

# Smart Work

THE SYNTAX GUIDE TO INFLUENCE

by Lisa J. Marshall  
and Lucy D. Freedman

SECOND EDITION *revised with a preface and two new chapters*  
by Lucy D. Freedman

“This book is  
a lifeline out of  
the Tower of Babel  
of today’s work world.”

– Margaret J. Wheatley,  
author, *Leadership and  
the New Science*

EXCERPT

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## CHAPTER ONE

# The New Workplace Game

**T**HE WORKPLACE HAS CHANGED SO much in the past three decades that we can hardly name all the changes. Due to game-changing technologies, almost everyone is able to interact with almost everyone else all the time. In the 1980s and 90s, the basic structure of organizations essentially vanished.

Middle managers used to be the vehicle of communication, before email, before conference calls, before teams were spread all over the map. At the time, technical professionals still believed that their jobs were secure and they could live in the semi-ivory tower of arcane knowledge, holding users somewhat at bay. Challenges of dotted-line reporting, uninformed user communities, and the eternal dilemmas of setting standards dominated the IT management conversation.

Meanwhile, the technologies changed and the game-changers arrived. Many people have been in and out of several more careers than they anticipated. What may not be as obvious is that *somebody* needs to do many of the things those millions of middle managers were doing. Everyone is more of a communicator today than they had to be twenty years ago.

Think of any problem in the organization in which you work or the ones with which you do business. What is the challenge that keeps them up at night? Can you think of any that wouldn't be at least somewhat less daunting with better communication?

This has become more so, not less so, over the past 10 years. At the same time, opportunities to learn excellent communication aren't abundant in

engineering or information and communications technology or other technical disciplines. Only the most fortunate technical managers and executives receive mentoring, coursework, or other learning experiences that build their emotional and social intelligence.

Many have never been exposed to essential concepts and often don't find the time or mindshare to address interpersonal issues. Until, of course, the almost-firing, the complaints from staff members, or the customers' disparaging word on the street. Good learners often learn well from experience and find good models to follow in their companies. Others may struggle on their own and possibly become rather rigid. Their best opportunity for learning may come in the form of one of the above-named breakdowns, or it may come because the communication culture in their organization exposes them to good communication design.

Executives, professionals, and operational leaders aren't necessarily well-informed on the basic communication skills. They may have the attitude, "That's not what I want to do, and besides, I don't do it all that well. I *chose* the work I'm good at!" It may not be fair. And it may not be what geeks are supposed to be good at. It is, however, what is needed.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this chapter is to look at what has brought us to this point, how the nature of work has changed as a result, and the implications for your career. We will explore the New Workplace and identify the behaviors that help you succeed there.

## THE CHANGE

In the preface we described how most of us sense that the game has changed, and no one is telling us the new rules. The world has changed, pretty dramatically. Here are just a few of the changes that have occurred:

- From 1955 to 1980 we saw three generations of computers; from 1980 to 1992, we saw five more. Each generation shrinks in size and increases in power. In 1980, almost no one used a personal computer. In 1995, most educated adults in the U.S. did. We now routinely hold in one hand the computing power of a mainframe computer of forty years ago.
- In the 1950s, the average thirty-year-old in the U.S. spent 14 percent of gross income on the mortgage; in 1973 that was

up to 21 percent. In the next decade it climbed to 44 percent. From 1977 to 1989, college tuitions more than doubled for state schools and tripled for private schools in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> The rise continues unabated. Students are struggling with rising tuition while many careers are driven by the need to pay back student loans. Middle-class incomes have lost buying power steadily since 2000.

- The working half-life of the knowledge of an electronics technician shrank from ten years in the 1970s to five years in the nineties; by the year 2000 it was halved again.<sup>2</sup> In 2010, core knowledge holds up while the acronym soup and generations of technology demand constant updating. One must decide which arena to go into as each one is so specialized. Literacy in the world of technology requires knowing how to use many platforms—from little keyboards to spoken words, from removable media to the cloud, from firewalls to proprietary software.
- During the 1980s, four million jobs were cut out of Fortune 500 industrial companies. In the nineties, for the first time in U.S. history, unemployed white-collar workers outnumbered unemployed blue-collar workers.<sup>3</sup> The temporary agency Manpower was the single largest employer in the country, and small businesses generated most of the new jobs. The U.S. saw manufacturing move overseas and with it, many technology jobs. Millions of additional job losses at the time of the economic meltdown of 2008 have sent many highly technical people who thought their jobs were secure into abrupt lifestyle changes.
- In the 21st century, ICT (Information and Communications Technology) has moved from something that automated some business processes to *being* the business. Every kind of work becomes more complex as organizations adopt new technologies.
- Workplace demographics have taken an interesting turn. After 2008, baby boomers deferred their expected retirement. Even though there is a knowledge drain as experienced people leave,

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1 “Living Standards: Running to Stand Still,” *The Economist*, 10 November, 1990, 19-22.

2 *Technical & Skills*, op.cit.

3 Jack Gordon. “Into the Dark: Rough Ride Ahead for American Workers,” *Training Magazine*, July 1993, 23.

many have stayed on, causing a shortage of promotion opportunities. Technically skilled workers are often supervising people who are decades older than they are.

- While extremely adept programmers hack their way into high profile startup jobs and get the chance to work day and night on the best new thing, employment in general is hard to come by. Good sense in dealing with people is an asset that employers value.

Scanning the forces at play in the business environment, we see four trends that have changed the nature of work forever:

- **The global economy** is creating an ever-sharpening edge to competition. Success in the 21st century may be defined as survival. The bottom line isn't just quality or service excellence or leanness or technology or time-based competition; it's a combination of all these factors, and more.
- **The span of effort is rising:** More is being demanded of everyone, not just you. We all have to learn more and then “do more with less.” The definition of a “world-class operation” is now one that accomplishes the most in the least amount of time, using the least number of resources, while delighting the customer. Competency requirements are also changing, and the emphasis is on effective learning.
- **Organizational restructuring will continue.** As companies rethink and re-engineer the way work gets done, old processes are being drastically simplified or outsourced. Businesses of the future will assemble crackerjack teams for specific purposes and then disband them, as film studios do now. Many organizations are experiencing a version of this. Companies also engage in fluid strategic partnership arrangements, which shift as the market changes. As a result, *the meanings of “success” and “career path” are changing radically.* The assumption of regular promotions is going the way of lifetime employment. There isn't likely to be much “up” in the survivor organizations—they are flat, flexible, and fast—and people move around a lot.
- **Workforces are increasingly diverse.** Technical workplaces look like the United Nations these days, with men and women from

all over the world working closely to build the next generation of whatever it is they do. That was not so true twenty years ago, and adds another layer of complexity to daily work.

Despite these huge changes, one thing remains the same: human nature. Fundamental needs, especially those for identity, security, and stimulation, are not changing. The basic similarities and differences among people are not changing, even though the contexts are. The implications of this will be explored throughout the rest of *Smart Work*.

## CHANGE DRIVERS

What is causing all of these changes? While there are as many theories as there are economists and consultants, certain forces are clearly key drivers.

One is the development of **global companies**, businesses that produce global products for local markets and that may locate their headquarters anywhere in the world. Global companies are important not for what they individually produce, but because they have changed the rules of competition. They are, in many cases, the creators of the New Workplace.

Another force is the shift to **knowledge-based work**, due to the speed and ease with which information is now transmitted worldwide. An increasingly tangled web of connections is the result. A hacker in Ithaca, New York, angry at his father, shuts down computers nationwide. Lockerbie, a tiny village in Scotland, receives a hailstorm of burning debris because of a religious war fought thousands of miles away. A cellphone photo spreads virally across nations and sets off political turmoil. Small changes in one place are magnified hugely elsewhere. The business press characterizes this turbulent reality as “**permanent whitewater.**”

Underlying these changes is one inescapable irony: Technology is the root cause of this upheaval, and many readers of this book are helping to engineer it. Change does not occur in a vacuum: every time a process gets refined, software coding makes the leap to the next generation, mechanical processes get automated, medical advances occur or science discovers a new, better, stronger, lighter building substance, the game changes for someone, somewhere. Eventually, those changes trickle down to the most personal levels of how we live our lives and feel about ourselves and our work. No one can predict the enormous consequences for society, nor what new skills we will have to learn.

## WHAT THIS MEANS TO YOU: THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK

Until the Industrial Age, people just worked. They did whatever needed to be done, and took however long was needed to do it. Even within specialized trade guilds, there was a completeness to work—you understood everything, and could do everything, even though you might have a specialty. That didn't mean there were no time crunches and crises: Ever been on a farm during haying season? It just meant that the rhythm of the work was dictated by the nature of the work itself, and that everyone understood how his or her piece related to the entire process.

Change expert William Bridges commented that today “most people think of the organized world as a pattern of ‘jobs’ the way that a honeycomb is a pattern of those little hexagonal pockets of honey.” Based on the last hundred years, that is not an unreasonable understanding of the organizational world. The transition we faced in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was away from “jobs” and back to “work.”

Bridges proposes a new theory about work: that organizations are “great wide fields of ‘work needing to be done.’” If one understands work as a field that incorporates whatever elements of human and technological input are needed to produce new service-based products, then clearly thinking in terms of “jobs” becomes useless. As Bridges pointed out, “When the ‘work that needs doing’ changes constantly, we can't constantly be writing new job descriptions and launching searches for the right person.”

A 2007 description of the type of people Google hires, according to its chief culture officer and director of human resources Stacy Savides Sullivan, is that “Google-y is defined as somebody who is fairly flexible, adaptable and not focusing on titles and hierarchy, and just gets stuff done.”<sup>4</sup> Certainly, personal mobility and communications technology have made availability and flexibility highly valued career assets. When you add that to the appropriate expertise, you've hit the global professional value standard. Just the same, none of that has any value when you can't communicate it, and when you can't facilitate the exchange of knowledge.

Not only is communication effectiveness essential to the career of every professional, it is also the key to organizational effectiveness and is a central competency for leadership. If you think about the most pressing priorities

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4 “Newsmaker: Meet Google's Culture Czar” by Elinor Mills, CNET News April 27, 2007

or challenges that keep you up at night, would any of them not be more manageable with better communication?

## THE NEW GUIDELINES

What, then, does the knowledge-intensive, service-based organization demand from its employees and leaders? What are the new rules, or guiding principles, for professionals in the New Workplace?

There are nine key guidelines that anyone who wants to survive in the New Workplace needs to understand and master. (See Figure 1-1.) Let's examine each of them:

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1. Develop Self-Knowledge.
  2. Take Responsibility for Yourself.
  3. Hold Clear Vision and Values.
  4. Manage Personal Boundaries.
  5. Manage Your Behavior.
  6. Build Bridges.
  7. Manage Conflicts.
  8. Unlearn and Learn.
  9. Accept Uncertainty and Take Risks.
- 

FIGURE 1-1

1. **Develop Self-Knowledge.** Bridges calls it D.A.T.A.—an understanding of your own Desires, Abilities, Temperament and Assets—that allows you to position yourself for maximum growth and contribution. Some leading companies offer their employees “360° feedback,” detailing how their bosses, peers, and subordinates perceive them. Based on this kind of feedback and your own self-assessment, you can systematically develop self-awareness and self-control. You learn not to dump home frustrations on co-workers. There is no room in the New Workplace to play out emotional business from the past. Instead, you become what we call “congruent,” able to “walk the talk,” so that what you say and what you do reinforce each other.
2. **Take Responsibility for Yourself.** Understand that it is your job to take care of yourself, and no one else's. Employers won't

take care of you any more. You are in charge of your career development, your professional growth, and making sure the work you do is the work you want to be doing. Even in the organizations that do place a premium on development, your interests and the organization's may diverge. It's up to you to take care of your best interests.

3. **Hold Clear Vision and Values.** Your sense of purpose holds you together when the world is constantly demanding flexibility. It is, in essence, your self-definition, the boundaries that contain the core of who you are and what you are about. Clear vision and values serve as the compass, the point of reference for your next decision.
4. **Manage Personal Boundaries.** Your organization won't climb up on the operating table and undergo open heart surgery in your place. Likewise, you need not suffer stress or pain in its place. In the long run, a person with a healthy home life and a broad range of interests has far more options for service and survival. Learning how to make effective requests and create viable agreements goes a long way towards helping to keep your boundaries both flexible and intact.
5. **Manage Your Behavior.** Beyond self-control, you must be able to respond sensitively to a wide variety of situations with appropriate and effective behavior. This means more than just not responding inappropriately. It means having "requisite variety," the ability consistently to come up with creative, situation-specific responses that generate positive results.
6. **Build Bridges.** The New Work is both knowledge-intensive and people-intensive. It needs bridges built across organizational boundaries, between organizational partners, among team members, and with customers. This is no longer someone else's responsibility; we are all in sales and customer service. We all add to the organization's credibility with its partners, its customers, its community—both shareholders and stakeholders—and its other employees.
7. **Manage Conflicts.** This means your own conflicts, as well as other people's. Managing conflicts doesn't mean sweeping them

under the rug. It means accepting them as critical indicators that people don't have a shared understanding of a) the goals or b) the process or that c) whatever is happening is not working. If you recognize this, you have new resources with which to increase the "robustness" of a solution. You understand how to use the conflict as data and not let it derail the process of reaching goals.

**8. Unlearn and Learn.** Let go of old assumptions and knowledge, and look at every new situation with fresh eyes. In other words, develop the ability to hold your beliefs lightly, to shift mindsets with the grace of Baryshnikov moving from ballet to modern dance or Wynton Marsalis shifting from classical music to jazz. Don't let go of *everything*: your knowledge of human nature and ability to work with others will continue to stand you in good stead. Your vision and values will keep critical boundaries in place.

**9. Accept Uncertainty and Take Risks.** Learn to tolerate ambiguity. Recognize that there is no such thing as avoiding risks. Not to make a decision can be every bit as risky as making one. In a world of time-based competition, failure to be proactive makes you reactive, and you still have to move quickly. In Jack Welch's GE—an organization that decided to take risks in order to survive—managers were expected to:

- Deliver on any commitment
- Share GE values
- Make their numbers
- Inspire, not force, employee performance

Consider the amount of risk embedded in criteria like these, which are expected in high-performing companies today: Every commitment becomes a risk; not "walking the talk" becomes a risk; lack of technical and business know-how become risks; and on top of all that you can't even tell people what to do!

## WHERE THIS TAKES US

One of the anomalies of our time is that traits that get you to the top—single-minded drive, ambition, the ability to disregard others and focus on

your goal—often no longer serve you once you are there. As Jack Welch, Larry Bossidy of AlliedSignal, Steve Jobs, and other remarkable business leaders have demonstrated, self-knowledge, the ability to keep learning and changing, and the ability to manage your behavior “sensitive to context”<sup>5</sup> are far more critical. Most of the economic and social “givens” of the previous generation have disintegrated in the last decades. While it isn’t yet completely clear what will replace them, new realities about both self and work are emerging.

These nine guidelines require more than new techniques. They demand a new kind of capability, a new kind of intelligence. This new intelligence is more integrative and broader than the scientific, detached, rational model of the past. Like the New Workplace, it is people-intensive. (See Chapter Eleven for a more detailed discussion of this new intelligence.)

## CONCLUSION

The skills that will keep technical and other professionals alive and afloat during these whitewater times have much less than in the past to do with technical knowledge, intellectual brilliance, or cutting-edge thinking. They will, for better or worse, involve people skills. The changes in the nature of work and the workplace require that we learn to work together so that we can all give our best. This is going to require the development of new skills, new capabilities, and new frames of reference. Make no mistake: We are talking about job survival. If you want to make it as a professional in the 21st century, you have to master these skills. This may seem risky, but there is even greater risk if you don’t. The world will pass you by.

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5 David R. Gaster, “A Framework for Visionary Leadership,” in *New Traditions in Business*, ed. by John Renesch. (San Francisco, Sterling & Stone, 1991), 170.



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## CHAPTER FOUR

# It Depends on How You Look at Things: The Power of Frames

**O**NE OF THE MOST POWERFUL functions of our mental models is to determine what we see, hear, and experience in any given situation. Thus, goal-setting should be preceded by making sure we are paying attention to what we do want, not what we don't want. Most technological development has come about because someone saw possibilities where others did not. We have to be aware of new possibilities before there is a chance for them to come to fruition.

### PURPOSE

A systematic shift from thinking about what went wrong in the past to what could go right in the future is a powerful tool for resolving issues, effecting change, and raising morale. This chapter begins the PLAN section of SYNTAX. It presents practical, hands-on advice on how to make the shift in attitude, or “frame,” from reactive to proactive.

### STARTING TO WORK

First, an exercise:

Think of an interpersonal situation that you would like to change. It can be anything, work-related or personal, as long as it contains something you would definitely like to change.

Answer the following questions about that situation. Answer exactly what the question asks—no more, no less.

First Frame:

1. What is the problem?
2. Why do you have it?
3. Who or what is limiting you or preventing you from getting what you want?
4. Whose fault is it?

What kind of internal response did you have? Make notes about the following, to compare with responses later on.

1. What is your energy level?
2. How do you feel about yourself in the situation?
3. How do you feel about the person or persons involved?
4. What is your level of
  - Motivation?
  - Clarity about the situation?
  - Optimism?

Second Frame:

Examine the same situation through a different frame. Again, answer the questions as written, without changing the language in any way.

1. What is your desired outcome?
2. How will you know when you attain it?
3. What possibilities might exist based on the current situation?
4. What have you learned from the situation so far?

After answering these questions,

1. Do you notice any differences in energy level?
2. Do you notice any differences in how you feel about yourself?
3. Do you notice any differences in how you feel about others in the situation?
4. Do you notice any differences in your levels of

- Motivation?
- Clarity about the situation?
- Optimism?

## SHIFTING THE FRAME

What happened when you shifted the frame? For many, the results are dramatic, even profound. Instead of feeling trapped, depressed, or angry, they feel hopeful, encouraged, or excited about new possibilities. They shift to an empowered state. For a few, the results are mild to non-existent. This is especially likely for those who experience the world in a more detached way.

Some actually find their energy is higher in the first frame because unhappiness and anger generate more steam. If this is used as motivation, they may still feel more positive about the likely resolution of the situation after the second frame.

If these frame shifts did not elicit a strong response, there are a few things to check: Did you answer the questions *exactly* as they were asked? Often people don't experience a shift because they have unconsciously altered the language to fit their own frames. They may have answered the first frame question already looking at their desired outcome or they may have stayed focused on the problem rather than possible solutions while they answered the second frame questions. For some people, internal language so dominates their thinking that external wording has little impact. Whatever the impact on you, it is important to start noticing how *your* word choices affect *others*. By recognizing this effect, you can influence people in a positive way when they are getting stuck in the negative.

There is no one correct response here, just an important point: *Language and framing affect our bodies and our responses*. How we think about a given situation largely determines how we feel, and thus, how we act. To become more resilient and proactive, observe how differently you feel and respond when you explore what you want rather than dwelling on what you don't want.

The first frame has been called the Problem Frame or Blame Frame. While these nicknames for a past-oriented approach sound negative, talking through this frame can be a useful way to experience how people have been unhappy in the past. When an individual, group, or organization is

stuck in the first frame:

- There is a whiny quality to descriptions of the situation.
- Conversations are repetitious, with the refrain of “Ain’t it awful?”
- Every statement includes a lengthy rationale, the gist of which is that “It isn’t my fault.”
- It’s usually pretty clear whose fault it *really* is.
- The truth about how bad things are or how little the speaker has done to change them is covered up.
- Exchanges may begin with some variation of “Well, if you hadn’t...” or “The problem is...”
- There is a lot of CYA (cover your ass) behavior—memos written, email messages sent—to assign responsibility for the mess anywhere but here.

In general, the Blame Frame is characterized by a victim mentality and a refusal to take responsibility.

Once you’ve recognized that you or someone else is in the Blame Frame, what do you do? Sometimes, nothing. If feelings are running high, people need to vent “ain’t-it-awful” feelings. The trick to managing those negative feelings is not to stay there too long and risk getting stuck in a cycle of blaming and victimhood. We have seen entire organizational cultures built around the Blame Frame dynamic. Needless to say, those organizations encounter serious trouble in the turbulent business environment. Time is eaten up by defensiveness, responsibility is denied, precious resources are squandered, and productivity nosedives. Talented people tend to exit such organizations, leaving the remaining population even more discouraged and negative.

It is important not to blame yourself while getting out of the Blame Frame. Once it has served its purpose, staying there wastes time, and, more importantly, preserves an unresourceful state of mind. There isn’t a lot of value in going over your own failings when it’s time to move on and refocus.

Even those caught in Blame Frame patterns rarely intend to be negative. It is just the way things seem to be.

## MOVING INTO THE AIM FRAME

Before we get out of the Blame Frame and into the Outcome Frame or Aim Frame, an important distinction needs to be made. The Aim Frame isn't simply about being positive and upbeat. It is about empowerment. It is about shifting the locus of control away from paralyzing external forces and back to those you *can* control—the ones within your own “responsibility.” Moving into the Aim Frame means taking responsibility for what will happen and empowering yourself and others to act, not waiting for others to act for you. The Aim Frame isn't about getting your CEO to do something—that is still external to your control. It is about *you* doing what needs to be done, by yourself or with the help of others.

The difficulty for most people is the fear of feeling threatened or embarrassed when they begin this shift. Chris Argyris, professor of organizational development at Harvard Business School, has observed that all human beings behave similarly when threatened or embarrassed. We instinctively hide our sense of threat or embarrassment, we cover up the fact that we are hiding, and then we cover up the covering up. A self-sealing loop is created. In the name of allowing others to preserve their dignity or save face, everyone colludes in the cover-up. Argyris calls these cycles “defensive routines.” Breaking them is learning to “discuss the undiscussable.”<sup>1</sup>

Argyris goes on to describe how learning processes are affected by such dynamics. He distinguishes two forms of learning: single-loop and double-loop.

- Single-loop learning occurs when organizations or individuals design actions and get the results they intended, or can correct initial actions and get the intended results.
- Double-loop learning occurs “when a mismatch between intentions and outcomes is identified and corrected by first examining and altering the governing variables [theory-in-use] and then the actions.”<sup>2</sup> Double-loop learning takes place when people explore the root causes of their actions in their beliefs and values. This requires analyzing our own behavior to identify those beliefs and values since, due to “undiscussability,” most of us *don't* “walk our own talk” and don't recognize that fact.

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1 Chris Argyris, *Knowledge for Action, A Guide to Overcoming Barriers to Organizational Change* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1993) 134-49.

2 Ibid.

In the Harvard Business Review, Argyris observed that managers often limit what they and others say, in the name of being considerate or keeping morale up. He notes that this deprives everyone of the opportunity to understand and own their behavior and learn from it. He continues:

*Admittedly, being considerate and positive can contribute to the solution of single-loop problems like cutting costs. But it will never help people figure out why they lived with problems for years on end, why they covered up those problems, why they covered up the cover-up, why they were so good at pointing to the responsibility of others and so slow to focus on their own.*<sup>3</sup>

The New Workplace Game described in Chapter One makes it clear that if organizations are to survive—and we are to survive inside them—more and more hard questions have to be asked. What moves can you make to get out of Blame and into Aim once you’ve recognized what is going on?

Several language patterns can be very helpful: The first is to state requests in the positive. Talk about what you *do* want, not what you don’t want. As a corollary, get people to focus on the desired outcome, not all the things that are currently wrong. At one large corporation they teach people to say “I wish” and “H2,” meaning “how to,” rather than negatives such as “I can’t.”

Another language pattern is to **ask questions that seek detailed, factual answers**. These questions start with “What,” “How,” or “When.”

- What has already been tried?
- When was this first noticed?
- How have we communicated to others?
- What has been the response?
- What else could be done to address the root causes?
- What fears have been raised by these efforts?

These questions avoid collusion with the Blame Frame and defensive routines. They shun rationalizations and blaming explanations. Conversely, questions that begin with “Why” invite the sort of defensive behavior we’re trying to avoid. “Why” is a good word to replace if you want to move a

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Argyris, “Good Communication that Blocks Learning,” *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1994, 79.

situation from Blame to Aim. The negative power of “Why” is explored in Chapter Eight.

“But” is another word to avoid. “But” has the effect of deleting everything that has gone before it. No matter how sincere the praise or support, “but” makes the brain retreat to primal mode: fight or flight. The chances that the rest of the message will be remembered are slim. A simple substitution of the word “and” makes a tremendous difference in how well you’re understood.

Once others perceive from your language patterns and non-verbal behavior that you are really listening, you can begin to move towards solutions. “Well, I’m pretty clear about what you *don’t* want—now, what *do* you want?” is one way to invite the shift to the Aim Frame. Other sample phrasings appear in Figure 4-1.

These phrases make it clear that you are aware of others’ experience and acknowledge its validity. You aren’t saying that they are wrong, merely that it is important to move into a goal-oriented mode. You can also say, “How can we work it out so that...[both our needs get met]?” This acknowledges the reality of the problems and the need to resolve them. It also implies that things *can* be worked out.

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<i>I</i>		understand		<i>your</i>		point of view		<i>and</i>		[state
		appreciate				situation				desired
		sympathize with				concerns				outcome]

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FIGURE 4-1

All these verbal moves are probably already in your repertoire of behavior. If you aren’t aware that you have them, it is hard to bring them forward when you need to. As you get better at recognizing the symptoms of the Blame Frame, you will be better able to make a conscious choice to move into the Aim Frame and use your more positive responses, with which effective communicators get positive results.

## CASE HISTORY

A steel stamping plant rolled its own sheet steel. Preventive maintenance

on the induction heating machines was supposed to be performed once a month and take about eight hours. In practice, the production people were usually too busy to shut down and give maintenance the time it needed. Of course, when the machines broke down there was almost always a red-hot ingot inside, which meant that it had to cool off for sixteen hours before maintenance could begin. Traditionally, Production blamed Maintenance and Maintenance blamed Production.

Finally, the plant introduced a TQM (Total Quality Management) process. One young manager asked, “How is it that we can’t afford eight hours for maintenance, but we can afford twenty-four hours for repairs?” After listening to a furious round of blaming, the on-site TQM facilitator asked very specific questions.

“Who here has known about this?”

“How long has it been going on?”

“How did this situation develop?”

“What prevented you from doing something about it?”

Answering the questions, the group began to see the situation in an entirely new light. Assumptions about other people’s motives or needs had been made but never tested, because to do so might have caused someone to lose face or suffer embarrassment. The first time Production had refused to stop for maintenance was because of a scheduling misunderstanding. Rather than admit that he had misunderstood, a supervisor had requested that the run not be interrupted, claiming it was for a priority customer. The next time that customer had a run, Maintenance assumed it could not be interrupted.

From there, things had quickly deteriorated. It soon became “common knowledge” on the plant floor that one did not interrupt runs for maintenance. Economic pressures were forcing continuous runs, so time for maintenance became scarcer and scarcer. Almost everyone knew about the problem, but they assumed it was someone else’s responsibility. The plant manager (who was, in fact, unaware of the situation) usually got the blame. “He must know about this, so it must be OK. Therefore it’s hands off for everyone else.”

When the group understood how much each of them had contributed to the development of this harmful pattern, they began to get depressed.

The facilitator quickly moved them on by asking, “How *should* maintenance be handled? We’re pretty clear on what we don’t want. How do we want it to be?”

Obviously, Maintenance needed to reclaim their responsibility and insist on regularly scheduled preventive maintenance. In general, they needed to be much more assertive about their role. While the supervisors needed the right to occasionally plead special exceptions, everyone had to assume responsibility for asking, “Is this a new policy or an exception?” By staying clear on the goal—a smoothly functioning and productive plant—it was easy to see that everyone bore responsibility for achieving that goal.

## CONCLUSION

All of us learn all the time. We often divide experiences into either failures or new possibilities. The choice generates subtle, powerful differences. The first attitude fundamentally assumes that we don’t have power, and naturally leads to shifting responsibility elsewhere. By paying attention to the frame you are in, you have more choice about the results you get than at any point further on. Once you enter the Aim Frame, you are moving forward and leading others forward as well. The next step is to make your chosen goals clear, complete, and compelling.

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The first edition of *Smart Work* went through five printings in its original form. Now it has been brought up to date with a new preface and chapters on remote communication and learning, both of which have exploded in the workplace since the book first came out in 1995.

Lucy Freedman, president of Syntax and developer of the SYNTAX of Influence, helps leaders create workplaces where customers, employees, and managers feel valued, share knowledge, and exceed expectations.

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