



Debra Allcock Tyler

THE PLEASURE AND THE PAIN

The No-fibbing Guide to
Working with People



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Working with People**

DIRECTORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Published by
Directory of Social Change
24 Stephenson Way
London NW1 2DP
Tel. 08450 77 77 07; Fax 020 7391 4804
E-mail publications@dsc.org.uk
www.dsc.org.uk
from whom further copies and a full books catalogue are available.

Directory of Social Change is a Registered Charity no. 800517

First published 2007

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ISBN: 978 1 903991 85 5

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Illustrations by Grizelda
Cover designed by Kate Bass and Simon Parkin
Typeset by Linda Parker
Printed and bound by Page Bros., Norwich

All other Directory of Social Change departments in London:
08450 77 77 07

Directory of Social Change Northern Office:
Federation House, Hope Street, Liverpool L1 9BW
Courses and conferences 08450 77 77 07
Research 0151 708 0136

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Dedication

To my staff at DSC who are mostly a pleasure!!!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following who teach me every day how much people are willing and able to give when they care: our DSC team as at March 2007.

Reda Allam
John Barrett
Kate Bass
Fred Carpenter
Claire Cohen
Charles Collett
Kirsty Cunningham
Justine Fernandes
Sandra Fielding
Alan French
Conor Gibson
Kim Hobbs
Supriya Horn
Annette Hutchinson
Jay Kennedy
Kajol Kochar
Richard Lee
Graham Leigh
Denise Lillya
John Martin

Michael McManus
Sarah Johnston
Lucy Muir-Smith
Shireen Mustafa
Sujata Pearson
Maria Pemberton
Harin Perera
Satinder Pujji
Helen Rice
Amy Rosser
Carole Sandman
Cathy Shimmin
Ruby Smallin
John Smyth
Rachel Stephens
Jill Thornton
Tom Traynor
Lisa van der Wekken
John Wallace
Ben Wittenberg

About the author

Debra Allcock Tyler is Chief Executive of the Directory of Social Change (DSC), which campaigns for an independent voluntary sector at the heart of social change. DSC achieves this through publishing, training and commentary. Current campaigns include the need to promote transparency and accountability of the sector, the need to increase public confidence in charitable organisations and concern about the sector's independence from government. With an annual turnover of more than £3 million, DSC has contact with some 20,000 voluntary and community organisations every year through its programmes.

Debra works with boards, chief executives and their top teams in governance issues, leadership, vision, mission, values and the establishment of strategic objectives. She is a trustee of MedicAlert® which is the only non-profit-making, registered charity providing a life-saving identification system for individuals with hidden medical conditions and allergies.

She is a member of the SORP Committee, a Fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce (FRSA) and a Licensed Practitioner of NLP. She is a Special Ambassador for the Guides Association (now Girlguiding UK) and a member of the Advisory Panel for the MSc in Voluntary Sector Management at Cass Business School, City University. She was a member of the Buse Commission for self-regulation in fundraising. She has a BSc (Hons) in Psychology, a Certificate in Natural Sciences (Physics; Chemistry; Earth Sciences; Biological Sciences) and is currently studying for a BSc in Physics.

During her twenty-two year career, Debra has worked in insurance, management consultancy and the voluntary sector, carrying out a range of managerial and leadership roles including sales, product development, campaigning, media relations and training.

She is an internationally published author of several books covering topics such as leadership, management, communication skills, personal development and time management, and has made many appearances on radio, TV and in the press.

Introduction

This is a book about people. That sounds like a big topic and indeed it is. Specifically, it's about people in the workplace: how they behave, their impact on you, and your impact on them. This book is not aimed specifically at managers. It is very much for anyone who has to work with people (most of us I imagine) at any level in an organisation. But if you are a manager reading this book, I hope that you find the general observations and ideas useful in helping you to think about how you lead and manage teams.

I base my observations and thoughts in this book on a number of different sources: stories that people have told me; my own work experience at all levels in an organisation; my research and training; and my psychology degree, which I took as a mature student, not so much because I wanted to understand more about others, but because I wanted to have a better insight into myself – and inevitably I found out not just about myself, but also about what makes other people tick.

During my 20-plus years in the workplace I have realised a basic truth about most human beings: they are largely influenced not by facts, not by evidence, not by logic, but by their emotions. And yet there are still so many people in the world who believe that all you need to do win others over to your argument is to present a strong, clear and evidence-based case. But if that is true, how is it that smokers still smoke, drivers still speed and directors of fundraising refuse point blank to get their expense forms in on time? Because logic doesn't drive us. It can inform our thinking, it can help to clarify what we want to do, but ultimately it is not what determines our decision making.

It is because we forget this basic fact about human beings that we so often get it wrong in how we communicate with them. I remember a colleague I used to work with saying to me that she could not argue with the logic of the position I had presented to her and she didn't have a better suggestion – but that what I had said just didn't *feel* right. And because her emotions weren't engaged by my persuasive arguments, her incentive to make it work was diminished. So the initiative I had proposed and asked her to deliver didn't work terribly well. There's no point saying, 'Well, she should have done it anyhow!' The truth is that if people's hearts aren't engaged then their heads are not going to compensate.

For example, I am currently studying for a degree in physics. When people hear that, they automatically assume that a) I must be really clever and b) I must be driven by evidence, experiment, empirical data and logical, proven arguments.

Well, first off, being interested in a subject doesn't necessarily make you good at it – I love it but I don't find it easy! And, second, it is not the facts themselves that drive this strange passion of mine, it is how the facts and figures that inevitably come with science make me *feel*. I feel alternately excited, challenged and frustrated when I'm getting to grips with a relatively simple maths problem or when I'm struggling to factorise. It's not the cold, hard facts that inspire me, but the way they make me think and feel. Lifeless facts don't move people. The emotions those facts stir up do.

So this book attempts to give you information, facts, theories and stories that hopefully will help you to understand a little more about yourself, and, perhaps more importantly in the context of working with people, also about others and how their feelings can create an effective working environment.

I don't pretend to have all the answers or even that my suggestions are the right ones for you. Any advice I give or observations I make are very much my own conclusions based on my opinion of what I have studied or observed – you are free to disregard those that simply don't fit in with your own experience. The book simply takes a number of different approaches to working with other people which you may or may not find useful.

There is a multitude of books on the subject of what makes human beings tick, from seminal psychological texts such as Eric Berne's *Games People Play* to the more 'pop psychology' ones like *How to Make Friends and Influence People* or *Emotional Intelligence*. I list those I find most useful or credible in the bibliography at the back of this book.

But I would strongly recommend three books in particular to you. The first is Stephen Pinker's *How the Mind Works*, which is the most useful summary of how human beings think, feel and react that I have ever read. The second is Dylan Evans's book *Emotion: the Science of Sentiment*. The third is the wonderful text by Theodore Zeldin called *Conversation: How Talk Can Change Your Life*.

Oh, and if work and the people in it are really driving you to despair, then read Scott Adams's *The Dilbert Principle*, which is bone-shakingly funny and helps to put all of our workplace woes into perspective.

Finally, I am not trying to convince you that it's straightforward or that the ideas and tools work all the time with all people – frankly, sometimes they don't. So my advice with this book is just to try out some of the ideas and see if they work. If they don't, then try something else.

People are generally not all that bad – honest! And if you make the effort to see things from their point of view you'll be amazed and delighted at how you can turn the pain of working with them into a real pleasure.

1 What makes people human

Seek first to understand, before being understood.

St Francis of Assisi

Outcomes

After reading this chapter you will:

- **Understand how and why people are different**
- **Know how to deal with assumptions**
- **Understand why people appear to be deluding themselves**

We can't really know how to work effectively with others without understanding human nature. And we can't examine the nature of human beings without taking a little excursion into the whole 'nature/nurture' debate. Is human nature innate or nurtured? This question still keeps rearing its ugly head, even though I have to say that for me it's fairly straightforward. It's both of course. Human beings may be born with a predisposition to a certain type of behaviour but it's the environment that will allow that behaviour to materialise – it's not inevitable that it will.

To put this into some context I want to talk a little about whether our genetic make-up is a fundamental determinant of what we are like when we grow up.

There is a genetic condition called phenylketonurea (PKU).¹ This condition means that you have a spontaneously occurring mutation in a gene which results in a defective protein. The particular protein is unable to convert phenylalanine to tyrosine and so too much phenylalanine remains in the blood. If PKU is untreated it can result in reduced brain development and irreversible mental retardation. However, the condition only develops if the environment supports it – that is if phenylalanine is present in the diet. If a child is diagnosed with PKU early enough in life and phenylalanine is eliminated from their diet (e.g. by avoiding eating meat) then the symptoms do not manifest themselves. Indeed, successful treatments for PKU mean that adults with the condition do not need to continue avoiding phenylalanine in their diets. So this is a classic case of a genetic condition which is dependent upon the environment in order to manifest itself.

However, it is really important for you to know that genes in themselves do not actually produce specific behaviours. All genes do is code for proteins and it is the action of the proteins that causes biological and behavioural traits. Most

¹ T. Watson and V. Stirling (eds) (1998), *Development and Flexibility (Biology: Brain & Behaviour, 2)*, Springer-Verlag/Open University Press, pp. 122–123.

genes represent only a small beginning in a bigger story of interacting hormones, proteins, chemicals and so on, which are influenced by diet, environment and society.

Even those things that we take as a basic biological given are not necessarily free from environmental influences, for example, the ability to see. Experiments on mice and cats have shown that if you blindfold an otherwise perfectly healthy mouse or cat from birth so that it can't see, it completely loses the ability to see even though there is nothing actually physically wrong. This is because the eye needs to learn how to see.²

It is true, therefore, that your environment and your physical self do have an enormous effect on your behaviour. However, unlike the poor cats and mice in the example above, we do have some control over our environment and we have the ability to take control of our behavioural responses to situations in which we find ourselves. Technically, when we say to ourselves, 'I can't help it, it's just the way I am', we are telling ourselves a bit of a fib. The reality is that in most cases we really can help it and our behaviour can become a choice. And that is an amazingly liberating thought, I think. You do not have to be trapped by your psychology. You can choose the behaviours and thinking which are going to work best for you to a much greater extent than you might imagine.

I saw this principle in action when I spent some time working with an organisation called Youth at Risk (YAR). YAR works with young people who have been socially excluded. They often have had very troubled childhoods, and have learned not to trust adults – or even themselves really. Many have been physically, emotionally or mentally abused in some way and a high proportion end up on the 'other side' of what most of us would consider to be social norms.

YAR helps these young people by showing them that their past does not have to dictate their present or their future. Being a victim in the past does not mean you have to be a victim in the future. You can make choices about who you want to be and what you want to do, and you don't need to blame those choices on others. You can't undo what has happened in the past, but you can change what you do for the future. The young people find this way of thinking liberates their ability to make choices about their lives, but it can be hard work.

The starting point is being self-aware: understanding that your past can influence your decisions today and dictate your future unless you consciously decide not to let this happen. Unfortunately, for many of us we are simply reacting to situations that we find ourselves in without necessarily fully understanding why.

Different or the same?

It is one of the strange paradoxes of human existence that we have to recognise that other people are the same as us and yet profoundly different. So what does that mean exactly? Well, for me it means beginning by recognising that there are some things that almost every human being on the planet has in common.

² T. Watson and V. Stirling (eds) (1998), *Development and Flexibility (Biology: Brain & Behaviour, 2)*, Springer-Verlag/Open University Press, pp. 94–99.

We all:

- Want to be loved
- Want to be able to love
- Want to feel that we 'belong'
- Want our efforts to be appreciated
- Want to be liked
- Want to feel that we are in control of our lives
- Want to feel that we have choices
- Want to feel that we are decent people
- Want to be good at something
- Want to be recognised for being good at it
- Want our voice to be heard
- Want to be understood

So fundamentally our needs are much the same. However, what makes us different is the way in which those needs are met. For example, some people want to be the best at what they do: they have a drive to be expert or the most knowledgeable about something. Others just want to feel that they have done their best and they don't feel the need to outshine others. As an aside, interestingly, I've noticed that for those people whom we term 'ambitious' at work, we tend to view that term, and therefore that person, negatively. Yet we consider ambition in a professional footballer or racing driver, for example, as a good thing. This may be because we find it an attractive quality in competitive sport because most of us don't have that talent or aim, but in the workplace we feel equality matters more.

But back to the point in hand. If we are faced with a situation that doesn't allow us to meet our common needs, as listed above, it will most likely cause a negative reaction to whatever we are observing or hearing. If we feel that our efforts at work haven't been appreciated by our boss we are likely to perceive that individual with some negativity. If we feel that the person who is asking us to do something for them doesn't like or respect us, that is likely to make us less willing to go the extra mile for them.

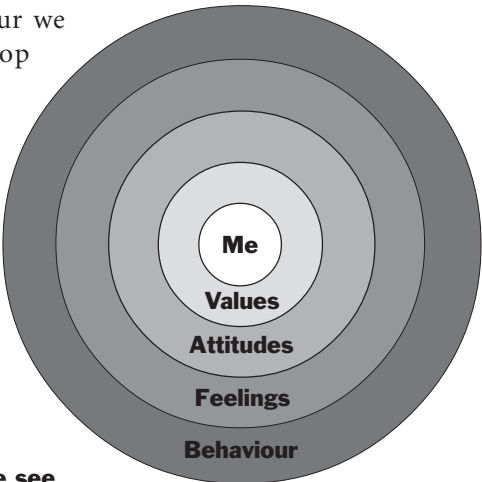
For example, have you noticed that when you like a person, if they make a mistake or do something wrong you will find excuses for them, but if someone you dislike does the same thing you will be metaphorically rubbing your hands with glee? That doesn't make us nasty – it just makes us human.

It is similar to when you buy a car and suddenly you notice all the other cars on the road that are the same as yours. We become highly attuned to those things that we are subconsciously 'looking' for. So, for example, with a person we don't like, we will notice all the things about them that confirm our dislike and ignore or disregard those things that contradict this feeling. We don't actively seek out people who *like* the object of our disdain. We're not really interested in hearing the contrary view – and we will tend to assume that those people are misguided or don't know how truly awful that person is!

Very few people wake up and think that they themselves are horrible people, even if we think they are. Most people wake up feeling pretty OK and justified in what they do and think most of the time. So telling someone they are horrid is highly unlikely to work. We don't believe it about ourselves so why should we believe it when other people say it? That is why it is so important to separate people's behaviour from who they are when we are dealing with them.

I think human beings are a bit like onions, made up of different layers. And if we understand that we cannot see inside but are only judging by the behaviour we observe, it might help us to stop making assumptions about others.

- Me** – my core
- Values** – what I am taught
- Attitudes** – how my values affect my outlook
- Feelings** – my emotional reaction
- Behaviour** – what I do, what people see



The human onion

Me

There is a central core, probably biologically based, which informs our general character. For example, if we are born with high levels of testosterone we are likely to be more adventurous as a child. If we have low levels of testosterone we are likely to be more cautious. However, even this innate bit is affected by what then happens to us as we grow up.

Values/Beliefs

Our values are taught to us throughout our lives, but we are most sensitive to them when we are very young. We learn our values both formally and informally. For example, if we are brought up within a practising religion we will be formally told what we should believe about the world. However, and often more powerfully, we also learn our values from observing what others do – in particular, we learn a lot from observing our peers.

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