specialised in such things as the intricacies of international exchange rates, the most effective way to exercise, or the hazards of particular chemicals. People with credible expertise have power. A single story on national television in America quoting an expert has been shown to shift public opinion nationwide by 4 per cent.[65]

Endorsements from likable or glamorous people are persuasive too because we use people we like or admire as a reference when we are uncertain.[66] Glamour rubs off on the product or idea and creates an image.

3.8.4 Use the need to be consistent

Our need to seem consistent, not just publicly, but to ourselves, is a powerful influence on our behaviour. Once we take a position on an issue we can be influenced by that action weeks later.

An American study from the 1960s showed how far-reaching the need to be consistent can be. Jonathan Freedman and Scott Fraser, from Stanford University sent research assistants into the suburbs of Palo Alto California to ask homeowners to agree to a simple request. They invited residents to sign a petition to 'Keep California beautiful'. As you might expect, not many people turned them down.

Two weeks later other members of the research team arrived at their door, pretended to be from a fictitious organisation, didn't mention the petition and asked the homeowners to agree to erecting a billboard reading, 'Drive Carefully' on their lawns.

Each research assistant had a photograph to show how the billboard would look – very large and with unprofessional lettering, obscuring much of an attractive house. Twenty per cent of a control group said yes to the billboard, but fifty five per cent of those who had previously agreed to sign the petition agreed. The researchers reasoned that signing the petition helped the homeowners to see themselves as public-spirited citizens. Two weeks later they were still seeing themselves as public-spirited – the kind of people who would help to save lives on the road. The pressure to be consistent was their own. They had no reason to believe that the second researcher knew anything about the petition.[67]

You could use the consistency principle to persuade yourself. Writing your goals creates a commitment to them, but public commitments are the most powerful. I remember a young teacher who enjoyed her work, but felt that she should see something of the world. She worried about giving up the security of her job. She procrastinated for a while, but at her farewell to her family and friends she mentioned that telling everyone that she would be travelling overseas soon gave her the motivation to make definite plans and begin saving. She's lived overseas ever since.

If you want to give up smoking, tell your friends. Tell them when you will be stopping and that you will be going cold turkey. If they ever see a cigarette in your hands, you're being inconsistent.

If a colleague says she's unhappy with the way clients' enquiries are handled, invite her to research and recommend ways of improving your customer service. You are asking her to be consistent with her expressed concern. If you want your colleagues to deliver their projects on time, consider asking them to commit to their deadlines in a meeting with the whole team.

You can use the human need to be consistent constructively when your children express healthy values or ambitions and you create opportunities for them to put those values into action. If your teenager says he would like to be fitter, you can point out that the new computer game he wants might distract him from his goal. The research shows that it would work better if you avoided pressure and your teenager felt free to decide whether to buy the game.

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