

# 10

## Working with others

*No man is an island, entire of itself.*

**John Donne**

**H**umans are essentially social creatures and as such, interpersonal relationships are of central importance for well-being and overall happiness and thus for experiencing great days at work. The list of benefits of having social relationships is a long one, and includes improved physical, mental and emotional quality of life, and better coping responses to stress and adversity. Having relationships is more beneficial than not having relationships and of course ‘good’ relationships are better than bad. Social relationships are predictors of overall satisfaction with life, reducing illness symptoms and developing meaning in life. Individuals who experience more negative moods are more likely to experience poor interpersonal relations (Froh *et al*, 2007).

Maintaining and enhancing social relationships are ‘robustly related to subjective well-being and an overall enhancement in quality of life’ (Froh *et al*, 2007). Whereas Lyubomirsky, (2010) describes: ‘One of the strongest findings in literature on happiness is that happy people have better relationships than their less happy peers.’

It seems that having good social relationships starts an upward spiral of success and happiness. Not all relationships are the same quality (see later in this chapter), which does not suggest that you ditch low-quality relationships. But you can be discerning as to whom you spend your time with. Spend more time with people who are enthusiastic and supportive, and contribute to you having more great days at work.

Outside of work we have the ability to choose whom we spend time with. Within the workplace it is rare to get the same amount of choice of who your co-workers are and you may work with a whole range of people to complete tasks. This chapter will give you the building blocks of how to form effective working relationships. Because most relationships ‘just work’, usually people don’t pay much attention to how they form work relationships. This chapter will look more closely at some of the components of a healthy working relationship so that you can actively go out and create more effective work relationships.

Chapters 11 and 12 take work relationships to the next level by exploring the dynamics of relationships at work in two particular contexts: creating high-performing teams and negotiations.

Although we may not believe that in work we can have the same degree of control over who we spend our time with as we do in our personal life, there is a lot we can do to influence our interactions, and increase the likelihood that the relationship generates energy rather than draining it.

A Gallup survey found that having what they described as a ‘best friend at work’ was important (Buckingham and Coffman, 2005). The benefits include having someone to bounce ideas off and who may see things differently from you. In times of crisis they can provide problem- or emotion-focused support. In times of joy they can provide moments of shared savouring and good company.

## What do relationships give you?

There are many ways in which a social network can provide us with support. First are a few suggestions, followed by tips for how you can develop supporting relationships.

### ***Different perspective***

*Sometimes the way we see the problem is the problem.*

**Covey**

The above statement contains much truth. Because we are unique we tend to see things differently from others, so getting someone else's perspective can shed a different light on the problem.

Sometimes just the act of describing the situation can provide insight and break an ineffective thinking cycle going round and round in your head. In times of stress someone who truly has a different perspective may provide you with additional ways to 'cope', whether this is emotion- or task-based coping.

### ***Broadening your network***

Whilst formal organizational hierarchies are useful, often work gets done and information gets passed through our informal networks. This information may be pertinent to your job, or it may be about finding new opportunities in different parts of the business. And sometimes it's just nice to meet with different people. It's useful to have a network, or range of people to call upon for assistance. Perhaps someone in your network has experienced a similar situation and can provide some advice, and it's great when we return the favour and support others in their quest.

Many people only think of their network when they are facing a major change that has been foisted on them, for example redundancy, a change in boss etc. Certainly, in today's world a burst of activity or an updated profile on a networking site could be a signal of a CV being updated. However, networks are a whole lot more than the stepping stone to the next job – they are part of the informal

communication connections that bind companies together, and they're the informal exchange of ideas which spark creativity. Throughout society, meeting places have been important for the transmission of information. Don't lose sight of the importance of face-to-face communication. While e-mail and Facebook have their place, as do Skype and video conferencing, where it's possible, for full spectrum communication nothing can beat face-to-face contact.

### ***Social aspects***

Perhaps the support of others encourages you, or maybe they just make you smile and laugh – and those positive emotions have the 'broaden and build' effect described in Chapter 6.

I knew a senior consultant in a large corporate who made a point of not going to lunch in the canteen on his own. At first I thought it was his insecurity, but he just found it nicer and more pleasurable to sit with enjoyable company: it's a mini-form of relaxation during the day! Other obvious benefits are that it's an opportunity to meet with people outside of your department – for different insights, you just have to do it.

Another manager said that on first becoming a manager she was so busy that she really resented going for coffee with her team because she was not able to get on with her work. As soon as she realized that going for coffee was an important part of her job (in that she got a feel of the team's morale and any concerns) she started to relax about it, and actually enjoyed it!

## **Developing supportive relationships**

Whilst the particular reasons why having a social network is so beneficial have so far eluded scientists, there is no doubt as to their importance. What follows are techniques for developing your skills in working with, and relating to, others at work. I describe some of

the building blocks of relationships and communication in the two subsequent chapters and then describe how these skills are applied both within teams and as part of negotiations.

## Initiating

Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) suggest that social relations at work begin with making and receiving ‘bids’. Relationship expert John Gottman defines a bid as a request for attention. This might be a smile, saying hello, offering a compliment, requesting help or asking a question:

*In the world of relationships nothing happens until someone makes a bid ... equally important in the bidding process is the response we get to our bids. If the other party does not respond by paying attention to our bid in a positive way the game stops, like a ball that dies when a tennis serve is not returned. Unlike the tennis serve, the goal of the bid is not to defeat the opponent but to encourage a volley.*

Ulrich and Ulrich (2010)

That is not to suggest that the volley continues indefinitely, or that you’re looking to compete with the record-breaking marathon tennis match<sup>1</sup> at the 2010 Wimbledon Championships! Typically in the work environment our communications take place around particular tasks or settings which have a natural and finite term.

### TIP

In group situations, most people wait to be introduced like a guest. You can initiate conversations. Take the initiative, act like the host, and initiate introductions and conversations.



## Curiosity

One key skill in building relationships is being interested in others. In business we can sometimes be too quick to jump to conclusions, which can lead to negative consequences based on incomplete or

missing information. Sometimes when others give us information, we might think ‘No, you’re wrong!’ In those moments, before you open your mouth you may want to employ some curiosity, an open mindset, and ask a few questions. Entertain the thought that perhaps the other person might have more information than you do about the situation, therefore your job in the conversation is to discover some of the missing facts. Hopefully it’s not hard to see the difference between: ‘Why on earth did you do that?’ and ‘I’m curious, what led you to that decision?’

When the situation is emotionally charged, perhaps the former is the first question that will come to mind. However, the second question will be far more productive and encourage a higher quality of response in that you’re more likely to discover what the other person is thinking rather than provoke a defensive response. Therefore, please pay attention to both the words that you use and the *tone* of your voice.

We all like to feel heard. Having curiosity about what the person’s talking about is an essential ingredient in building rapport. With rapport you build trust to say ‘no’ later, or to question – without burning the relationship.

## Questions

At some point, you may have been on a course which extols the virtues of questions. I’m a firm believer in the power of questions, and possibly slightly evangelical on the topic. Many people know the theory of questions – but are less fluent speaking the language of questions.

Here’s a very quick recap on the differences between closed and open questions. A closed question is one that elicits a one-word answer and often starts ‘do you ...?’, ‘have you ...?’, ‘is it ...?’, where technically the answer is ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Whilst people may respond more fully, they don’t have to ‘think’ too hard.

By contrast, an open question demonstrates that your thinking is open – and you seek information. Open questions can be very

powerful since they can direct the course of a conversation. For example, if you want to hear about the reasons why something can't be done, ask, 'What's the reason this isn't possible?' If however you're more interested in finding solutions you could ask, 'How do you think we could get round this?'

### Open Questions: What, Why, How, Who, When, Where

The first three generally provide the most information. The last three could be answered in a word. The 'why' question normally has a caution around its use as it can invoke defensiveness – 'Why did you do it that way?' – because for some people there is an implied criticism.

#### TIP

Ask more open questions: 'What do you think about that?'



#### TIP

Listen to the response! Nod to show that you've heard. If you need time to consider your response – just say: 'What you've said is thought provoking, I'm thinking of the best way to respond.'



## Effective responding

'I've got some good news!' How do you respond when colleagues or friends share their good news with you?

There are a variety of ways you could react:

- You could be happy for them, but not make a big deal about it.
- You could be indifferent ('Oh').
- You could be sceptical, and point out why the good news isn't so good at all ('Are you sure that this is what you really want? Isn't it a bit risky?').

Researchers (Gable *et al*, 2004) found there's a really effective way to respond. It's called 'active constructive' and essentially means that you react in an active-constructive way by:

- feeling genuine excitement;
- outwardly displaying your excitement;
- capitalizing (prolonging discussion of the good news, telling people about it, suggesting celebratory activities).

Figure 10.1 gives some examples.

**FIGURE 10.1** Active constructive responding

<p><b>Passive and constructive</b></p> <p>'That's good news.'</p> <p>(Non-verbal communication: little or no active emotional expression)</p>	<p><b>Active and constructive</b></p> <p>'That's great, I know how important that promotion was to you! We should go out and celebrate and you can tell me what excites you most about your new job.'</p> <p>(Non-verbal communication: maintaining good eye contact; displays of positive emotions such as genuine smiling, laughter and appropriate touch)</p>
<p><b>Passive and destructive</b></p> <p>'What are we doing on Friday night?'</p> <p>(Non-verbal communication: little or no eye contact, turning away, leaving the room)</p>	<p><b>Active and destructive</b></p> <p>'That sounds like a lot of responsibility to take on. There will probably be more stress involved in the new position and longer hours at the office.'</p> <p>(Non-verbal communication: displays of negative emotions such as furrowed brow, frowning)</p>

Adapted from Gable *et al* (2004) and Hefferon workshop presentation (2011)

‘Active and constructive’ is the top-right box. Before you think it’s a bit too ‘gushy’, try to stand in the other person’s shoes, or imagine a time when someone – probably close to you – was happy and enthusiastic for you. In my experience people love to be on the receiving end of it – so try it out and watch the response you get.

Those of you who might describe yourself as a strong silent type may prefer the passive and constructive – however, whilst it seems supportive, it doesn’t have the same positive impact on the other person. The research clearly shows that these comments are not sufficient to develop the relationship. In the next chapter we see that it’s comments like these that form the basis of high-performing teams where everyone is riding high at the top of their game.

**TIP**

Respond to other people’s good news with an outward display of genuine enthusiasm and ask for more information: ‘That’s sounds like great news, how did that come about?’



You may think that active constructive is a bit gushy, but watch the response when you use it genuinely!

There are people in your life for whom you’re delighted to share in their good news – and there doesn’t have to be anything in it for you! More importantly there may be people you don’t care for but you can genuinely share (albeit only for a couple of minutes) their good news in an ‘active-constructive’ manner: you have the potential to significantly shift the relationship forward. Do not be put off by any initial scepticism especially if this is the first positive interaction you have had together.

## Assertive communications

Not all relationships are healthy (some are draining and unproductive), so how do you form healthy relationships? This section will explore

what it means to be assertive at work – a key skill in forming healthy relationships – and then we will look at some dynamics of relationships, suggesting ways of steering your relationships more towards health.

Sadly I think sometimes the word ‘assertive’ has become a byword for ‘aggressive behaviour’ and ‘bully’. In order to ensure we are aligned on what the terms mean, let’s first take a look at some definitions. In their book *Assertiveness at Work* (1999), Ken and Kate Back describe:

- Aggressiveness: behaving as if my needs, rights and wants are more important than yours.
- Non-assertive: behaving as if my needs, rights and wants are less important than yours.
- Assertiveness: behaving as if my needs, rights and wants are equal to yours.

Whilst in the short term aggressive behaviour might get fast results, over time people who have been bullied are likely to get cheesed off and not produce results, withdraw or deliberately become obstructive or unproductive. Being non-assertive can leave people feeling resentful that others haven’t noticed them. In my experience the key skill is to use assertive communication. This ensures that focus remains on the job to be done. Too much ‘pandering’ happens in organizations, whether others are pandering to our whims or we to theirs. In the meantime very little productive work is happening as a result of all that pandering!

Even in a hierarchical organization as an individual you have ‘equal needs, rights and wants’ both to those senior to you, and those more junior to you. This means you have a right to your opinion, they have a right to theirs. These opinions may be different. Whilst opinions are cheap – everyone has them – in a business setting, information has currency. The information that each of you has will be different. You may have information based on the detail of the project or task you’re working on, whereas your manager may have a broader perspective. Both sets of information will be useful. Remember many minds and perspectives focused on finding solutions will be more effective than just one.

When there is a difference of opinion don't just railroad the other person or back down. I often hear that in situations where opinions differ, people compromise. For me that has negative connotations.

### COMPROMISE

You may have heard the story of two cooks, each requiring a lemon for their recipe, but with only one available. Their compromise is to have half a lemon each ... which is OK until you realize that one cook required the zest, and the other the juice. 'If only' they had found out a little more about the specific requirements of the situation then they each could have had exactly what they needed.

Compromise seems to be an easy option when the focus is on keeping one another happy, rather than the art and skills of asking questions in an assertive manner, and finding facts. Of course there are different decision-making strategies, the satisficer and the maximizer, covered more fully in Chapter 8 – and it's also about deciding the impact of the decision and which strategy is good enough!

It's often useful to 'negotiate' a solution based on what's required.

### ***Mixed messages from academic research***

In the academic literature assertiveness relates to the concept of self-esteem. The science of self-esteem is fragmented with mixed implications. Back in the 1970s self-esteem was seen to be a significant factor in determining academic success in school-aged children. Unfortunately research also links high self-esteem to bullying. 'The highest and lowest rates of cheating and bullying are found in different sub-categories of high self-esteem' (Baumeister *et al*, 2003). So in building self-esteem or assertiveness, there is a risk of becoming a bully.

The discrepancy between views can be explained because the scientific measurement of self-esteem is determined without reference to other people. If a person has high self-esteem, but holds others in

low regard, it's likely that bullying will take place. If, however, a person has high self-esteem and also holds other people in equally high regard then bullying is not likely.

Based on the definitions of assertiveness and aggressiveness mentioned above, then it seems bullies have been perhaps unwittingly encouraged to put themselves first, disregarding others. In the workplace, most 'bullies' don't see themselves as bullies.

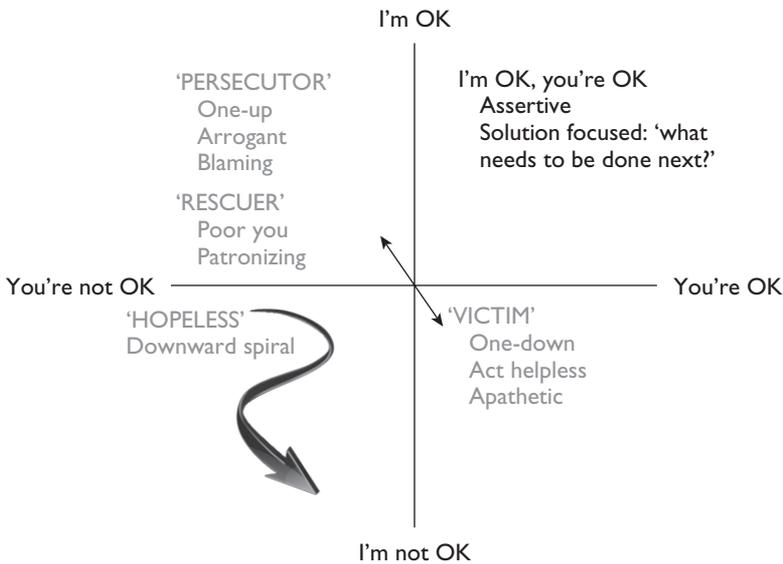
## ***Building assertiveness***

Rather than building self-esteem and assertive behaviours in isolation from others, I think it's useful to think about them in relation to other people. What follows is an approach which helps to ensure communications remain assertive without developing self-esteem which verges on bullying behaviours. In corporate training and executive one to one work with clients, the tool I often use for understanding the dynamics in relationships is the OK Corral. The specifics of this tool have been adapted from work by Momentum Consultants, who in turn adapted them from the field of Transactional Analysis (TA). TA is a theory of personality and a psychotherapy for personal growth and personal change. Because of the importance of having healthy relationships with others in order to lead to having more great days at work, we will take a closer look at this powerful tool.

## ***The OK Corral***

The OK Corral is the name of a model developed by Franklin Ernst which maps how a person views *themselves* and *others* in terms of 'OKness'.

Ernst (1971) plotted the statements on a grid<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 10.2), with the 'I'm OK' to 'I'm not OK' on the vertical continuum, and 'You're OK' to 'You're not OK' on the horizontal continuum. In describing the OK Corral Stewart and Joines (1987) noted that by putting these together in all their possible combinations, the following four statements about self and others emerge:

**FIGURE 10.2** OK Corral – adaptation

Adapted from Ernst (1971), Karpman (1968) and Momentum Consultants

- I'm OK, you're OK.
- I'm not OK, you're OK.
- I'm OK, you're not OK.
- I'm not OK, you're not OK.

The diagram provides a way of understanding the reinforcing automatic dynamics that sometimes happen between people, which I believe can lead to less healthy relationships.

The key insight or benefit of the OK Corral is to recognize that however (badly) another person communicates with you, you don't have to respond automatically, as though you're a puppet with the other person pulling your strings. You have choice. The trick, of course, is to be able to catch yourself before you react and, as with all new skills, it might require a bit of practice!

The focus of this book is on healthy relationships, and specifically ones that lead to having great days at work. Therefore, I'll briefly describe some of the behaviours typical in each of the

**FIGURE 10.3** Responding to others like a puppet on a string

quadrants before exploring how you can use this to develop your relationships.

Whilst we might habitually communicate from only one of the four quadrants, we can and do communicate from all of them. This is entirely normal. What follows is how you can become increasingly aware of the underlying dynamic of a conversation so that you don't have to respond with a knee-jerk reaction, but can have a more considered response, thus developing your gravitas in any situation.

### ***Overview of behaviours in each quadrant***

Conceptually understanding the OK Corral doesn't take long – the value, and the challenge is in developing awareness and on-going practice in using it. Therefore, when you have had one of 'those' conversations, you know, the one where you wonder just *how* and *why* you agreed to do something or where you 'snapped' in an 'out of character way' – or indeed any conversation where you think

‘What happened there?’ – it’s probably a good cue to come back and look at this tool to try and understand what happened.

In order to start developing awareness, tune in to your responses. You probably recognize the type of things that people you know say in each of the quadrants: imagine someone saying the initial sentences to you. There is no right or wrong way to respond, but experience the emotional impact, and what you’d like to do or say in response. You may not be able to ‘name’ the emotional impact, in which case just note your instinctive response. It’s likely that one or more of the phrases will cause you to have a particular reaction – that’s great, make a note. Then we will look at why they might have that effect and some of the antidotes.

### **You’re OK, I’m not OK (‘victim’)**

(For emphasis, imagine this being said a slight whine.) ‘Gosh, that’s hard, I’m not sure that I can do it. It’s OK for you, you’ve got lots of experience – I’ll never be any good at it.’

Behaviour in this quadrant typically operates from being ‘one-down’, slightly helpless.

Notice, what’s the emotional impact on you? How do you want to respond?

### **You’re not OK, I’m OK (‘persecutor’ behaviour)**

(For added arrogance, imagine it being said by someone who is rolling their eyes as they say it. Add emphasis to the word ‘bother’.) ‘Am I the only one to do any work around here! I don’t know why I bother trying to explain anything to you – you never do anything.’ Left unsaid, but implied is the question ‘Am I the only competent person around here?’ or ‘You’re too stupid to understand this.’

Notice, what’s the emotional impact on you? What’s your instinctive response?

### **You’re not OK, I’m OK (‘rescuer’ behaviour)**

There’s another manifestation of the behaviours in this quadrant.

(To increase the impact, imagine it being said in a very slow, laboured tone of voice, and add a mild patronizing tone.) ‘This piece of work is quite complicated, but I’ll describe what you need to do slowly, and I operate an open door policy for you to ask me questions at any time ...’ unsaid ‘You poor thing ... you need my continuing help to cope around here – good job I’m here to help.’

Notice, what’s the emotional impact on you? What would you say or do in that situation?

### **You’re not OK, I’m not OK**

This can be a downward spiral of negativity. ‘I can’t fix the situation, and neither can you. Woe is me!’

(Imagine the person with a slouch, looking down, shaking their head.) ‘The management aren’t up to it, whatever I do won’t make a difference – this place is doomed.’

Notice, what’s the emotional impact on you? How do you want to respond?

## ***Relationship dynamics***

Before completing the quadrants and describing I’m OK, you’re OK, you may have noticed that some of the phrases caused a more intense emotional response from you than others, which is very normal.

In the work environment there can be relationship dynamics between ‘victims’ and ‘persecutors’ or ‘rescuers’ – each ‘needing’ each other to reinforce their view of the world.

An example which demonstrates a negative relationship and negative effect on self-esteem is when a person displays ‘victim’ behaviour in a given situation, and is likely to feel ‘one-down’ to another person. They may have an unconscious expectation for people to behave in a certain way, either by rescuing or persecuting, which reinforces their ‘one-down’ view of the world, which in turn reinforces their negative self-esteem. So what’s the alternative?

Essentially we return to the definition of assertiveness – where we have needs, rights and wants which are held to be equal. Sometimes

easier said than done, but by being aware of what is going on we can start taking action which will immediately start to empower us. Assertiveness, gravitas and long term credibility are in the realm of the I'm OK, you're OK quadrant.

### **I'm OK, you're OK**

Finally the sweet spot! I'm OK, you're OK is effective in problem-solving, assertive situations. That is not to say there is anything wrong with the others – they are all a natural part of human behaviour. It's just that I'm OK, you're OK maintains relations for the long run. Each situation is different, but the key is not to be hooked by your instinctive response.

**Responding to the 'victim':** it's natural to either want to 'help' or to verbally 'slap'. However, you can engage the person and not be drawn into the emotion. You could repeat the question or ask how they could start on the task.

**Responding to the 'persecutor':** instinctive responses range from wanting to get into a verbal fight, or backing down sheepishly. It's useful to notice if the person uses this behaviour with other people – as typically they do. As you realize that they're not responding to you, it's just a habit that's formed in the way they respond, you could reflect back to them that they seem annoyed, and can repeat the original request.

**Responding to the I'm not OK, you're not OK:** this is more challenging – but the good news is that in the work environment there are fewer of these people who use this response habitually.

At work we have a number of relationships; I'm guessing that for most of us it's important for us to ensure the quality of the relationships for the long term. For example, with your colleagues you provide support or share information with each other, day in and day out. Relationships with supervisors, or even those with subordinates, are likely to be important in the long term.

The option is still available to respond to any of the quadrants instinctively. They can be used to manipulate. As a buyer I was on the receiving end of a sales person trying to bully me into the sale by

suggesting that I didn't have the sign-off authority on a large sum of money. I assume he expected me to 'prove' myself by buying, but I didn't like the way he made me feel, and given there were other service providers with very similar offerings, I took the business elsewhere.

You may not hold a grudge against poor behaviour or not think twice about manipulation in the game of business – other people might. And of course there are relationships with customers and suppliers. I'm not sure that anyone likes to be backed into a corner, so I'm OK, you're OK gives a basis for negotiating without emotional blackmail.

*People may not remember exactly what you did, or what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel.*

Maya Angelou

Knowing your strengths, developing your vision and having goals that you regularly achieve will keep you motivated.

## ***Developing options to respond***

So now you know what is going on within the dynamics of communications, next we'll look briefly at why the phrases have a 'pull', and what you can do differently in each of the situations. Each type of communication 'invites' particular responses. For example, an adult being childish may invite a parental response (which could range from being 'told off' to being nurtured). Alternatively the childish response may also invite someone to join in with their playfulness. Sometimes the response we get from others can be telling about the signals we're putting into the world. One way to determine how effective our communication is the response we get.

**TIP**

If you feel someone's comment is having an emotional impact on you (from any of the quadrants): Breathe. Reflect back what they've said. Ask a question.

### You're OK, I'm not OK ('victim' behaviours)

The implied invitation is for you to respond from 'rescuer': 'OK, I'll help you with that ...' However, for some people this invitation will invoke their 'persecutor': 'For goodness sake, just get on with it!'

Remember you are not a puppet: just because the strings are pulled you still have a choice of different ways to respond. You don't have to accept the invitation to respond in this predictable way.

**Antidote:** stay focused on the original request, ask questions – from an I'm OK, you're OK perspective. Additionally, if appropriate, remind them of the experience that they've got that's relevant. Or ask them the steps that they can take with the experience that they've got.

I'm often asked: 'Aren't there occasions when a person genuinely needs assistance?' Yes, of course. And be aware that you don't create a dependency because you enjoy the ability to 'help others'. If you notice a significant amount of your time is spent on 'helping others', even if it's a recognized part of your role, check that you're asking the other person questions to develop their thinking and their skills.

### You're not OK, I'm OK ('persecutor' behaviours)

The unsaid invitation is for you to bow to the superior knowledge and expertise of the expert. However, you might remember from Chapter 2 on mindsets that when someone is so convinced of their superior knowledge, they may be suffering from an acute episode of a fixed mindset!

**Antidote:** say *'I'm OK, you're OK'*. Take a breath, it's generally better to stay in control of your emotions, whether their invitation provokes you to want to join them in jousting with superiority, or whether you want to withdraw from the conversation. If you're asking for information you can repeat the request. Ideally keep the behaviour separate from the person. They may be behaving in a frustrated or antagonistic way, but that is not their identity.

It's useful to remember that a person is more than their behaviour. I think it can be a little risky to stereotype an individual based on their behaviour; I've made mistakes and had momentary lapses in behaviour; I wouldn't like to be categorized hereafter based on those mistakes, would you?

'Two spelling mistakes and an incorrect use of the word "their"' was the feedback I received from a senior manager when submitting a report that I'd extensively researched and written. These initial comments in a conversation left me devastated. As I had a tendency to catastrophize, I thought my career was over – 'How careless, he won't trust me with anything now.' Over time I've managed to separate my mistakes and behaviour from my identity so that it doesn't overwhelm me.

I'm asked, 'What if I have made a genuine mistake and the other person has a genuine reason to be annoyed?' Then I would advocate the use of an apology. 'What if the person has the reputation of flying off the handle – nothing I'm going to do will make any difference.' Well that's great: it sounds like flying off the handle is this person's habit – and whatever you do is not likely to make a difference.

When you experience someone who habitually flies off the handle, you could consider this your 'extreme' practice of saying *'I'm OK, you're OK'*.

Interestingly a significant number of people like to test models to the extreme. When discussing the separation of identity and

behaviour I'm regularly asked how that applies to working with murderers. I believe that the tool still works, and I suggest that those working in a therapeutic setting with these individuals have undertaken advanced training in the area.

Fortunately, the corridors of our offices are not filled with murderers, but with genuinely nice people: essentially people just like you and me. Sometimes we all have 'off days', and sometimes people get set in patterns of behaviour that were once successful, but over time have become fossilized and rigid. If it is possible, look through the behaviour and see the person. It will make interacting with them easier and less stressful for you.

### **You're not OK, I'm OK ('rescuer' behaviour)**

The unspoken invitation is for you to be grateful to the superior knowledge and expertise of the expert. Although for many it can provoke a bit of persecutor behaviour in response. The rescuer then switches to victim behaviour, with a mournful 'I was only trying to help' – the 'excitement' of the switch can be the foundation of many office dramas: 'He said ... then she said ..., then you'll never guess what happened next ...'. Not very productive behaviour in the workplace, and better left to TV drama.

**Antidote:** stay focused on the original request, ask questions – from an I'm OK, you're OK perspective.

### **You're not OK, I'm not OK**

In the workplace setting, this set of behaviours is relatively rare on an on-going basis. Often people who experience these behaviours on a regular basis are not in employment. However, as with all of the styles of behaving we can all slip into each of them. Rath (Rath and Clifton, 2005) describes people who sap your energy, and advocates staying away from 'dippers'.

## **Developing OKness**

In my experience of working and training others in the OK Corral, the first step is for people to notice that their internal responses are

connected to the behaviours displayed by others. They then understand how to do something different, which seems to empower – I trust the same will be true for you too.

Then there's just the small matter of practising a set of skills: awareness of what's going on in the moment (Chapter 5), pausing and choosing how to respond most effectively.

The OK Corral suggests that there are two ways to develop our self-esteem: firstly through ourselves and secondly in our relationships with others, which are developed one response at a time. The previous section explored some of these responses.

We can increase our own 'OKness' with awareness of our actions, we can increase our competence in activities (practice) through which our confidence is likely to increase. The science describes this as 'mastery'. A great starting point is to know what you do well; you can develop this through understanding your strengths, and often finding ways to use more of them. Often using our strengths leads us to feeling good about ourselves.

Be supportive and encouraging of your own behaviour, which may not always be as good as you would like, but the goal is to focus and build on the positive. In Chapter 2 I talked about making mistakes as a part of developing an open mindset. This can be useful for two reasons. Firstly our own sense of self-esteem will develop if we can separate our own behaviours from our identity: 'Just because I made a spelling mistake doesn't make me a bad person.' Also, if we can perform this separation of behaviour and identity for our selves, then it's likely that we can start to practise it in relation to others. For example, 'Just because he shouted doesn't mean that he's an idiot.'

This chapter has been about illustrating the concepts of building effective relationships sufficiently to understand them. The next chapter takes further the concepts of questions, curiosity and active constructing, specifically looking at what makes a high-performing team. Then Chapter 12 further explores the skills required in negotiations.

## Summary

- Many of us have never been taught how to work effectively with others – but there are some approaches that can maximize your effectiveness when working with other people.
- Responding in an ‘active-constructing’ way develops relationships.
- You don’t have to respond instinctively to other people – you are more than a puppet being pulled by its strings.
- You can develop your skills of questioning, listening and supporting others, as well as responding to the request rather than the emotion.

## Notes

- 1 The Isner–Mahut match which lasted for 11 hours, 5 minutes over three days.
- 2 The diagram has been adapted from the original and also includes behaviour labels from the Drama Triangle: Karpman, S (1968) Fairy tales and script drama analysis, *Transactional Analysis Bulletin*, 7, 39–43.