

Thriving Workplace

An overview of HEAR & Be HEARD By originator and tutor Tom Watkins

Who and what is this for?

Analyses of organisational challenges and successes consistently demonstrate the need for interpersonal competence as a basis for collaboration, cohesion, teamwork and high performance. Everything else, eventually, depends on it.

High levels of intellect, professional competence, status or goodwill don't necessarily equate to proficiency in managing workplace relationships. **Everyone** benefits from systematic development of their own practices but few do this; they make-do with acquired habits, unaware of or unwilling to examine their part in problems or the potential of skilful change.

Supervisors, leaders, coaches, managers and staff at all levels of responsibility find **Hear and Be Heard** provides vital reference-points, techniques and a personal roadmap for continuous improvement of interpersonal competence, whatever their current levels of competence. The practices dealt with are equally applicable to personal, family and social life.

How constructive are your practices? How do you know?

What approach is taken?

There are at least two sides to every interpersonal communication challenge but we have the power to control only one; we cannot make other people change. Our best shot at making the differences that matter comes from enhancing our own practical and attitudinal responses to communication opportunities.

This view increases the likelihood of positively influencing others with our behaviour-modelling and constructive responses. Whether or not others do change, we strengthen our own confidence and repertoire of mature responses to difficult, awkward, tiresome, alarming or otherwise challenging interactions

Hear and Be Heard takes a comprehensive approach to assessing and enhancing the generic self-management and interpersonal communication practices necessary for constructive relationships. It goes to the heart of dialogue – the attitudinal foundations of our willingness and ability to hear and understand others, and to be ourselves heard and understood.

The programme enables a surprising degree of sustainable improvement to relationships-management practices: greater self-awareness and *meta-cognitive* ability; enhanced listening, clarity, honesty, ability to cooperate; confidence and competence to approach and resolve conflict openly with respect for individual differences; and more satisfying everyday dialogue.

Hear and Be Heard has been adapted for self-study online (with access to 1:1 support if required). The start-point is one of the most important phases, a four-step interpersonal communication skills self-appraisal. It is the best gateway to further online study from our comprehensive resources on the subject.

Why are some exchanges with some people, so difficult?

The quality of whatever is done or attempted amongst people in organisations and with their clients always depends, eventually, on the quality of interpersonal communication practices and on the parties' ability to manage their attitudes towards others and the problems and differences they have with them.

Normally, we can get by with the relatively unrefined interpersonal communication practices we grew up with. Although these are habits we tend not to think about, often of doubtful quality and based on untested assumptions, there is frequently tolerance for mistakes, improvisation, casual imprecision or awkwardness. Anyway, we tell ourselves, we'll take greater care and apply more rigorous techniques if and when necessary.

But *best* interpersonal practices are most called for when communication is most difficult: when tolerance is low or non-existent, feelings are intense, differences most acute, people stressed and the consequences of failure most severe. Then, we are seriously challenged because our ordinary habits, *ad hoc* are not equal to the task. Techniques held in reserve for those times lie beyond reach because we are not skilled in them. ("Skill" means "*ability arising from practice*".) Opportunities are lost, problems and conflicts worsen, relationships are damaged, time and energy wasted, cooperation and achievements put at risk.

Two vital questions, seldom answered

The parties seldom have insight into their own part in the problems. They see themselves as victims and tend to blame one another - often making their complaints about "difficult people" the subject and cause of widespread dissatisfaction elsewhere. Thus, they avoid the practice of self-responsibility and the uncomfortable process of answering two searching questions:

- How constructive and fit-for-purpose are your interpersonal communication, conflict resolution and problem solving practices?
- What do you know about your own part in the interpersonal challenges you experience?

Commonly, those seen as "difficult people" are either required to undertake a training programme or resented because they never will.

Where did it come from?

Hear and Be Heard is an interpersonal communication and relationships management skills-training programme I designed and have conducted many hundreds of times since 1982, often with the entire staff of client organisations over the course or years. (Usually as a four-day course over three weeks.) Although not a correctional programme for "difficult people", it helps deal us to deal with people who are sometimes difficult - including ourselves.

Do we still need this?

There was a time when the development of interpersonal communication practices was considered necessary for only the seriously dysfunctional. ("*Send them on a course!*") Now that the connection between these and all other supervision and leadership practices is better understood (increasingly, as part of the practices of *Habits of Mind*, *Emotional Intelligence* and *Mindfulness*), we know that people at all levels benefit from their systematic and continual improvement.

Rather than "*Do we need it?*" the question has become: "*How can we methodically and efficiently enhance the interpersonal practices of those who understand that skill in these matters is central to all that we work towards?*" The response we provide is one that since 1982, very many individuals and organisations have found transformational.

What is it based on?

All interpersonal communication and relationships management material within Thriving Workplace is drawn directly from the guidebook and workbook provided to **Hear and Be Heard** programme participants.

The programme goes to the heart of dialogue and confident interpersonal communication, to reveal and deal with hidden belief structures and attitudes that underlie our approach to understanding others and to making ourselves understood. It is designed to help you get more from your interpersonal communication and more satisfying working relationships - within your organisation and outside of it.

Research into thinking and intelligent behaviour (by such authors as Costa, Feuerstein, Glatthorn and Baron, Sternberg, Ennis, Goleman, Perkins and Coles) indicates identifiable habits of mind which characterise effective thinkers in all walks of life. They are developmental qualities that are never completely mastered. Seven of them are dominant themes within our approach to relationships management:

- Managing impulsivity.
- Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision.
- Persisting when the solution to a problem is not readily apparent.
- Listening to others with understanding and empathy.
- Asking questions and posing problems.
- Metacognition: thinking about our own thinking.
- Knowing what to do when we don't know what to do.

"While intelligent human beings are capable of thinking skilfully, it is their habits of mind that provide the fuel to activate strategic thinking. In order to engage skilfully in problem solving, decision making, or knowledge generation, they must possess, be disposed and inclined to manage their impulsivity, display empathy, be inquisitive and persistent."

[Arthur L Costa]

The **Hear and Be Heard** material currently within this website and continually being added to it, is a comprehensive approach to assessing and enhancing the people-skills necessary for constructive relationships within our professional situations and personal lives. ("*Constructive*" = *servicing to improve, helpful, positive, practical, productive.*)

The outcomes

We intend that you will find **Hear and Be Heard**:

- **Diagnostic:** identify and understand the causes of the difficulties you have in your exchanges with others, and those that they have with you.
- **Remedial:** habituate simple skills, processes and practices in combinations that make very significant improvements.
- **Affirming:** confirm the appropriateness of those aspects of your current behaviours and mental frameworks that are already responsive, mature, skilful and respectful.

Those who have studied **Hear and Be Heard** and applied its guidelines report very significant self-understanding of their own part in problems experienced with others, and a surprising degree of ability to make sustainable improvements to their relationships-management practices: greater self-assertion, more confidence, clarity, honesty, cooperation, the ability to approach and resolve conflict openly with respect for individual differences, and more satisfying everyday dialogue.

Our organisational clients

The following organisations are amongst a much longer list of clients who have made very significant use of this programme (as either **Hear and Be Heard** or **Managing Effective Relationships**) at various times:

Shell NZ	Philips NZ Ltd
The New Zealand Treasury	Te Puni Kokiri
National Library of New Zealand	Synfuels NZ Ltd
Air New Zealand (Flight Operations & Engineering Services)	Reserve Bank of New Zealand
Various NZ Crown Research Institutes	South Auckland (Counties Manukau) Health
Western Bay (BOPD) Health	Trade Aid Importers Ltd
Southern Districts Health Board	Exicom New Zealand
Trade Aid Importers Ltd	Health Waikato
	NZ Lotteries Commission

Client Comments

Typical participant comments and recommendations include:

- *A clear and ethical conceptual basis, practical guidelines AND sufficient real-life rehearsal to gain confidence – at last! This is the programme I should have taken – we all should have been able to take – years ago.*
- *Effective communication is an essential leadership skill, and I rate **Hear and Be Heard** as one of the best development programmes in this field. I have seen my staff grow in confidence in both business and social settings after undertaking the programme. [Vivian Blake, COO, Southern District Health Board]*
- ***Hear and Be Heard** is the foundation on which I am moving our organisation from one that was merely surviving to one which will thrive. Tom offers practical information that can be used in everyday situations, delivered in a safe environment, where everyone is able to participate at the level they feel comfortable with. The greater insight and understanding of communicating with others has improved both my professional and personal life and I would recommend it as a 'must do' for any organisation. [Geoff White, General Manager, Trade Aid Importers Ltd]*
- *A most productive and empowering programme. I made improvements I had not thought possible. It gave me a mandate to change my approach to relationships and much more confidence for resolving problems.*
- *One of the most enlightening journeys I've ever undertaken! Years later it is still impossible to exaggerate the importance of this course on the rest of my life.*
- *I felt my communication was quite good but have learned a lot. Takes self-awareness to a new level. I was amazed to discover how little real listening goes on in my own behaviours and others' around me.*
- *Deals sensitively and effectively with the 'freight' of old habits, beliefs and feelings, while teaching alternative practices that really work! . . . Brilliant! Would be great if everyone could do this – but in the first instance I think all the line managers should be exposed to these skills.*
- *Probably the most important leadership development training I have undertaken. Learning when to "HEAR" and when to "BE HEARD" has made problems manageable and improved my workplace relationships.*
- *Excellent [written] material conducive to study and frequent consultation. This should be rolled out further in the organisation.*

Tom Watkins