

# Introduction

It's said that money makes the world go round. That might be the case, but so do relationships.

Those of us living in the 21st century are likely to meet more people in one day than most people living in medieval times met in a lifetime. Admittedly, some of those encounters may be quite brief and superficial and probably don't deserve to be referred to as a relationship. For instance, I'm on nodding terms with a couple of people who serve me at the Post Office, but I would hesitate to use the term 'relationship' as a way of describing what goes on between us (even though Deirdre does give me my book of first class stamps with a certain twinkle in her eye). However, what begins as a brief encounter with someone may lead to something long term. (Not with you though, Deirdre.)

It's these longer term encounters that I want to focus on in this book. And I want to attempt what few books on this subject normally do – focus on relationships both in and outside the workplace. In my experience, both are crucial and our sense of fulfilment and happiness are inextricably linked to the quality of these relationships. Performance at work can be hindered or enhanced by how well we relate to a boss, colleague or customer. And in your personal life, the source of great joy or sorrow usually stems from your relationships with those closest to you.

What if you're feeling fairly satisfied with the quality of your relationships at the moment? Great. Congratulations. But join me anyway. Personally when it comes to dealing with people, I'm up for any help I can get, even if the journey so far has been going relatively well. In my experience, the ride isn't always smooth and sometimes we're not aware of what's around the corner.

But maybe you have been drawn to this book because you want to learn how to avoid strangling the people in your life. Okay, the word ‘strangle’ is perhaps a little extreme, but you get my point. Let me manage your expectations. I’m not promising you quick, superficial answers. And please be clear on this – your relationships won’t improve because you’ve read this book. That will only happen when you start to apply and engage with the insights that are relevant to you. I’m talking about a partnership here, not a passive experience of reading some words on a page and then forgetting all about it.

This is serious stuff. Purely on a commercial level, this book could be worth thousands to you. Clients, customers and staff are all won and lost based around how good or bad we are at relating to each other. If that’s what you gain from this book, then I’m happy for you. But I believe you could gain some insights that you’ll struggle to put a monetary value on – but which will be priceless. Perhaps a marriage that seemed dead will be resurrected or a wounded relationship with a loved one may see the healing process begin. Maybe rather than saying ‘I don’t know what’s got into him or her recently’, you’ll begin to find new ways of understanding others.

And at this point, let me clarify something regarding the title of this book – *SUMO Your Relationships*. The phrase SUMO – Shut Up, Move On – is sometimes misunderstood as it can sound rather aggressive to some people. Well, if you’ve read my previous book, *SUMO – Shut Up, Move On*, you’ll understand what is at the very heart of the SUMO message. If not:

The phrase SUMO is split into two parts. ‘Shut Up’ means to take time out, to be quiet, to do some reflecting. We do so many things on auto pilot, i.e. without consciously thinking about what we’re doing. Life is busy. People are in a hurry. We want everything now. The only thing is, we don’t always take time to decide what we *really* want. This book gives you the chance to do so in terms of the relationships in your life. Appendix A gives a brief overview of the ‘Six SUMO Principles’

covered in my previous book and how they relate to this whole subject of relationships.

Unlike many books that explore how to deal with other people, I'll also be challenging you to examine yourself and reflect on your own behaviour and attitudes. Hard as it might be to imagine, it's just possible that someone bought this book with you in mind.

To help this process and to encourage you to stop and think, I include sections called 'SUMO pit stop's. Just like in a Formula One motor race, I'm encouraging you to leave the circuit temporarily in order that you're in a better position to complete it. It's an opportunity to refuel and perhaps, just as race conditions change and necessary adjustments need to be made, the SUMO pit stops provide you with an opportunity to consider what adjustments you need to make in order to improve your relationships.

However, I don't want to take the analogy too far. Life is not a race. It's not about winners or losers. I'm not encouraging you to view life as some competition where you're trying to get ahead of others. My approach is that we all learn or perhaps re-learn some ideas that enhance our relationships and ultimately make winners of us all.

And in case you're wondering – the 'Move On' part of SUMO is **not** another way of saying 'move out' or 'move away'. It's not a call to give up on people, or move on to a different relationship – that's not the essence of the 'move on' message. But although it's not the essence, it can sometimes be the reality. There may be occasions when it seems our only option is to literally let go and 'move on' – but I'm encouraging you to see this as your final option, not your first. Too often I feel I look for the quick way out. It's the easy option – but 'easy' doesn't always mean 'best'. As we'll see, improving relationships takes time, but – as I've seen from my own experience – it's time worth taking.

The 'Move On' message of SUMO is above all about hope. You can move on and things can change. You don't have to accept the current state of your relationships. The future can be different – if you want it to be.

Am I an eternal optimist? No. I'm realistic enough to recognise that things don't always move on in the way we would want. As I write, a close friend of mine has started divorce proceedings. Her marriage is now over, almost before it had begun. Her pain is tangible. The ending of her relationship is not by 'mutual agreement'. It's a story that will be echoed by many.

Equally, the workplace contains people so disaffected by their work that there seems little hope of change. But I remain an optimistic realist. I don't accept that such scenarios – although common – are always inevitable. Change can happen, but we may need a few more tools to help turn hopes into realities.

In writing this book and reflecting on my own character, I asked myself the question, 'Flawed, Fraud or Faithful?' My answer? All three.

To be honest, I do believe I'm flawed – in fact, I believe we all are to some extent. And yes I do sometimes feel a fraud as I fail to always practice what I preach. But when I'm being kinder to myself I also know that there are times when I'm being faithful to the values and principles I hold dear.

I guess this view of myself is a struggle many of us battle with – particularly in the context of our relationships. But I'm comforted by the words of the author and journalist Philip Yancey who wrote, 'We are all in peril if the flawed messenger invalidates the message.' I sincerely hope my own personal failings don't undermine the power of the message.

And as for my message, my close friend and mentor Paul Sandham said to me recently, 'If you haven't lived it or breathed it, don't write it.' I can assure you, I've taken on board his

advice – you’ll be reading plenty about my own personal encounters with people.

I think we all experience highs and lows in our relationships – I certainly have. But here’s my perspective on what has made my own personal journey a little less bumpy than it might have been. It’s based upon over twenty years of research, but perhaps more importantly, over forty years of life experience.

So determine, as you read this book, to learn from my mistakes as well as from my successes and work at making your journey and that of others, a little more comfortable as a result.

Enjoy the ride

Paul McGee – The SUMO Guy

P.S. If this book belongs to you (as opposed to being borrowed), you’ll find the following helpful. To get the most from your read, have a pen, pencil or highlighter to hand. You’ll be asked to reflect on a number of questions throughout the book, and I think on occasions you’ll find it invaluable to write down your thoughts. There will also be certain stories or phrases that you come across and won’t want to forget. I suggest you highlight them. Reading this book is about making a difference to your relationships, not about seeing how pristine you can keep the pages. But if you really can’t bring yourself to do this, then please at least have a note book to hand whilst you’re reading.

