

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

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**What the book
is about and
who it's for**

Consider the following probably all too recurrent situations.

- You don't like the way your new boss is managing you. He's constantly looking over your shoulder, checking not just whether you meet your objectives but also how you do so. He has criticized you in front of your subordinates and has taken decisions which affect you without discussing them. He's succeeded in thoroughly demotivating you but doesn't appear to be aware of that. You need to tackle him about this.
- At a conference, you spot a prospect you've been unsuccessfully chasing for six months. The person he's drinking a coffee with during a break suddenly excuses herself to answer a call, leaving your prospect alone and five feet away from you. Now's your opportunity!
- You're a senior management consultant. At the end of an assignment, your client has asked you to carry out some additional analyses. You agree to do so at no extra cost, but the analyses are more complicated than you envisaged and your team has spent a considerable amount of extra time interrogating the data. You think you're justified in asking for an additional fee but feel uncomfortable doing so after the work has been done rather than before. You hesitate before making the call.

WHAT THE BOOK IS ABOUT AND WHO IT'S FOR

- Someone you manage makes invaluable contributions to the project you're working on together, but he's always late for your team meetings and his lateness is starting to become contagious. You've already explained to him the problems this poses but it hasn't made any difference. Yesterday your boss came to the team meeting. She was singularly unimpressed by the fact that the meeting started 10 minutes late and asked you afterwards to sort things out. You need to do so.
- You've had a fire overnight on your production line and you've just been told by your operations manager that a big order to a major client can't be delivered on time. Now you need to pick up the phone and give the client the bad news.
- You're a front office manager in conversation with a customer. You feel the customer is being gratuitously rude to you but you ignore it in the hope of preserving the sale. But the more you ignore the insults, the worse they get. You need to address the situation.
- It's 2 o'clock in the morning. After a party in your flat, a member of the opposite sex to whom you are strongly attracted (and not just because it's 2am) has stayed on to help you clear up. Instead, you end up having a deep and meaningful conversation over the last bottle of wine. Your thoughts turn to romance – or at least to lust. Then he/she says: "I suppose I ought to be thinking about getting a taxi." You clear your throat to respond.

Situations like these will be familiar to anyone picking up this book. Who hasn't hesitated before leaping in? Who hasn't, on occasion, failed to leap in at all? Who hasn't had cause to regret the things left unsaid; or the things which were said, but ineffectually or maladroitly? Apart from those of us incarcerated in solitary confinement, marooned, Crusoe-like, on a desert island or pursuing careers as the loneliest of goatherds (and I'm guessing that if you're reading these words, none of those descriptions apply to you) then we all spend most of our lives

interacting with our fellow human beings, both professionally and personally – negotiating, selling, influencing, requesting, procuring, transacting, seducing, persuading, resolving; and our happiness and success at practically every level is in large part measured by how effectively we do so.

Dealing effectively with someone else doesn't just mean getting what you want from them. Being effective also means getting the result quickly rather than laboriously. And, even more importantly, it means doing so whilst maintaining or enhancing the relationship with the other person so that they'll continue buying from you, going out with you, living with you, working for you, employing you. It also means maintaining or enhancing the relationship even if, for objective reasons, you don't get the result you want – so that perhaps you'll still have a chance in the future.

It's my view that the "secret" of dealing effectively with other people is no secret – and not just because it's been exposed in the preface to this book. We all instinctively feel greater respect for someone who speaks candidly than for someone who beats around the bush. We trust them more and if their honesty and transparency is also accompanied by courtesy and respect, we are more likely to help them if we can. On the basis of "do as you would be done by", we automatically understand that we will have more impact, generate greater trust and confidence and give ourselves a better chance of the other person listening to us in an open and receptive frame of mind if we can speak straightforwardly and honestly – as long as we can manage to do so without also being blunt and abrupt.

Our instincts are clearly telling us what we should be doing. But how to do so? For there's the rub. The vast majority of human beings are faced with what they see as an insoluble dilemma: to be clear, straightforward and direct, but risk being seen as blunt and brutal; or to be polite, respectful and courteous but incapable of getting to the point. In other words, to have no inhibitions and trample heedlessly on the

sensitivities of the listener, or to be a slave to inhibition and tread so softly as to leave no trace.

This is of course a false dilemma, because how can you be truly respectful of other people if you're not also being straightforward with them? This book will suggest ways in which you can systematically square the circle – it will propose principles which will allow you to “talk lean”, to be both candid and courteous in every situation. If you apply these principles, you will give yourself every chance that other people will be open and receptive to what you have to say and ready to help you if they can.

Many years ago, I witnessed a scene on the London Underground which has remained vividly in my memory. A young man hanging onto straps near mine was clearly attracted to a girl who had jumped in at the same station – and it seemed to me that his interest was shyly returned. This scenario probably recurs a thousand times a day on the Tube in London and in other cities around the world, but in most cases nothing at all comes of it because neither party finds the courage or the words to say what's really in their mind. (I've noticed recently that rather than seizing the moment, these prospective lovers have started saying what's in their mind the next day in the columns of free commuter newspapers [*Rush-Hour Crush* in the London *Metro* is one such column] – by which time the opportunity has probably been missed, or at the least has now been entirely drained of the seductive power of spontaneity.)

But the young man in question clearly did have both the necessary courage and the words to grasp the moment. After a couple of stops, he spoke up (discretely, but I was an attentive eavesdropper) and a conversation ensued which went something like this:

Boy: Excuse me. Uhhh . . . I apologize if I'm being forward. I've been wracking my brains since you got in to find something original to say. But my mind's a total blank, you're probably going to get out at any minute and the moment

will have gone; so I just want to say that I really like the way you look . . . and I'd like to have a coffee with you!

Girl (reddening but smiling): Oh! . . . I don't know what to say . . . that's quite flattering!

Boy: So what do we do now?

Girl: I don't know! What do you suggest?

Boy: How about that coffee?

Girl: When?

Boy: At the next stop?

Girl: OK! Why not?

The reason the young man's words have stuck in my mind over the years was because they impressed me so much. I was awe-struck – and envious.

He had been spontaneously both straightforward and polite, he had found the freedom to put into words exactly what he was thinking and he did so in a way which was comfortable for him and comfortable for the person he was talking to. He spoke respectfully and generated respect; and consequently he presented himself as someone who was honest, genuine and sincere rather than as a smooth pick-up artist. The conversation was efficient because it quickly produced the result the young man was looking for.

His initiative could just as well have ended in failure if the girl had not been single or simply didn't like the look of him. But he would certainly still have gained her respect (as well as mine) and he wouldn't have spent the rest of the week regretting what he hadn't found the courage to say – to the detriment too of his own self-respect.

This analysis came to me years later with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight. At the time I simply reflected ruefully that some people have a natural gift for communicating which the rest of us can only envy from afar; and that those people will probably be the ones who will

have the most fun in life by landing the best jobs, the most appealing dates, the fastest promotions, the most valuable contracts and everything else we'd all like to ask for but don't dare to. And after that reflection, I went back to reading my newspaper and to carrying on my life as a distinctly second-division communicator.

Luckily, 15 years later I met a man called Philippe de Lapoyade who showed me that communication skills at this level can be developed by anyone. Like me, Philippe had witnessed situations in which someone had dared to speak up and had done so in a way that had delivered results and enhanced the relationship. Unlike me, he hadn't simply reflected ruefully that some people are born with those skills and some people aren't.

Instead, he set out to identify, via meticulous observation of his own meetings and those of many others, the verbal behaviour patterns which consistently produce concrete results rapidly and whilst enhancing the relationship. The target of his observation was "effective communication" rather than "effective communicators" because he noticed that we're all capable on our day of effective communication. Great communicators don't possess skills which the rest of us wholly lack; they just manage to deploy those skills more consistently.

It is no surprise that "effective communication" turned out to be communication which was simultaneously both candid and courteous. Where Philippe's exercise contributed huge value was in identifying the "how" rather than the "what". As a result of his observations, he defined a set of simple rules to describe effective behaviour patterns in meetings and conversations so that he could apply them himself, consistently and consciously, rather than occasionally and unconsciously; and so that he could teach others to do likewise. What you are reading is based on the results of that canny piece of reverse engineering.

This book is not unique in addressing the subject of dealing effectively with other people – doing so is after all a pretty fundamental part of

being a human being and it is not surprising that the subject has inspired a substantial bibliography. I can't claim to have read every book on the topic, though I have read a good few. Some are simple compilations of the blindingly obvious ("It's a good idea to remember the other person's name" is an example I found recently), the better ones contain good common sense but no framework for applying the common sense consistently, the best contain both common sense and a framework for applying it – but in my (admittedly partial and subjective) view no other book on the subject will give you a framework and tools that are so effective and yet so simple. This is the consequence of Philippe's rigour in condensing and organizing the fruits of his observations into a concise set of easily understood principles which can be summarized on a single page – and at the end of the book, they will be.

As the example from the London Underground suggests, this is a book about seduction, but not in the narrow sense of erotic seduction. It is about seduction in a much broader sense. Seductive behaviour, in both a professional and a personal context, is behaviour which is attractive to the other person, which engenders trust and confidence and so puts them in an open and receptive frame of mind, ready to allow themselves to be taken in the direction in which you have told them you want to take them. Seductive behaviour is necessarily based on transparency and sincerity – the absence of those qualities is unattractive because it creates anxiety and puts us on our guard. Paradoxically, there is nothing less seductive than the behaviour of a seducer. The would-be Don Juan, or the salesman oozing faux charm, both have intentions which are plain, but which invariably remain unvoiced, with adverse consequences for the generation of trust and respect.

What the Book Does

The book will suggest how to *introduce* any meeting or conversation – a sales meeting, a request for a raise, a loan, an investment or a date,

the assignment of an arduous task, the extraction of a promise or a commitment, the announcement of bad news – and how to prepare that introduction so that right from the outset, the other person will be curious, open and receptive to your request, ready to listen and to help if possible.

It will suggest how to use your arguments *during the meeting* in a way that will ensure they produce something other than counter arguments. It will suggest how to listen with rigour and precision to the other person and to demonstrate irrefutably not only that he or she has been listened to but also that you have done something with what you have heard. It will suggest how to react verbally to what the other person says in the conversation, how to seize opportunities and overcome setbacks, in a way which guarantees complete consistency between what's going on in your head and what's coming out of your mouth. It will suggest how to ensure that all of the energy during the exchange is focused on achieving your goal or protecting your interests whilst also constructing the required amount of trust and esteem. It will suggest ways of dealing effectively with the situations described at the beginning of this chapter – but it will give you the verbal tools to deal effectively with ANY situation.

The ideas advanced in the book will have a significant impact on the productivity of your meetings at the level of both the relationship and the results.

Some of the approach described in the book is relevant only to meetings and conversations which YOU have initiated (what I will refer to as “outgoing” meetings). Unless you're the one who's called a meeting or initiated a conversation, it's not your role to open it. But many of your meetings and conversations are “incoming”, initiated by someone else and for which you can't prepare and can only listen and react. The book will suggest how to be more effective in both outgoing and incoming meetings and conversations.

Much of the book's content may suggest that its subject is primarily dealing with other people in *challenging* meetings, where the stakes

are high. By definition, this is the area where the book is likely to be most helpful – and probably the reason you picked it up. But although our approach will help you to tackle tricky meetings more successfully, Philippe is keen to emphasize that his focus in developing the approach was not on solving problems but on constructing results and relationships. To borrow an analogy from another colleague whose passion outside work is growing trees, the approach should not be seen as a way of putting out forest fires, but rather as a way of planting saplings.

Once you've understood and assimilated the approach as it relates to handling challenging meetings, I hope therefore that you will appreciate that everything between these covers can also be practised in easy meetings, to make them even simpler, quicker for all involved and more positive in terms of the impact on your relationship with other people. It will help to reduce the pain you suffer in difficult meetings – but much more importantly it will help to increase the pleasure you derive from all meetings.

What the Book Does Not Do

The book can't – and doesn't set out to – provide a cast-iron guarantee that if you apply the approach you will always get what you want from a meeting. More modestly, it will give you the courage to say what you think and to ask for what you want and, if what you want is obtainable, it will give you the best chance of obtaining it quickly. And if what you want isn't objectively attainable under any circumstances, you will find this out more quickly too and avoid wasting time and energy; and avoid the risk of poisoning the relationship through fruitless argument.

The book will not seek to change who you are; it will seek instead to change what you do with who you are.

It will not seek to impose upon you standard words and phrases. You will be able to assimilate everything between these pages in a way which is entirely consistent with your own vocabulary and way of speaking.

The book will not school you in the dark arts of manipulation. Deliberate manipulation (by which I mean trying to take someone somewhere without telling them in advance where you're trying to take them) can undoubtedly be an effective *short-term* strategy for getting what you want (which is why, regrettably, manipulative behaviour – under different names – is often taught to people in management and sales roles).

Unsurprisingly, most of us dislike being on the receiving end of manipulative behaviour. We usually realize pretty quickly, though often too late, what's happened, with negative consequences for the relationship. De facto, manipulation is not an effective *long-term* strategy if you want to maintain or enhance the relationship and continue getting what you want from the other person. Most of us are also uncomfortable being asked deliberately to manipulate someone else; and in our view, companies should think twice about asking their employees to do things they're not comfortable with, particularly if those things are also of dubious strategic value.

A particularly egregious form of manipulation is the surreptitious application of “techniques” or “methods” to the unconscious mind of the other person. There is a strong belief in many quarters that the most effective way to influence someone else is by working on his or her subconscious. There is no doubt that we all process a lot of the information in a meeting or conversation at an unconscious level – what the other person looks like, how they're dressed, how they speak, the way they hold themselves, the space they occupy and much more; and it is consequently quite possible to influence the other person by working on their unconscious mind. But this is a difficult trick to pull

off subtly and without detection. You could never openly admit to using techniques which act on the other person's subconscious – and if the other person ever suspects that you are consciously setting out to work on their unconscious mind, it's likely to be disastrous both for the result and the relationship. The advice in this book is exclusively concerned with working on the other person's *conscious* mind.

Admittedly a lot of manipulative behaviour is applied accidentally rather than deliberately, without ill-will or dishonest intention, but simply through the lack of an accessible alternative. This happens when people instinctively disguise their real purpose when they've got something difficult to say, because they think that if they come straight out with it, they will immediately frighten the other person off – so they adopt a more circuitous route.

Far from endorsing manipulative behaviour, the book will demonstrate that, whether applied deliberately or through force of circumstance, it is unnecessary and counter-productive; and that it is possible to influence and persuade far more effectively without recourse to such behaviour.

The approach on which this book is based and which we teach in organizations around the world is resolutely not called “The Interactifs Technique” or the “The Interactifs Methodology”. Instead, we call it “The Interactifs Discipline”. We believe the distinction is an important one. This approach is not something which you apply to other people in the expectation that IT will be effective; it is something which you apply to yourself in the expectation that YOU will be effective.