

2Way \rightleftarrows FEEDBACK

How to build more effective
staff relationships through
a culture of constructive feedback



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staff relationships through
a culture of constructive feedback**

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Carnegie Services Pty Ltd
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jennifer McCoy is a Director and Principal behind *Positive Change Consulting*. She has worked with a wide range of industries — small to large commercial organisations, and in industries such as Superannuation, Health, Local Government, Education, Emergency Services, and Aged Care — training and coaching leaders and staff to manage workplace changes.

Jennifer has had significant experience in quality management: as the *Project Manager — Quality for Ambulance Service Victoria (1995 – 1998)*, in its implementation of the international management standard ISO 9002; and as consultant to *Glengollan Village for Aged People* in its accreditation to the Aged Care Standards (1999 – 2000). These roles involved successfully developing and managing collaborative relationships under conditions of significant workplace change.

A major strength is Jennifer's ability to foster individual commitment, involvement and enthusiasm for the achievement of personal and professional goals, inspiring determination to try out new learning within an organisation.

Jennifer is an experienced and qualified coach having studied with the Institute of Executive Coaching Australia Ltd; an Accredited Facilitator of the organisational change program "*Investment in Excellence*" (The Pacific Institute); and a Registered Trainer/Coach — Quality Management (Plexus Australia). She is a member of the Advisory Board of Australasian Auditing and Certification Services and a committee member of the Australian Institute of Management's Leadership Special Interest Group. She has a Master of Educational Studies, she graduated as a Master of Management in 2004 and she runs the biennial Small Business Management course for the Australian Catholic University, one of the units in its Master of Management program.

She has published papers on quality management in "*The Quality Magazine*", industry journals and "*The Asia Pacific Journal of Quality Management*". She has co-authored with Tony Austin, "*Grow your own micro business*", which draws on their challenges of consulting and training, to assist others avoid the pitfalls. She has also facilitated workshops in Australia and overseas; including the Australian Innovation Festival (2005), the Australian Council of Educational Leaders conference (2003), the National Speakers Association of Australia conference (2000) and Singapore General Hospital (1999).

This book grew from her consulting work as well as from numerous workshops designed to assist business owners and middle-level managers to work more effectively with their staff — "*Leading People, Managing the Team*"; "*Leader as Coach and Mentor*"; "*Don't Let Your Staff Keep You Awake at Night*" and "*Great Staff Build Great Workplaces*".

Other publications by Jennifer McCoy:

“Coaching for leadership in schools”

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“A case study in health care: Ambulance Service Victoria”

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INTRODUCTION

- Australian Businesses waste \$1,118 a year for every full-time employee, based on the time managers spend dealing with so-called poor performers. This equates to a loss of more than \$82 million a year for Australia's top 50 private businesses alone.⁽¹⁾
- Australian managers spend approximately 12 per cent of their time, or one hour every day, correcting others' mistakes.⁽¹⁾
- In 'Out of the Crisis', the late great W Edwards Deming writes:
"Some experts on banking declare that between 40 and 60 percent of any bank's staff is involved in verifying the work of other staff members".⁽²⁾

Does any of this surprise you? Probably not!

Ask most small business owners: *"Apart from the usual cash-flow challenges, what is the hardest part of your job, what most keeps you awake at night?"* and they're likely to tell you: *"Dealing with staff"*. Ask managers and team leaders in larger organisations the same question and you're likely to get a similar answer.

The message we hear over and over is that managing people is so often the 'hard stuff' about work. Yet it doesn't have to be difficult, as we'll attempt to show in this book.

Why do staff always need me around?

"Why do staff always need me around before they'll do any work?" Have you ever said, or at least thought, something like this?

It's an age-old problem — both employers and managers constantly frustrated by people management issues. If you hang around the office or shop all day supervising — who's going to develop the business? If you have to spend half your day fixing mistakes others have made, where do you find the time for your own work? Wouldn't it be nice to be able to go home before the kids go to bed? If you bottle it all up and then vent your frustration by yelling at your staff, you'll just create a bigger problem than the one you have already. Heavy financial discussions with your bank manager seem a breeze by comparison!

But let's make no bones about it; these are not staff problems, they are management problems.

Work shouldn't be this difficult — should it?

Why do these things happen? How can you handle these situations without getting stressed? What can you say? How can you say it?

You need to be able to **talk** to staff about how you can all pull together as a team, how people's actions and behaviour reflect on the business, how important it is to speak appropriately to customers, suppliers and each other; how to remain positive and constructive in their communications. And, at least theoretically and logically, this should not be hard. Speaking to individuals about particular concerns need not be difficult and there are ways of doing it that avoid stress and destructive conflict.

*It's all about **feedback** — at the right time and in the right way.*

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book grew out of numerous workshops we've run with small business owners and managers in a variety of larger companies. It aims to help you make staff relationships productive, effective, and even enjoyable, whether you own the business or manage a team or department.

We want to help you transform yourselves from business owners and managers into leaders, who can confidently leave their staff to handle the details. Isn't that what you have staff for in the first place? To make life easier for you! If that isn't happening, you probably need to start thinking and operating differently.

We also believe really productive working relationships with your staff are based on giving feedback — feedback from you to your staff and feedback from them to you. For that to happen, you need to think strategically about your business and about your position — take a leadership role, and acknowledge that you're responsible for making it work.

We will give you ideas to think about and to discuss with your staff, as well as tools that are practical and that you can start using immediately. We hope that, like most people in our workshops, you'll find some new and useful ideas here, as well as some new slants on those you're already implementing.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. "Getting the Edge in the New People Economy", report of a survey conducted by UK research group The Future Foundation <http://www.futurefoundation.net/SHLReport.htm>
2. W Edwards Deming. (1986) "Out of the Crisis" MIT-CAES. ISBN 0-911379-01-0

*A leader is best when people barely know he exists,
Not so good when people obey him and acclaim him;
Worse, when they despise him.
But, of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will say "We did it ourselves".*

Lao-Tse (6th Cent. BC)

FIVE STEPS TO MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK

Fear of feedback

In our experience, many people, in their minds, equate feedback with bad news. We want to show you how feedback can become accepted as 'the-way-we-do-things-around-here', part of the workplace culture, a standard way of getting things done more effectively and efficiently, no matter what the size or nature of the business.

We all like feedback when things go well, even 'bosses'. Perhaps especially 'bosses', as they seldom get thanks or praise from their staff (or, for that matter, from their own superiors) for things that go well. But as a 'boss', you also need to hear the 'hard stuff', what's gone wrong and why. What you did or didn't do that led to unfortunate outcomes. Even if you simply made a mistake, erred in your judgement, behaved like a human being. Everyone slips up at times, regardless of their position.

When feedback, both good news and bad news, becomes part of the culture and is valued as a constructive force, there is no longer any reason for it to be feared.

The easy stuff

It's feedback when you tell people when they've done well, ie: when you:

- Thank people for a job well done.
- Commend them for taking the initiative and solving a problem for you.
- Discuss with individuals where they're going and what their career opportunities might be, even if its not in your business or workplace.
- Discuss progress with teams.
- Celebrate the wins when everyone's pulled together and things have gone well.

This is the easy stuff. However, the reality seems to be that even this easy stuff is often not done. According to a study done by international organisational development firm Human Synergistics, ninety percent of Australians work in a negative culture of blame, indecision and conformity. The study also found that management styles and bosses' actions were out of touch with the espoused values of most organisations and that most managers worked under misguided assumptions about human behaviour.⁽¹⁾

The hard stuff

Of course we also have to deliver the 'bad news' at times and when we have to give this kind of feedback we often end up criticizing and distressing the person or people concerned, however well-intentioned we are. None of us enjoys upsetting others, so why does it happen?

A common reason is that we put up with things for too long — what people are doing, the things that are going wrong — because we don't know what to say or how to say it.

And we remember what happened last time:

- She cried...and you felt guilty about raising the concern.
- He got defensive, made excuses, and still didn't finish the job properly.
- She sulked, shared her hard-luck story with other staff and they took her side.
- He started avoiding you, and so increased the levels of stress.
- She gave notice — leaving you short-staffed and with the pressure and expense of finding someone else.

All of which just went to increase your uncertainty about what to say and how to say it the next time something goes wrong.

When we finally realise we can no longer put off dealing with a situation, apprehension will have built up out of all proportion. We are likely to find ourselves well outside our comfort zone and we react defensively, 'backs-against-the-wall'. We are often unnecessarily aggressive in our attitude and hurtful in our expressions. Not surprisingly, the recipients respond the same way, to your face or behind your back. Nothing has been solved and relationships have become just that bit more dysfunctional.

Building a feedback culture through leadership

Building a workplace where everyone is comfortable about giving and receiving feedback about their performance significantly reduces stress levels in manager-staff relationships. It might take time and patience and trust — *especially trust*. And that begins with you, the business owner, the manager, the team leader.

However, it's difficult to build this kind of workplace if you see yourself just as a manager — primarily concerned with making sure things run smoothly and efficiently, with what people are doing and when. Often too close to the action to see the bigger picture and be able to give positive feedback; often too emotionally attached to the situation so that when things don't go so well, you take mistakes personally and resort to criticism.

However, thinking and acting like a leader gives you a different perspective. As Stephen Covey says: "*Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall*".⁽²⁾ From such a perspective, giving feedback, good and bad, comes much more easily. Without feedback, workplaces will continue to be miserable and dysfunctional; you'll continue to be stressed, and achievements will remain well below potential. We'd like to show you, in five easy instalments as shown (see page 13), how to apply thinking and acting like a leader to building a culture of constructive feedback.

THE FIVE STEPS

This book takes you through five steps needed to build more effective staff relationships through a culture of constructive feedback.

This simple graphic is a guide to the steps. Of course business seldom develops in such a logical way and people adopt ideas gradually, depending on their readiness and the usefulness to them of those ideas. The *5 step plan* is simply a framework and I invite you to use the information and strategies most appropriate for you, your staff and your business.

Above all, as a leader, we encourage you spend time reflecting on the value of each step you take and make changes as you see fit for your business.

Think & act
like a leader

Clarify what
you want

Understand
staff needs

Plan, discuss,
agree, commit

Give & get
feedback

- **Think & act like a leader** — A successful business or department depends on leadership to give staff a purpose, a reason for their effort. Learn why you need to be a leader, what people want from a leader, what it takes to be a leader and how feedback is an essential part of leadership.
- **Clarify what you want** — When you are confident about what you want for your business or department, you will find it much easier to inspire staff to greater efforts. This step helps you to clarify your vision for the business or department, to define what needs to be done to achieve that vision and then promote the values that underpin all activities.
- **Understand staff needs** — To lead people effectively it helps to understand what they want from their work so we can begin to meet those needs. This step draws on some of the research into people at work and provides practical strategies for you to start working with staff to improve your workplace relationships and more productive outcomes for the business.
- **Plan, discuss, agree, commit** — This step provides practical strategies for communicating with staff, building teamwork and reaching agreement on how people behave in your workplace.
- **Give & get feedback** — Feedback is fundamental to communication at work, to acceptance of responsibility, commitment and business success. This step gives practical suggestions, tools and strategies for building a feedback culture in your workplace.

Let's now look at each of these steps in more detail.

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How to build more effective staff relationships through a culture of constructive feedback.

Ask most small business owners: “*Apart from the usual cash-flow challenges, what is the hardest part of your job, what mostly keeps you awake at night?*” and they’re likely to tell you: “*Dealing with staff*”. Ask managers and team leaders in larger organisations the same question and you’re likely to get a similar answer.

Managing people is so often the **‘hard stuff’** about work. Yet it doesn’t have to be difficult. It’s all about giving (and receiving) feedback — at the right time and in the right way.

This book grew out of numerous workshops Jennifer has run with small business owners, and managers in a variety of larger companies.

Learn how to:

- > Transform yourself into a leader — then relax and let your staff handle the details.
- > Give meaningful feedback — in *5 simple steps*.
- > Encourage staff commitment — to give you feedback.
- > Deal with the ‘hard stuff’ constructively — knowing what to say and how to say it.
- > Put some practical tools to use immediately
- > Turn your staff into a team and have fun — whether you own the business or manage a team or department.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer McCoy is a Director and Principal behind *Positive Change Consulting*. She specialises in using coaching and mentoring strategies to build leadership skills, develop teamwork and improve communication — assisting organisations to improve their business performance through people.

She has worked with a wide range of industries — small to large commercial organizations, plus service industries. This book is based on workshops run for her business clients, focusing on respect for people, on their personal growth, and on valuing their contributions.

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