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A DIFFERENT KIND OF "SMART"

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"There is one thing more powerful than all the armies of the world, and that is an idea whose time has come."

—Victor Hugo

SURELY, EACH OF US KNOWS at least one person, and probably several, whose company we do not enjoy. Not rarely do we hear people say things like:

> "I dread having to visit my parents this weekend; I just know my mother will pick a big fight with my father, and she'll criticize me the whole time I'm there. I don't even know why I still go to visit them. Guilt, I suppose."

Others may say things like:

"I hate my job; my boss finds fault with everything I do. I guess I'll have to start looking around for something better."

Or:

"Maybe we should kind of 'forget' to invite him to go out with us. If he goes along, we'll argue all night."

Or:

"I feel like we should invite her to join us for lunch, but I can't bear to hear about her divorce one more time. She can't seem to talk about anything else."

Most of us can more adroitly spot deficits in social intelligence on the part of others than virtues—I know it when I don't see it. We may unconsciously gravitate toward people who have it, but we consciously steer away from those who don't. And those in between, at the middle of the scale of interpersonal competence? We can "take them or leave them."

How many people consider their parents or close family members a negative influence in their lives, rather than counting them among their best friends? How many people have parted company with their families, at least emotionally if not physically? How many parents complain that their children neglect them or seem to have no desire to visit them?

People who enjoy close and supportive family relationships often seem baffled by the difficulties others describe in dealing with their close kin. But even within so-called happy families, certain individuals may treat others in ways that alienate them.

Conversely, most of us have at least a few acquaintances we consider special—people with whom we feel comfortable, respected,

affirmed, and cared about. Put two examples of the extremes side by side for a moment—compare a person you tend to avoid with a person whose company you eagerly seek out, and contrast their behaviors. It quickly becomes obvious, not only that one person simply behaves in a more positive, supportive way than the other, but you also get the sense that the positive person somehow knows more about people than the negative one. The positive ones seem to "get it"—they understand people and their interactions reflect that understanding, more than simply consisting of some set of "nice" behaviors.

What we will call social intelligence in this book consists of both insight and behavior. We seek to understand human social effectiveness at a level beyond simple formulas—beyond saying "please" and "thank you," beyond the normal social courtesies, beyond the so-called "people skills" supposedly valued in the workplace. We seek to understand how highly effective people navigate social situations so skillfully, and how they know—at least most of the time—how to engage others in ways appropriate to the context.

To begin with a working definition, we can think of social intelligence, or "SI," as:

The ability to get along well with others and to get them to cooperate with you.

OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES?

I've often heard people I deal with every day—from teachers, trainers, personnel people, and conference organizers to business managers, consultants, publishers, editors, and journalists—express a kind of automatic, stereotyped reaction to the phrase "social intelligence." Frequently such a person will say, "Oh yeah—'people skills'—very important in today's world."

By slotting the concept of social intelligence into an old familiar category and recoding it with an old familiar name, they risk misperceiving its potential significance. This sense of the simple and familiar

may have held back the perception and understanding of SI as a more deeply layered, more comprehensive view of human affairs. An expression from the ancient tradition of Zen philosophy advises:

"The biggest obstacle to learning something new is the belief that you already know it."

Academic researchers and theoreticians have chewed on the notion of social intelligence for decades, with mostly ambiguous results. As far back as 1920, eminent researchers such as E.L. Thorndike tried to identify a unique set of skills, separate from those associated with the traditional idea of intellectual intelligence, that could measure a person's social competence, and possibly predict his or her success in dealing with others. In the other camp, "IQ" pioneers like David Wechsler, as early as 1939, argued that "social intelligence is just general intelligence applied to social situations." Attempts to correlate measures of sociability with the early intelligence tests yielded inconclusive results. Academics have kept themselves profitably occupied ever since, trying to deconstruct the concept of social effectiveness into an acceptable set of dimensions, or categories, in hopes of designing scientifically rigorous ways to measure them.

Meanwhile, life goes on, and we ordinary civilians have struggled on our own to define the essence of social effectiveness. In the business world particularly, personnel experts, trainers, consultants, executives, and managers have sought to define practical social skills, presumably for the purpose of helping their employees develop or improve, or at least to select the ones who "have it" and place them in the right jobs. This search has also met with relatively limited success.

For many years, and particularly over the past few decades, business educators have talked often about "communication skills," "interpersonal skills" and "people skills," usually with very little in the way of working definitions to support their conversations. For example, many employee performance evaluation forms include a section on communication

skills, but mostly leave it to the worker's boss to assess a dimension of performance based on subjective impressions and opinions. Lacking a comprehensive operating definition of these skills, managers and others have little to rely on other than a sense that "I know it when I see it."

Frequently, if I ask a manager who assesses an employee as having poor communication skills, "What particular skills do you see as lacking, or in need of development?" the manager may think for a moment and then begin to enumerate certain specific malfunctions he or she has observed. They can often identify certain behaviors and idiosyncrasies they consider ineffective or dysfunctional.

However, if I ask the same manager to enumerate a fairly complete set of skills that make up the package of "people skills," he or she will typically struggle with the challenge. After quickly listing the obvious and familiar skills such as listening and explaining things clearly, the inventory typically degenerates to a vague set of personality traits—aspects such as "considerate," "cooperative," and "articulate."

These traditional platitudinal definitions of interacting skills have limited our understanding of social intelligence as a broader concept and have led many people to settle for clichés instead of seeking a more robust operational model. We have typically settled for a few skills and techniques—"active listening," for example, or "I-messages," in which a person expresses his or her own feelings and reactions—and have not seriously sought a more comprehensive view.

The argument in favor of developing a more comprehensive model of human effectiveness, which goes beyond the older construct of "people skills," posits that such a model can serve a person as a mental platform for understanding social situations, or contexts in which interactions take place, and it can also enable a person to design a response to a unique situation without feeling dependent on some fixed inventory of things to say, ways to say them, or pre-programmed conversational tactics.

It seems reasonable to posit that the ability to behave skillfully in a wide range of social situations—talking to one's boss, taking part in

a meeting, making a presentation to a group, sharing experiences with a spouse or significant other, interviewing for a job—rests on something more than simply knowing a set of specific skills or procedures. It implies a depth and breadth of life knowledge, a deep knowledge of one's culture—and possibly other cultures—the accumulated wisdom that comes from constantly observing and learning what works and what doesn't in human situations.

For example, simply "reading" the context of a situation—the multitude of cues that encode and signal the relationships, rules for behavior, and the attitudes and intentions of the participants—requires a deeply embedded understanding and know-how. To reduce the idea of human effectiveness to some simple package of "people skills" seems to discount the richness of understanding and resourcefulness that can make people more effective in their dealings with one another.

GOING BEYOND IQ

For many experts and students of human performance, the publication of Harvard professor Howard Gardner's 1983 book *Frames of Mind* marked a turning point in understanding and defining the sources of mental competence. For some, it represents a turning point of immense importance.[1]

Gardner overturned one of the most fundamental assumptions of the psychological and educational establishments, namely that human mental competence arises from a single trait called "intelligence." Beginning with the work of Alfred Binet in France, who tried to measure the "mental age" of children, to the early attempts of the U.S. Army to identify measurable mental characteristics of soldiers that could predict their success in various tasks, and Cattell and others in California, who searched for measures that could predict the academic success of schoolchildren, the "IQ" concept has held sway in Western cultures for seventy-five years.

Many leading thinkers in the field of developmental psychology have advocated eliminating intelligence testing from American schools,

but with little success. The eminent intelligence psychologist Arthur Jensen wrote, "Achievement itself is the school's main concern. I see no need to measure anything other than achievement itself."

The notion that a single three-digit number assigns a person to a certain level of potential for success in life became an article of faith, particularly for educators and administrators who believed in designing educational systems and experiences around presumed levels of competence. Argument and speculation continue as to whether the use of numerical IQ scores has done more harm than good in Western society. Aside from its presumed usefulness in classifying and assigning students, real benefits of the IQ system and ideology seem hard to find. Many anti-IQ advocates argue that its only real impact has consisted of making some people feel less worthy than others and leading some to consider themselves somehow superior to others.

The method of measuring IQ has come in for even more criticism than the concept of IQ itself. Critics charge—quite rightly, I think—that standardized pencil-and-paper IQ tests cannot possibly assess the full range of mental competencies available to a person. In particular, the designer of a standardized written test has to define each problem in terms of a closed set of possible answers. Any other means of assessment, such as written essays, commentary, or physical demonstration of a skill, would require a scoring system run by trained evaluators, which would make the testing process very costly and difficult to administer.

The lack of a method for inviting *original responses* to questions or problems completely rules out the measurement of *divergent production,* the basis for what we call creativity. Asking a question like "How many things can you do with a small coin?" invites an unbounded range of replies; no computer software could possibly evaluate them all. At a minimum, this restriction to *convergent responses,* that is, the "one right answer," eliminates a whole range of mental skills that play an important part in human success. Some critics of IQ testing contend that relying on written IQ measurements has caused educators to favor—consciously or unconsciously—students who perform well on preprogrammed tasks, at

the expense of those who lean toward unstructured, creative forms of thought. They argue further that the design of the educational experience in public institutions reflects the "one right answer" approach and shows little respect for the "more than one right answer" concept that forms so much of the basis for creative thinking, the arts, literature, music, and other subjective aspects of human experience.

Enter Professor Howard Gardner. Beginning in about 1980, Gardner became interested in some fundamental questions arising from psychological testing: Why do some people with very high IQ scores fail miserably in their personal lives? Do tests of mental competence miss certain obvious aspects of human ability, such as artistic, musical, athletic, literary, and social competence? Gardner came to the inevitable conclusion: the concept of "intelligence" as a singular measure of competence has to go. He posited that human beings have a *range* of key competencies—intelligences—and they exist in various proportions in various persons.

With Gardner's model of multiple intelligences, theory finally caught up with common sense. Theoretical questions remain about how best to subdivide or categorize these various intelligences, and that discussion will probably continue for some time. Gardner himself has apparently not arrived at a fully satisfying taxonomic structure; as of this writing he continues to explore various categorical dimensions. But his "MI" concept has reached the tipping point of acceptance in certain sectors, particularly education and business, at least in the United States. Some of the more rigorous academic advocates of the single-number "g-factor" theory of IQ still vigorously oppose Gardner's concept, and the controversy will almost certain rage for decades to come. In particular, Gardner's research methods do not involve exactly the same experimental tools as those favored by the single-IQ fans, so the two lines of investigation do not necessarily yield comparable results.

We'll have our hands full in this book exploring just one of these multiple intelligences, the domain of social intelligence, so we have no cause to enter the theoretical fray surrounding the MI concept itself. We

must content ourselves with placing SI clearly within the MI framework and then understanding its implications within that framework.

Placing SI within Gardner's MI framework requires a bit of conceptual acrobatics, inasmuch as Gardner himself—at least at the time of this writing—continues to evolve his categories and definitions. The bulk of his early work involved a set of some seven independent intelligences. He has also posited the existence of an eighth dimension, less clearly defined. Some other researchers have diced up the macro-intelligences into other categories.

Consequently, for our exploration, we will need to settle on some working definition of these multiple intelligences, in order to place SI clearly into that perspective. While Gardner uses rather scientific sounding labels for his categories—verbal-logical, mathematical-symbolic, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and musical—we probably do little harm by recoding them into street language and simplifying them conceptually. With appropriate respect for Professor Gardner and his theory, I've found it helpful to rearrange these "multiple smarts" into six primary categories:

1. *Abstract Intelligence:* symbolic reasoning.
2. *Social Intelligence:* dealing with people (the topic of this book).
3. *Practical Intelligence:* getting things done.
4. *Emotional Intelligence:* self-awareness and self-management.
5. *Aesthetic Intelligence:* the sense of form, design, music, art, and literature.
6. *Kinesthetic Intelligence:* whole-body skills like sports, dance, music, or flying a jet fighter.

Others might argue for a somewhat different set of subdivisions, but these six categories work fairly well, and they have the modest extra advantage of spelling out a memorable acronym: ASPEAK.

This notion of multiple intelligences seems to fit with our common experience. Consider the disparity between abstract intelligence—the

IQ kind—and social intelligence. I've met many members of Mensa, the international society of people with high IQs—the only requirement for membership. I've often marveled at the number of them who, despite their impressive cognitive credentials, seemed incapable of connecting with other people and, in some cases, incapable of maintaining a reasonable degree of emotional resilience. Presumably the "Renaissance human," the success model most of us admire, would have a strong and well-integrated combination of all six intelligences.

EI, SI, OR BOTH?

Since the 1995 publication of Daniel Goleman's landmark book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ,* the concept of "EI" or "EQ"—an emotional quotient—has taken hold significantly in the business sector.[2] Trainers, personnel people, consultants, coaches, and managers have embraced EI as an important element of personal effectiveness. A series of other books, training programs, seminars, and conferences have, predictably, followed in its wake. As typically happens with a breakthrough concept, some people have even accorded the EI movement a kind of cult-like status. For a few, EI explains just about everything; for most, it explains many things and fits well with other concepts of human development.

Goleman's first attempts to frame a practical model of EI identified five dimensions of competence:

1. Self-awareness.
2. Self-regulation.
3. Motivation.
4. Empathy.
5. Relationships.

One of Goleman's five original dimensions, however—the relationship dimension—seems to stretch the model and the concept beyond its practical boundaries. The first four primary competencies do clearly

identify elements of the internal emotional landscape, which influence one's behavior in fundamental ways. And certainly they influence in a very fundamental way a person's capacity to interact well with others. But in trying to force-fit social competence into an already broad model of emotional competence, we risk doing too little with too much.

By folding motivation into self-awareness, later work streamlined the EI model into four domains—as of this writing termed self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management—each of which links to clusters of specific EI competencies, eighteen in all.[3] Relationship management, for example, is associated with seven leadership-oriented competencies, including inspirational leadership (guiding and motivating with a compelling vision), developing others (bolstering others' abilities through feedback and guidance), and change catalyst (initiating, managing, and leading in a new direction).[4]

If we widen our conceptual zoom lens to reconsider Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences, we can more readily place Goleman's overall EI concept in terms of its relationships to the other intelligences. We can also begin to identify the ways in which we can combine the various intelligences in a synergistic way, to build a portrait of the competent human—the true "Renaissance person."

With appropriate respect for the contributions of both Gardner and Goleman, it seems worthwhile to link together both of these useful concepts as complementary views. We can look at EI as a dimension of *internal competence*—self-awareness and skillful deployment of one's emotional responses. Then we can clearly delineate our model of social intelligence in terms of *externally oriented competencies.* In other words, we need both of these intelligences for interpersonal success.

Indeed, as previously explained, Professor Gardner does exactly this in his formulation: he posits an *intrapersonal* intelligence—emotional intelligence, for all practical purposes—and an *interpersonal* intelligence—competency in human situations. The value of this clearer delineation of concepts may lie in the opportunity to coordinate and interrelate them, rather than trying to squash them into a single conceptual container.

For example, consider the syndrome of shyness, a pattern of behavior that relates strongly to low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and feelings of low self-worth. Learning to interact more skillfully and confidently with others requires not only acquiring new social skills—eye contact, using a stronger voice, taking up more space—but it also involves revising one's inner self-estimate—re-owning one's rights as a person, acknowledging one's worth as a human being, and learning different emotional responses to social interactions. Taken together, EI and SI can go a long way toward explaining social pathologies such as shyness and offering developmental strategies for overcoming them.

As another example, consider a person who exhibits what many people call the "abrasive personality." This person's abusive behaviors—criticizing others, disputing and arguing with them, putting people down, using aggressive language, voicing dogmatic opinions—may arise from a low sense of self-worth, that is, low EI. At the same time, such a person may simply lack sufficient insight into his or her impact on others, and may not grasp the value of helping other people feel good about themselves as an avenue to achieving his or her own ends.

FROM TOXIC TO NOURISHING

A personal experience, more than a decade ago, finally brought the concept of SI, as a behavioral proposition, into focus for me. I had been teaching a series of management seminars for a university extension program in northern California. The program ran for five consecutive week-ends, each with a Friday evening session and an all-day Saturday session. The same managers attended all sessions.

During the first session I introduced a self-assessment questionnaire I had drafted as an attempt to profile behaviors that contributed to alienation, conflict, and animosity, in contrast to behaviors that led to empathy, understanding, and cooperation. I also introduced the terms "toxic" and "nourishing," respectively, to denote the contrast between the two.

Toxic behaviors, by this definition, cause others to feel devalued, inadequate, angry, frustrated, or guilty. *Nourishing behaviors* cause others to feel valued, capable, loved, respected, and appreciated. People with high social intelligence—those who are primarily nourishing in their behavior—become magnetic to others. People with low social intelligence—those who exhibit primarily toxic behavior toward others—act as anti-magnetic. In this regard, the old expression about having "a magnetic personality" may have some value.

During the session, the managers filled out the draft questionnaire and scored it. Most of them reported that they found the profile personally useful, particularly in that it gave them a specific set of behaviors to think about. At the next session one of the managers offered to share an experience he'd had during the intervening week:

> "I have one particular employee who's very toxic in almost all of his interactions with others. I've been urged to fire him many times. I haven't been able to figure out what to do with him, until now.
>
> "Last Monday, after our week-end seminar, I invited him to sit down with me and I showed him this questionnaire. I just said, 'I've been taking a management course, and the instructor gave us a questionnaire that I thought was kind of interesting. I'd like to ask you to read it.'
>
> "I sat there without saying a word while he read the list of toxic and nourishing behaviors. When he got to the bottom, he looked up at me. He said 'This is me, isn't it? All of the things on the toxic side are the things I've been doing. I never really thought about it this way.'
>
> "I only said one thing to him: 'Maybe it's something you want to consider.'"
>
> "Well, I've never seen someone's behavior change so fast in my whole life. From one day to the next, he went from the complete grouch to being helpful, considerate, and even friendly. His

coworkers keep asking me 'What did you do to him? Did you inject him with something? Did you send him off to therapy? Suddenly he's become Mr. Personality!'"

Many times since that episode I've seen convincing evidence that the biggest single cause of low social intelligence comes from simple lack of insight. Toxic people often become so preoccupied with their own personal struggles that they simply do not understand the impact they have on others. They need help in seeing themselves as others see them. And to make sense of that insight, we turn to our model of social intelligence—and some examples of social incompetence from everyday life.

BLIND SPOTS, LENSES, AND FILTERS

Try the following experiment: light a very small candle or switch on a small pocket-sized flashlight and hold it out in front of you at arm's length. Fix your vision straight in front of you, focusing on some convenient object or a point on a wall, and don't let your eyes move as you carry out this procedure. Close your left eye if you have the light source in your right hand, or close your right eye if you have the light source in your left hand. Now, starting with the light source directly in line with the center of your open eye, and continuing to gaze directly forward, slowly swing the light source in an arc, outward from the center line of your nose. Keeping your eyes focused straight ahead, but remaining aware of the light source, you'll discover a point—located at about a 15-degree angle outward from the center line—at which the light source will disappear. On either side of this "blind spot," you'll become aware of the light again; within the blind spot, you simply can't see it.

This physiological blind spot resides at the point where the optic nerve leaves the eye; you have no nerve cells at that small point, and so you cannot see anything in that particular place in your visual field. Most of us rarely notice this blind spot, and many people don't know

they have one. How can we have an area of no perception right in the middle of our visual field and not notice it? The answer lies in the way the brain processes the information coming to it. Our eyes move about more than they stay still; our survival instincts cause us to scan our environment rapidly, except when we choose to concentrate on one thing for some reason. As the eyes move about, they feed a complete picture to the brain, which works around the blind spot and constructs an apparently complete picture by filling in the missing data.

Just as our brains work around our visual blind spots, so too do they work around our social or psychological blind spots. We don't see what we don't want to see. And we do see what we want to see.

The commonplace expressions we use in our culture indicate that we understand, at some level, that we human beings do not actually perceive reality—*we create it at the instant of perception*. Each of us ingests his or her own unique reality, which becomes the net result of our perceptions, reactions, interpretations, and distortions. We often refer to our blind spots—aspects of our experience that we block out of our consciousness, either through simple inattentiveness, subconscious repression, or outright denial. However, the fact that we frequently refer to these blind spots in ordinary conversation does not guarantee that we actually understand them or that we consciously act to see through them or see past them.

All of us have blind spots, lenses, and filters permanently installed between our sensory channels and our brains. Our unique blind spots block out those parts of reality that we have chosen not to deal with. Our personal lenses magnify those aspects of reality we preoccupy ourselves with. And our filters selectively exclude or rearrange various aspects of reality to suit our existing brain patterns.

These blind spots, lenses, and filters operate dynamically—they shift from moment to moment, from situation to situation, programmed by our values, beliefs, desires, expectations, fears, and evaluations.

A personal experience brought the concept of social blind spots home to me in a very direct way. I discovered that several of my

acquaintances, with whom I've enjoyed many evenings in interesting conversations, felt that I made a practice of monopolizing the discussions. In particular, several of them who usually had little to say seemed to feel that I interpreted their silence as a license to take the conversational ball, and they felt that I should have made a more proactive effort to invite them to participate. Unfortunately, none of them saw fit to break this news to me; I began to suspect it based on other sources of evidence. When I sought their feedback, they agreed with my diagnosis. "You always have interesting points of view and interesting things to say," they assured me. "But others may not feel encouraged to share their views unless you take a back seat for a while."

If we knew about our blind spots, they wouldn't exist, or at least we could adjust to them and work around them. Unfortunately, even our best friends may hesitate to tell us about our blind spots—as they perceive them—and we sometimes have no other way of discovering them except by accident.

My way of dealing with that particular blind spot, now brought into consciousness, included silently reciting a personal mantra before entering into any conversation: "A conversation is not a lecture by Karl Albrecht." This has helped considerably, at least according to the feedback I've received from my friends. I only wish that all of us had felt more free and less anxious about helping me discover and reduce my particular blind spot.

Do I have other such blind spots? How would I know?

SOCIAL HALITOSIS, FLATULENCE, AND DANDRUFF

Recently I was sitting in my favorite local coffee shop, reviewing some information for a project I was engrossed in, when two men came in and sat at the table next to mine—a few feet away. One of them chatted to the other animatedly for several minutes. At a lull in the conversation, he leaned over in my direction and said "Pardon me, sir. That's a great-looking ring you're wearing. Is it 'lapiz'?"

"Thanks," I said. "It is."

He immediately took this as an invitation; he got up and came over to my table, depositing himself in the chair across from me. "May I see it?" he asked. I took off the ring and he made a show of admiring it. "I see you're writing quite a bit. What do you do for a living?"

As he continued to chatter I quickly discovered that he had an objective in mind. He set off in a tirade about a "fantastic new business opportunity," using "the Internet—which is a whole new way of doing business."

"This is not a franchise," he assured me. "It's not a multi-level marketing scheme. It's a fabulous way to achieve financial independence, and I'm proud to be able to help so many people realize their dreams."

As I listened to a few more of his breathless platitudes, I mused about how little he cared about me and how he seemed perfectly entitled to exploit a complete stranger. In a surreal moment of imagination, I seemed to lose awareness of his smiling, handsome face. I pictured a bright yellow "smiley face" superimposed on his head—a kind of mindless happy guy who was completely oblivious to the social impropriety he was committing.

Social Halitosis

I've come to refer to this kind of inauthentic, inconsiderate behavior as a form of "social halitosis," the conversational equivalent of bad breath. I suppose Mr. Smiley Face was consumed with enthusiasm for his newfound moneymaking enterprise. I also suppose that he often told himself and his associates something like "Everybody's a customer for this. I can make a sale in any situation." And to prove it, he accosted an innocent bystander in a coffee shop.

The conversation had become a rather comical experience for me. As soon as he'd bridged over from the artifice of admiring my ring to the set-up for his sales pitch, I said, "This sounds like a sales pitch. Is that why you wanted to talk to me?"

Probably unaccustomed to hearing normally polite people refer directly to his rudeness, he stalled for a few seconds, and then found his feet again. "Oh no, I just thought that you seemed like a really intelligent person who's probably interested in making a lot of money. We all want to be successful, don't we?"

Then he launched again into his story about this fantastic new opportunity. When he stopped for a breath, I said, "You really seem to be consumed by this." Startled again, he began to lose altitude. "Well, yes, I am excited about it. I can't understand why anybody wouldn't be interested in an opportunity to make money."

I said, "Well, thanks for considering me, but I'm really not interested." Finally out of steam, he mumbled some polite form of departure and slunk back to the other table to join the other man.

This little vignette holds several lessons, I believe. One is that some people are completely capable—either through ignorance and lack of insight, or through willful disregard for the social rights of others—of treating another person like a thing, a piece of furniture, a non-being who exists only for the fulfillment of their own selfish purposes.

I don't know whether Mr. Smiley Face ever recovered from his social pathology, but I wouldn't be surprised to discover that he has very few real friends. Maybe he came to his senses, or maybe he jumped on another "fabulous opportunity"—possibly sold to him by another member of the Smiley Face clan.

A second lesson—or conclusion—I've arrived at after being accosted by members of the Smiley Face clan is that I have no obligation to listen politely while they're treating me like a thing. I've developed the habit of telling them to their faces that I don't want to listen to their stories. Usually I do it politely, and sometimes I do it bluntly.

The Smiley Face clan seems rather numerous, actually. Some of them are religious proselytizers. They accost people in public places, purport to strike up banal conversations, and then segue into a sales pitch for their church. Years ago many of the followers of a personal

growth movement known as EST (which originally stood for "Erhard Seminars Training") became known as zombie-like recruiters for the cause. I found it a surreal experience to meet one of them at a social function and suddenly find myself on the receiving end of a strangely patterned recitation that seemed devoid of all originality or spontaneity.

I don't think all persons who try to sell things to strangers deserve to be classified as afflicted with social halitosis—just those who can't or won't treat human beings like human beings. Military recruiters, car salespeople, telemarketers, and quite a few others get paid to pitch us their products. The difference, it seems, lies in the *meta-verbal* cues—the choice of words, inflection, phrasing, and pacing, the cadence of their conversation tell us whether we're getting the canned spiel or we're being addressed as real human beings and individuals. Perhaps if it doesn't sound like a spiel, then it doesn't matter if it is.

This malfunction takes on comic proportions for me when I hear a telemarketer launch into a robotic, mindless recitation of a scripted message—before I interrupt and politely hang up. I think of it as hearing someone who knows the words but doesn't know the tune; after the thousandth recitation, the sales rep's brain goes "off line" and leaves behind the equivalent of a recorded message. This partly explains the low success rate of telemarketing calls.

Another variation of the social halitosis affliction is the person who has only one "story" and who insists on telling it over and over to everyone who will hold still. Sometimes their subject is so important or so personally compelling to them that they interpret the slightest expression of interest—even feigned interest—as an invitation to tell the whole story. Unable or unwilling to deliver the "elevator" version of the story and let the conversation move on to other topics, the mono-story person gets caught up in his or her own preoccupation and overloads the listener. A surprising number of them never seem to detect or consider that they're sharing much more about penguins than others want to know.

For some, their religious views dominate their discussion. Sometimes people going through difficult life situations, such as divorce or major health problems, feel compelled to dump their suffering on others, and to elaborate and dramatize it well beyond the limits of ordinary sympathy. Some people suffer from occasional and circumstantial bouts of social halitosis. For others it becomes a long-term affliction, with a set of unconscious benefits that make it difficult to give up.

I recall one person in particular, who seemed to have only one subject of conversation: a particular medical disorder she struggled with. She had built a support group of people who coped with this disorder, and every conversation I had with her—before I began navigating toward other people at the social functions where I encountered her—revolved around this most interesting medical condition. She recited the statistics of its occurrence, shared the latest research findings, and regaled anyone who would listen with the experiences of her support group. I began to notice the subtle signals of withdrawal on the part of her listeners, but apparently she did not.

Some psychologists interpret the mono-story syndrome as evidence of a form of covert hostility—the impulse to victimize others who feel bound by the rules of polite conversation. They may derive a measure of enjoyment—usually unconsciously—from keeping their "victim" pinned down like a prize butterfly, knowing that most people will not violate the unspoken rules of etiquette.

Social Flatulence

Quite a few years ago I was visiting Dallas on a business trip. I was out for the evening with the marketing representative of the firm I was dealing with, a likable but somewhat uncouth fellow with a loud voice and a pronounced New Jersey accent. He had just recently relocated to Texas and didn't know the city very well yet.

We were having a drink in a lounge in the central business district, prior to heading out somewhere for dinner. This happened only a few years after the assassination of President John Kennedy had occurred.

Benny (not his real name) expressed interest in driving past the site of the assassination event, and asked whether I knew how to get there. I did not.

In his best "Jersey" accent, he yelled out across the room to the bartender who was standing at the other end of the bar, "Hey! Where's the place downtown where JFK got it?"

Suddenly, the room got very quiet. All eyes turned to us. I began shifting my body in the direction of the door. The bartender walked over to us and explained, in a quiet voice, how to get to the Dealey Plaza site. I felt mortified, and very grateful that the bartender had chosen to overlook the insensitive statement. I had already known that many Texans, and especially those in Dallas, felt especially distressed about the event, even years later, and that many of them worried that other Americans might unfairly characterize Dallas as a violence-prone place.

Benny's peculiar form of insensitivity and lack of situational awareness demonstrates what organizational consultant Edward Hampton calls "social flatulence." Hampton is somewhat less delicate in his choice of language. According to Hampton:

> "Some people have a knack for saying something so inappropriate, inconsiderate, or crude, showing so little appreciation for the immediate context, that it's the social equivalent of passing gas in church, or at a wedding or a funeral. I call it a 'social fart.'"

I must agree with Hampton's characterization. Social flatulence originates in ignorance, lack of situational awareness, or—possibly worse—a lack of respect for the accepted norms for behavior.

Social Dandruff

While riding on a sightseeing bus in some now-forgotten tourist city, I had the misfortune of sitting behind a teen-aged girl who decided to vigorously brush her long hair. After a few seconds of watching her hair flying in all directions, and considering the hygienic implications of her

beauty maintenance, I tapped her on the shoulder and politely requested that she stop brushing her hair in my face. She did, but only after a sullen comment and an expression that clearly conveyed that I had violated her civil rights in some way. She apparently saw nothing wrong with sharing her dandruff with a total stranger.

Inasmuch as we've used metaphors of personal hygiene—social halitosis and social flatulence—we might as well complete the triad: consider social dandruff, a pattern of behavior that selfishly imposes one's interests on others.

Many examples spring to mind: the teenagers in the car beside you at the traffic light, who feel entitled to share their musical preferences with you by playing their car stereo at maximum volume. Or the young men loudly displaying their ethnic pride by carrying a "boom box" playing their favorite counter-cultural music. Or the group of ten people who come into the restaurant and "take over" the place, laughing loudly and yelling across the table as other patrons try to enjoy their meals in peace. Or the coworker who walks into your office uninvited, sits down, and props his feet up on your desk, assuming you have nothing better to do but talk to him.

Social dandruff also includes the person who imposes on the politeness of others to ask for favors inappropriate to the relationship. It includes the "get my way" person, who insists on deciding where the group shall go for lunch. It includes the person who feels free to spray everybody in sight or hearing with his or her political views or religious convictions. It includes the narcissistic person who sweeps into the room with a grand air, expecting others to stop what they're doing or talking about and acknowledge his or her entrance.

All three of these forms of toxic behavior—social halitosis, flatulence, and dandruff—arise from the same social pathology: lack of insight or lack of concern for one's impact on others. They all represent various versions of self-centered, selfish, and self-serving behavior, lacking in altruism or consideration for others.

THE "DILBERT" FACTOR

The world of Scott Adams' popular cartoon character Dilbert offers a valuable window into the social dynamics of an important subculture of the Western business world—the "techies." Dilbert and his workmates represent a highly stereotyped but very real subpopulation, which we in the business world haven't really taken seriously or tried to understand. Jokes and anecdotes about high-tech people abound, and yet their influence on the rest of us remains largely unexamined, and the ways in which their techno-theology shapes the choices in our lives deserves much more careful thought.

These people design the web pages and computer screens we see, decide how our software works, write the manuals and help screens we read as we struggle to understand their software, answer the help calls we make, create the formats for bank statements—and authors' royalty reports—and they make far-reaching decisions about how technology fits—or fails to fit—the hands of human beings. Ridiculing them or looking down on them does little good; we need to understand them, and figure out how to integrate them more successfully into the social structures of our world.

We can temporarily borrow Adams' trademarked character and transform him from an individual into a generic profile, for the purposes of understanding the handicaps that limit his—or her—social and professional success, and understanding how the education of a dilbert—in the generic sense—may also benefit society at large.

Stereotypes get to be stereotypes partly because they contain a certain core element of truth. Although the cruel or unthinking use of stereotypes can do great injustice, on the other hand, denying their core truths can also have destructive effects. While many engineers, computer experts, scientists, and technicians do not fit the stereotypical pattern of techies, geeks, and nerds, many of them do.

For this discussion, we characterize dilberts as not all technically or intellectually oriented people, but rather those who more or less fit

a distinctive psychosocial profile—a stereotype, to be sure. At the extreme, dilberts tend to show the following characteristics:

- Arrested or retarded social development, accompanied by marked introversion and limited self-insight
- Limited awareness and insight into social contexts and the motivations of others
- A compensated sense of low self-esteem; gaining feelings of self-worth through intellectual or technical achievements
- Eccentric social and political ideologies; ostentatious rejection of social conventions and views; attempts to present themselves as different, unclassifiable, and unique
- An adolescent-like sense of humor and a truncated sense of imagination, often manifested in ways others perceive as eccentric rather than creative
- A well-rationalized disdain for authority, rules, and social structures; characterizing bosses and non-technical authority figures as stupid, ignorant, and ego-motivated

The recurring stories in Adams' "Dilbert" cartoons consist mainly of the bumbling incompetence of the boss, his Machiavellian disregard for the humanity of the dilberts as underlings, the stupidity and incompetence of the seldom-seen top executives, nonsensical policies that waste time and resources, and occasionally the nerdy personalities of the protagonist and his coworkers.

Where do these dilberts come from? What makes dilberts behave like dilberts? I believe they constitute the flawed outputs of our educational system, at both high school and university levels. From personal experience, having received my early education as a physicist, I can testify that high schools and colleges have done little in the past to acquaint prospective dilberts with the need to function socially. While this state of affairs has changed somewhat, at some institutions, for the most part the dilberts tend to pass through the educational system

unchanged. Having worked with and managed dilberts, I have also found that business organizations do very little to help them acculturate to the diversified working societies in which they have to function.

Many technically or intellectually inclined students choose careers in engineering, the sciences, and in technologically oriented fields precisely because they anticipate working with things rather than with other people, or at worst working with other people like themselves. Seldom does their educational experience alert them to the fact that they will one day have to explain their ideas to others, persuade others of the value of their opinions, and sell their ideas and themselves. Like innocent sheep, they enter the political environments of large organizations assuming that their great ideas will sell themselves, that only a stupid person would fail to grasp the value of their contributions.

After a big dose of reality, they often conclude that fortune has cruelly implanted them in the midst of an astonishing number of stupid people. Too often, they rationalize their failures and frustration by retreating into the dilbert syndrome: "These people are too stupid, incompetent, or misguided to understand or appreciate me." Dilberts tend to disdain "company politics," which they consider despicable and unproductive. Consequently, they typically do not develop the kinds of political smarts necessary to advance in a career. In their naïve, oversimplified world view, one should advance strictly on technical merit, not on one's ability to "play politics." Many of them discover the truth slowly, if at all.

CAN WE BECOME A SOCIALLY SMARTER SPECIES?

At the risk of veering too far off into the philosophical realm, it may be worth reflecting on the broader implications of a science of social intelligence, and on where the study of such a discipline might be leading us.

An observer from a distant planet, presumably from a culture wiser and more successful than ours, might look with dismay at the incapacity of human beings to cooperate and to forbear from inhuman

behavior. To be fair, such a being should credit human beings with great acts of collaboration and common effort, as well as condemn them for their colossal atrocities. One cannot sneeze at the Great Pyramid, the Panama Canal, the moon landing, the Internet, and the Ice Capades.

On the other hand, such an extraterrestrial observer might point out, we humans have proven that we can inflict destruction and suffering on a grand scale, just as we can build and collaborate on a grand scale. And parenthetically, many of our proud grand schemes have also involved considerable "collateral damage." After the most gifted artisans in India completed the Taj Mahal, emperor Shah Jahan had them killed; he had the principal architects blinded so they could never repeat their masterwork. Historical accounts note that over 5,000 workers lost their lives building the Panama Canal.

Looking at the broader sweep of history, our extraterrestrial observer could justifiably declare us a murderous species—"the only one," in the words of Mark Twain, "that, for sordid wages, goes forth in cold blood to exterminate his own kind." Over the past century or so, we've averaged something over 1,000,000 people per year killed in wars and similar violent episodes. That only counts people professionally killed; the collateral damage—the deaths due to starvation, disease, and social collapse—would run the score up to much more impressive levels.

The renowned British writer and futurist H.G. Wells observed, "Civilization becomes ever more a race, between education and catastrophe." Anthropologists like the late Steven Jay Gould have labeled us a relatively young, unproven species, and see no good evidence to conclude that we will outlast the cockroaches.

To venture into the realm of the grandiose for a moment, I would say that we as a species need three things to improve our chances of surviving and living in a reasonably peaceable state. None of them individually will solve the problem of man's inhumanity to man, and taken together they can probably only reduce its severity. But as we progressively lose them, we seem to drift further in the wrong direction.

First, we need leaders who model high social intelligence. In particular we need leaders who can articulate a positive vision of development and progress—even if it doesn't make all of us happy. We need leaders who appeal to our higher selves and invite us to grow as individuals and as a society, rather than leaders who pander to our primal fears and selfish greed.

Second, we need an educational system that honors the principles and behaviors associated with high social intelligence, and that teaches our young people to understand the cultures and subcultures through which they must navigate in this modern world, and that emphasizes the value of collaboration over conflict. We need an educational system that equips young people to express their ideas clearly, to make themselves understood, and to seek to understand others before reacting to their behavior. They need at least a workable alternative to the standard seventeen-word teenager vocabulary—"awesome," "weird," "I'm like. . .," "Ohmygod!," "whatever," and the rest.

And third, we need a media environment that serves the higher values of the culture and not simply the commercial interests of corporations whose executives feel entitled to sell anything they choose, to anybody they can influence, by any means possible. By shifting our discussion from the vague, undefined entity called "the media" and focusing instead on the leaders of the commercial enterprises that operate, populate, and manage the media environment that surrounds us all, we may succeed to some extent—possibly to a greater extent than we do now—in holding them accountable and inducing them to feel responsible for the powerful consequences of the image environment on our children, our leaders, our attitudes, our institutions, and our politics.

Order in the Court

The phrase "civility in the courtroom" doesn't come to mind too often these days. In the wake of televised celebrity trials, where we get to know defendants on a first-name basis—like football star "O.J." (Simpson), entertainer "Michael" (Jackson), TV cooking-show host

"Martha" (Stewart), actor "Robert" (Blake), accused wife-murderer "Scott" (Peterson), and sports star "Kobe" (Bryant), there seem to be fewer and fewer lay or law people still clinging to the musty old courthouse traditions of decorum, order, and politesse.

Since exceptions are often useful, consider the example set by Baltimore, Maryland, Judge Anselm Sodaro (1910–2002). Judge Sodaro became known, not just statewide, but nationally, for his courtesy, civility, and positive demeanor toward everyone who entered his courtroom.

In an age of increasing discourtesy, disrespect for institutions, and incivility, Judge Sodaro set such a standard of excellence for courtroom courtesy that, in 1998, the Maryland State Bar Association created the "Judge Anselm Sodaro Judicial Civility Award." This prize is given annually to a sitting judge who best demonstrates the practices of its namesake.

Known in his early law career as an example of the "fair but relentless prosecutor," Judge Sodaro became a Maryland Circuit Court Judge in 1956, Chief Judge in 1975, and continued in that capacity until his retirement in 1980.

His span as a judge was consistently noted for his use of courtesy and graciousness toward civil litigants, criminal defendants, witnesses, victims, bailiffs, and each of the attorneys who addressed his court. With each session, he tried to create an atmosphere of fairness for all parties.

Judge Sodaro may have best exemplified what it really means to have "order in the court."

S.P.A.C.E.: THE SKILLS OF INTERACTION

Returning to Planet Reality for the remainder of this discourse, I would like to complete this chapter by offering a fairly simple but relatively comprehensive model for describing, assessing, and developing SI at a personal level.

Inasmuch as I possess no formal credentials as a psychologist or academic researcher, I choose to invoke a kind of "diplomatic immunity" as I attempt to construct a workable and useful framework that may apply in the business and professional environment. Not having any obligations to the traditions of psychometric research, I feel relatively free to start with Professor Gardner's concept of social intelligence as a legitimate dimension of human competence, and to attempt to build a model based largely on experience and common sense.

Having chewed on the idea of SI myself off and on for over twenty years—mostly off—I've gradually evolved to a set of dimensions that seem promising as a framework for defining, measuring, and developing it. I make no claims for the statistical validity or psychometric rigor of this model or these dimensions, other than that they seem to pass the test of common sense. It will, of course, have to stand or fall on its merits over time.

Five distinct dimensions, or categories of competence, have emerged over the many years of chewing. We will explore each of them later in considerable detail, so we simply enumerate them here as follows:

1. *Situational Awareness.* We can think of this dimension as a kind of "social radar," or the ability to read situations and to interpret the behaviors of people in those situations, in terms of their possible intentions, emotional states, and proclivity to interact.
2. *Presence.* Often referred to as "bearing," presence incorporates a range of verbal and nonverbal patterns, one's appearance, posture, voice quality, subtle movements—a whole collection of signals others process into an evaluative impression of a person.
3. *Authenticity.* The social radars of other people pick up various signals from our behavior that lead them to judge us as honest, open, ethical, trustworthy, and well-intentioned—or inauthentic.
4. *Clarity.* Our ability to explain ourselves, illuminate ideas, pass data clearly and accurately, and articulate our views and

proposed courses of action, enables us to get others to cooperate with us.

5. *Empathy.* Going somewhat beyond the conventional connotation of empathy as having a feeling *for* someone else, or "sympathizing" with them, we define empathy as a shared feeling *between* two people. In this connotation we will consider empathy a state of *connectedness* with another person, which creates the basis for positive interaction and cooperation.

Putting these five common-language dimensions together, we have a working definition and a diagnostic tool for SI, which we will refer to by its acronym S.P.A.C.E. The following chapters will define, explore, and interrelate each of these key dimensions and will propose ways in which we can use the S.P.A.C.E. framework as a diagnostic and developmental model.

Exploring S.P.A.C.E.

If you would like to develop and practice the five dimensions of social competence—Situational Awareness, Presence, Authenticity, Clarity, and Empathy—a good way to start is to make yourself more fully aware of all of them on a daily basis. Once you've read the following individual chapters, consider concentrating on each of the five dimensions on each of the five week-days.

- On Monday, pay special attention to Situational Awareness. Observe others in various situations, and study the situations you personally experience.
- Spend each Tuesday paying careful attention to the dimension of Presence—yours and others'.
- Spend Wednesdays observing and learning about Authenticity.
- Devote Thursdays to Clarity of both thought and expression.

- On Fridays, concentrate especially on Empathy, observing it, learning about it, and developing it.
- On the week-end, deliberately tune in to all five dimensions.

Other things you can do to develop your S.P.A.C.E. skills:

- Keep some note cards handy and jot down your observations, discoveries, and realizations.
- Discuss these ideas with others. Explain them to others as a way to strengthen your own understanding. Teach them to the children in your life.
- Form a discussion group to share the learning process with others.
- Have the courage to seek helpful feedback from others, so you can gain greater self-insight. Provide others with helpful feedback if they ask for it.
- Make social intelligence an everyday experience of observation, learning, and development.

Notes

1. Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind.* New York: Basic Books Inc., 1983. See also Gardner, Howard. *Intelligence Reframed.* New York: Basic Books Inc., 1999.
2. Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ.* New York: Bantam, 1995. See also Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence.* New York: Bantam, 1998, and Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence.* Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.
3. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership.*
4. Ibid.