

What we say to others and the way we say it can build – or destroy - the trust and respect in our relationship.



So you could say relationships are all about communication.



Is the simplest relationship a Team?

Our evolution is based on forming cooperative relationships with at least one other human to form a simple team.

Teams (or tribes) were good for survival, enabling collective security, catching bigger mammoths for food and clothing and eventually better ideas – two heads being better than one, for most people.



“I’m inviting you to my seminar on Improving Your Communication Skills. If you’d like to attend, grunt once for yes or twice for no.”

To do all this we needed more sophisticated communication – there’s only so much you can convey with a grunt.

So we developed more complex sounds – words – which when we say them have specific meaning, so there shouldn’t be any misunderstandings.

But of course there are, all the time.

Which could be a problem in any relationship.



But not everyone is part of a team, surely?



“No man is an island, entire of itself. Everyman is a part of the Continent”

John Donne

In reality the vast majority of us form relationships – or a team – with the people we work with and live with.

When two companies fall out, it’s usually the people from each one whose relationship has broken down, just as much as if they’d had a row with their life partner.

In both cases if the relationship had been strong, they would have solved the problem themselves.

To quote Nelson Mandela

“Conflict is an ever present feature of life - how we handle it is one of the most important tasks we face”

Nelson Mandela 2001 UN Speech (Attributed)

If handling your conflict on your own seems too much to ask, that’s where we can help.



What makes a team fall apart?



We constantly judge what's going on around us for any threat, real or perceived. It's part of our genetic survival kit. So the more people we know or live or work with, the more we watch for negative behaviour that could be a threat.

It takes consistent experience of someone's positive behaviour before we "trust" that is how they are.

That Trust is the bedrock of any relationship.

Without it there is no open discussion, so no commitment to our common goals, our communication suffers, so our ability to resolve differences declines and the relationship falls apart.

And we see little hope of ever rebuilding it.

Not because we don't want to, but because we don't know how.

Which is where we can help.



How can you rebuild trust?



We say that Trust comes from repeated positive interactions over a period of time.

Which can be a problem if you don't trust them – why would you want repeated interactions with them?

But there are things you can do.

- ✦ Think objectively about what was said or done – understand how much was poor communication or a lack of respect or deliberate malice.
- ✦ Think about the positive behaviours you would want to see in the future that might demonstrate respect? Which if they continued might lead to trust?
- ✦ What things, topics, behaviours would you absolutely have to have an apology for or an agreement never to repeat?
- ✦ If you were them what would you be thinking?

And it might help to talk with someone who won't judge you and will help you gain some clarity about what you could do next.



What is a mediator or facilitator?



Someone who is:

- ✦ trained in negotiation and communication techniques, so they can facilitate or make easier a conversation you and “the other” might otherwise find difficult or impossible.
- ✦ independent and impartial – they won’t judge either of you, nor be biased nor tell you what to do.
- ✦ able to help you have a conversation about the future, rather than rehashing the past.
- ✦ clear that it’s your conflict, so the goals are yours.
- ✦ able to show you how to achieve them.

And it works in most cases because:

- ✦ Most of us don’t like conflict, we want to find a way out.
- ✦ You’ve never had a positive discussion about what went wrong and how to fix it.
- ✦ No one has shown you how to do that.

Which is where we can also help.



So what happens first?



A confidential discussion:

- ✦ Between you and the facilitator/mediator,
- ✦ About the issues as you see them,
- ✦ About what you would like to happen.

Then they will ask about:

- ✦ What you think the other person might want,
- ✦ So what your common objectives might be.
- ✦ And how you – and they – could help each other to reach them.

Then they'll have the same conversation with the other person.

As a result they'll be able to share between you:

- ✦ What you both think has happened to bring about the conflict.
- ✦ Where you have common issues and where you have different ones.
- ✦ How best to hold a safe, confidential, productive conversation between you.



What could happen when we meet?

You will both have agreed the details of when and where and for how long, and have your own private “breakout” room to think in or meet the mediator.

And you’ll have agreed:

- ☀ How to greet each other when you first enter the joint meeting room.
- ☀ Rules about not interrupting, shouting or pulling “funny” faces.
- ☀ A common Agenda of the issues you both must have discussed.



Then the mediator/facilitator will ask each of you to take 5 uninterrupted minutes to say:

- ☀ What you would like to achieve.
- ☀ The key issues you want to have discussed.

Finally the mediator/facilitator will ask each of you:

- ☀ How you would like to start your discussions by responding to something you had just heard or by choosing a topic from the shared Agenda?

And so the discussion will start, with the mediator helping you solve each of your topics and staying “future focussed”.



What could happen by the end?



You will both have spent some time in your own rooms thinking but most of the time together discussing and agreeing about the future, with the help of the mediator / facilitator.

You'll have found some topics easy to agree and some more difficult, but if you've stuck with it you'll have covered everything you wanted to.

Mainly you'll have discussed things such as:

- ✦ The values that are important if the relationship is to work, like openness, respect and so on.
- ✦ The past behaviours that haven't supported those values and the future ones which would.
- ✦ What to do if someone slips up and goes back to old ways.

Most of the time will be about the future, because:

- ✦ None of us can change the past,
- ✦ But we can learn from it and make our futures far better as a result.

And at the end you should have:

- ✦ A clear understanding of the future, some agreed behaviours and actions and possibly
- ✦ the beginnings of trust between you.



And finally

- ☼ Was this useful for you?
- ☼ What questions haven't we answered?
- ☼ What else might we be able to do to help?
- ☼ Please let us know



Thank you for your time.


Jeremy Scuse

