Stages of a work relationship

- **Honeymoon**: Not being right, Value, Unity
- **Partnership**: Independence / Dependence, Authenticity, Roles, rules, duties
- **Leadership**: Positive / Negative, Competition, Fear of the next step, Commitment to change
- **Dead Zone**: Commitment to the relationship, Common interests
- **Power Struggle**: Temptation, Unconditional giving, Grace, Intuition, Make the other person more important than you, Fear of disaster, Using people, Deep fractures

**Shadow**: Grace

**Honeycomb**:
- **Power**: Leader, Force, Control
- **Struggle**: Conflict, Resistance, Resistance
- **Leadership**: Influence, Authority, Influence
- **Partnership**: Collaboration, Commitment, Commitment
- **Dead Zone**: Stagnation, Lack, Lack
- **Honeymoon**: Liking, Attraction, Attraction
[The word “business” is intended to cover any organisation with a workplace.]

‘Businesses are just people’ is a principle shared by many. Of course, this is not to belittle people: the principle states that people form the most important component of a business. (Incidentally, this is a values-neutral statement: people may be a business’s greatest asset, but they can also be its greatest liability.)

It’s important to maintain this principle at the forefront of our attention because a disproportionate amount of resources and time are given to process and procedure, to the nuts and bolts, rather than to the people who are making it all happen.

But businesses, and all workplaces, are nothing if not transactional. Not just the commercial transaction between supplier and customer, but also the interpersonal communications between the people in the business and the client needed to ensure the right goods or services are supplied; the management and leadership needed in the organisation—and the teamwork which results; the interpersonal communication between people in the organisation and people in their supplier businesses, in other businesses (for example at networking events) and other stakeholders.

So, a more useful principle might be that ‘businesses are just the relationships between people’—and between groups of people: directors and staff, marketing team and production, “the business” and “clients”.

To address the relationships between businesspeople, a suitable model is needed. There is no research and no evidence that human beings form relationships differently in different spheres of life: private, work, sport, religion and so on. As the only models about interpersonal relationships have been created form work done with private relationships, emotional intelligence at work uses such a model.

It’s true that private relationships are felt more intensely than work ones (on the whole!) but that doesn’t mean the process isn’t the same. Indeed, describing work relationships in a flamboyant, almost exaggerated, manner has the benefit of ensuring that people will more easily see what’s going on in a work relationship. If the relationship between two businesspeople is drifting into a dead zone, then seeing that for what it is will help them move forward, whereas considering the relationship as ‘business as usual, but less productive’ will make it hard to see where there might be a problem and will result in this state lasting potentially a long time.

It’s also true that some people at work introduce an element of privacy, of intimacy, into their relationship which is not necessary for the success of the business, but just emphasises that relationships are just relationships, whatever the contexts and, in fact, can’t be pigeonholed into particular contexts (private, work, sport, religion and so on).

Why use a model?

That relationships change through time is obvious to everyone who has ever been in a relationship (if only as child and care giver). That you might be able to define certain states of a relationship and say that any given relationship goes through these states through time would probably be accepted by many people.

The benefit of the model we use is that it is able:

- to define these states in terms of a small number of stages (five),
- which are clearly distinguishable from each other
- and which can be described in detail.
At this point it is worth recalling what George Box, a British statistician, said. “All models are wrong, but some models are useful.” In other words, relationships do not switch between five precisely define stages, but it is useful to think that they do because, by thinking this way, one can learn about what is going on for each of the people in the relationship.

Because the model runs on a time line—this stage, then this stage, then this stage, and so on—if one encounters two people who demonstrate they are at a given stage of their relationship, it is possible to test the applicability of the model by asking, “did your relationship in the past conform to the predictions of the model about earlier stages of the relationship?” IF they can see that it did, they are likely to see that it could be possible to attain the future stages the model predicts.

The model is empirical: it was developed, formulated and enhanced using the experience of many people in relationships. It confirms that the people being researched (and the many more people who have used the model as a tool to help them move forward) tend to form relationships in broadly similar ways. This makes it reasonable to assume that other people will also find the model useful in helping them move through their relationship. And so it proves. This is the most important aspect of the model, in our opinion.

In addition to being validated by extensive testing in the field (it is well over thirty years old and has been used by hundreds, if not thousands, of practitioners with their clients), the model is fully explicable by main stream psychological theory.

**Stages of a relationship**

The model suggests that work (and all other) personal relationships go through five stages.

The first of these is the **honeymoon stage**. This is a widely accepted concept. For example in politics, a newly elected prime minister or president, is considered to have a honeymoon period whose end is gleefully marked by all concerned.

It’s a period in which each partner in the relationship tends to see the best in other, to be able to see the most potential in the relationship, and to overlook (or not even be aware of any ways in which the other might fall short).

This stage is abruptly ended by the **power struggle stage**. Now each party can see all the ‘faults’ in the other, is often genuinely shocked when the faults materialise, as if they hadn’t existed until that moment. As the name implies, it is a time of fights and dissent, of needing to be right. Most of all, it can be considered the period in which each party is fighting to heave their needs met in the relationship.

As this stage can be exhausting, it’s followed by the **dead zone stage**. This is where both parties retire to lick their wounds: they don’t want the relationship to end but:

- either they don’t see they are in this position, so it becomes ‘business as usual, but less productive’
- or they realise they have a problem, but they don’t know how to move forward in the relationship
- or (and this is remarkably common) they realise they have a problem but, whether they are aware of the solution or not, they refuse to move forward.

And the last of these is common because, at its heart, the dead zone is place where we refuse to take the next step.
The next step is partnership. It’s what the name suggests. Looking back, it’s clear that the first three stages were all about “me, me, me”. It’s only in partnership that the relationship becomes about “us”. This is, obviously, a far more productive and useful place to be for any business.

The reason people can’t or won’t go there is their unwillingness to take the next step—the step out of dead zone into partnership. And, at base, that unwillingness (that refusal, I’m tempted to say) stems from doubt. Doubt they can do it, doubt they will be accepted if they do, doubt that other people will have recognised they’ve done it, doubt they will be rejected having stepped out of their comfort zone, doubt... Any doubt the ego can create in order to keep them ‘safe’.

In the well known scene in Indiana Jones and the raiders of the lost ark, Mr Jones has to cross an abyss, trusting that the bridge he has been told is there, but which he can’t see, will support him. He has to take the next step with no proof it will be supported. It is.

Once two people can make their relationship about "us", they can make it about the other person. In the fifth stage, leadership, people typically are able to make the other person more important than them, as Chuck Spezzano has put it. This is not behaving or feeling or thinking as if the other person were more important: that route leads to making oneself inferior, ultimately to becoming a victim. It is about acting as if. If each party in the relationship is making the other more important than them, that is going to be the most useful way of deepening and enhancing the relationship and, in business terms, growing the business.

1. Honeymoon stage

The honeymoon stage is a familiar enough concept. There is a sense of possibility—we can see all the positive things in the other person and they in us.

Case study: I’d been working with Ben and his small business for a number of months when he told me he had had a remarkably positive meeting with Bill, someone I also know form the networking events I attended. Ben was full of admiration for Bill and described admiringly many qualities he saw in him. I’m not saying that I couldn’t see these attributes myself, or at least imagine they were there, but, shall we say, I wasn’t wearing Ben’s rose tinted glasses.

Over the weeks, Ben told me about a joint venture he and Bill were working on. It clearly had promise and Ben was full of enthusiasm for it and for his new business partner, at one point recommending that I consider developing some sort of venture with Bill.

So, as the case study shows, the honeymoon stage facilitates commitment to the relationship in both parties, who are willing to overlook, or not even notice, things that don’t fit the positive experience they are having.

It’s an essential start to a long standing and successful work relationship, whether the relationship is, like the case study, one between business partners, or one between employer and employee, service provider and client, or any other.

But it is (partly) an illusion as we shall see.
2 Power struggle stage

Pretty soon there is trouble in paradise. A dispute blows up, apparently out of nowhere: one party is aghast at what the other has said or done, and the other is completely nonplussed by the reaction. What is happening is that each person in the relationship is now fighting to ensure their needs are met form the relationship—fighting to be in control of it. What was interesting before now becomes the source of disputes; disputers which seem sometimes to be positively welcomed by both parties.

Case study: One day, I received an angry, exasperated phone call from Ben. “Do you realise what that b****** Bill has done? He has handed me a document describing in detail a proposed business relationship between us which is far from what we agreed in our discussions. It’s completely unacceptable as a document and it’s completely unacceptable that he is demanding unilaterally that I accept—and sign—it.”

Now Ben had learnt all about the stages of a work relationship but it possibly didn’t help his mood when I lightly pointed out, “Oh, I see you’re in the power struggle stage now”.

The case study shows a perfect example of Bill attempting to ensure his needs are met: to the point that he writes them down and makes Ben sign them! I daresay Bill’s fears that his needs wouldn’t be met led him to exaggerate the strength of his demands that Ben comply with them, thereby precipitating (or, even, ensuring) the inevitable argument that followed. Of course, Ben wants his needs met in the relationship, so he is furious that Bill has stolen a march on him.

The power struggle stage is usually experience in very polarised ways. Here are some of the more common.

Good guy/bad guy

Ben and Bill each saw themselves as the good guy (the aggrieved guy, in Ben’s case) and the other person as the bad guy. The relationship can break here, because we focus on things in the other person that we can’t accept and, depending on how committed we are to not accepting them, they can become insuperable obstacles to progress.

The way forward: In a power struggle, don’t insist that you’re right and the other person is wrong.

I am certain that the power struggle is an essential stage in the development of all relationships and that people will argue (ostensibly) about the price of fish if they don’t have anything better to row over.

It’s important that neither party withdraws at this point. If you can see the perception of good guy/bad guy is just an artefact of the process, it’s possible to see past it to a more productive relationship.

Case study: Ben decided to walk away from the potential business partnership.

Even though Ben knew that he was in a predictable stage of his business relationship with Bill, he preferred not to deal with the issues that were coming up for him, and the implication that it might be for him (as the person who was supposed to understand about these things) to step up and lead both of them through the difficulty.

Case study: ‘Email blizzard’ is a good illustration of supplier and client locked in a good guy/bad guy relationship.
Independence/dependence

By independent, I don’t mean self-sufficient or autonomous (though independent people can be these things). I mean something more controlling, more unwilling to engage with others: the typical British boss, in fact, who says “it’s tough at the top” or “if I want a job done properly, I have to do it myself”.

The independent person needs to be right—to have the answers and be seen to have them—while the dependent person is more emotionally reactive—they will feel a victim, and will often appear ‘needy’.

Time and again, in all walks of life, not least business, you see two people, or two groups of people, who have set up a dependent/independent relationship. Indeed, one person wanting to be dependent more or less forces the other to be independent, and one person wanting to be independent makes the other dependent.

So, by being independent, bosses make their staff dependent, and then complain that the staff aren’t motivated, self-starters, proactive or whatever euphemism. They may well ensure that they recruit staff who comply with this (however unknowingly).

Case study: Jack and Jill, the two directors of a small business, had noticeably set up a dependent/independent relationship. What was interesting—remarkable, even—was how long they had kept it going, and how successful the business was, despite the time, energy and resources they had committed to perpetuating their fight. However, the relationship was taking its toll on the business: Jack, who had been successfully manoeuvred against his will, into dependency, was becoming increasingly stressed and his physical health was affected; Jill’s attitude at work was demotivating and demoralising staff.

What probably annoyed Tony Blair about being called “Bush’s poodle” by the media was that here was a relationship in which both parties desperately wanted to be seen to be the independent person. As this is almost impossible to maintain for any length of time, and would have required a public persona that would have been as ridiculous as it was unacceptable, Blair was forced into the dependent position, much against his will, I imagine.

The way forward: The independent person should consciously value the dependent person and what they have to bring to the relationship. The dependent person should stop using others to take care of them. Both of these are far easier once one has the insight about what is going on.

Positive/negative (or optimistic/pessimistic)

Here, one person is the problem solver but is blind to pitfalls; the other can see problems which they can’t resolve.

Imagine two sales executives arguing about why sales haven’t reached the company’s quarterly target (again). One can see what needs to be done, but can’t see why it won’t work. To the other, the situation is just a disaster and there’s no hope.

Yet, chances are that the situation is one where the sales executives aren’t arguing because sales are down; sales are down because the executives are arguing. In other words, if they spent the same amount of time, energy and resources addressing the problem instead of each other, they could resolve the situation by bearing in mind that...

The way forward: The two positions need to be united. Both are equally necessary and both have value.
3 Dead zone stage

The power struggle stage can be exhausting to maintain and one of the functions of the dead zone is to provide a space where the parties can retire and lick their wounds. It’s important to recognise that both parties want the work relationship to continue, but they don’t know how—or are unwilling to dare—to take the next step, the step out of the dead zone. So, it’s a place of inauthenticity, characterised by withdrawal and deadness.

The relationship might appear to be successful, but we don’t feel successful in it and even this can often only be achieved with hard work. This is where we need to deal with the deeper blocks we use to inhibit success.

As with all the stages of a work relationship (except honeymoon), the relationship can be experienced in a number of ways. Here are three of the more common.

Roles, rules and duties

This is the epitome of inauthenticity, where we are “going through the motions”, doing the right thing for the wrong reasons, “acting it” rather than “being it”.

Case study: I used to work with Desmond in a London pub where we were barmen. He was amongst the better staff: quick, efficient, he’d always give you the right change, and he was always affable and friendly. The trouble was that he had a little habit of saying, when he asked for the money, “that’ll be forty four coins of the realm, please”. (Yes, it was that long ago.) The very first time one heard this, it might raise a slight smile; after ten or more times in one evening, it was getting wearing and, after three months, homicide-inducing.

It was the clear inauthenticity of the way Desmond related to the customers that grated. It encouraged one to find further ‘faults’ and soon anything in his manner, however normal, became suspect. One rapidly came to the conclusion that, rather than being a barman, he was someone playing the role of a barman.

Of course, in all organisations, there are legal obligations on managers that they require all staff to abide by regulations regarding health and safety, as well as many other spheres of activity, such as finance.

The directors of most organisations have a duty to act in the best interests of the organisation, ultimately to ensure its preservation, and this shows up in requirements that staff comply with rules and procedures which determine how the business operates and people work within it. It makes sense, for efficiency, that staff are given roles (job descriptions) which should ensure they know what they are supposed to be doing.

In some organisations, such as those in the health sector, compliance with roles, rules and duties can literally be a matter of life and death.

None of any of this implies that the organisations are in the dead zone. The roles, rules and duties have clear purposes and are often essential. Where there is a likelihood that a work relationship is sliding into the dead zone, it will be when rules are being followed for their own sake, where people are complying with them rather than doing what’s most useful. Desmond, in the example, decided that he had to act and talk in certain ways in his relationships with customers.

Case study: Roger ran a small business offering consultancy services. It was important that written material, particularly proposals, was as good as possible, so there was a rule that he had to review such documents before they were sent. By and large, his review always made some improvements and was therefore welcome. However, he couldn’t leave it at that, and insisted n seeing not only the revised document, but in reviewing in four, five even six times. Assuredly, it was no better after six reviews than it had been after two.
Roger seemed to be stuck in his own rule that he couldn’t get out of. That it was a real rule would be only too clear if a document had gone out without his final say so: there would be trouble to pay. However minor, this was a perfect illustration of the way Roger’s relationships with his staff were dead.

The way forward is to see that making the rules more important than the purpose of the working relationship will make it harder to achieve that purpose. To commit to the success of the relationship, you only have to have an intention to make the working relationship more important than petty rules. In other words, by being authentic, saying what you really think and trusting others enough to share your needs, you can make progress (see also Fear of the next step below).

**Competition**

This is rather like power struggle disguised as attempts to be successful. Competition between businesses, and between people within businesses, is so accepted as a cultural norm that any suggestion that it is not the most useful way can often be met with genuine incomprehension.

But, consider a sales director who pits his sales executives against each other, offering a prize each month for the one who has sold most. Immediately, all the executives will start plotting to take sales from each other. Someone who knows they won’t win one month will fail to close deals until the following month so they might contribute to that month’s performance. Meanwhile the prospect has gone elsewhere. In short, people will expend time, energy and resources on competing which could, instead, have been spent on the business.

Competition in a relationship inevitably sets up one person to be the loser, and this has a detrimental effect on that person’s attitude, affecting their motivation and performance. This is particularly damaging where some or all directors of a business are in competition; not least because, by showing this particular way, they are inculcating this aptitude in the staff.

A telling question here is, “do you want to win or do you want to succeed?” For many people, it is about winning. This often arises from a belief in a ‘scarcity model’: a belief that there is not enough to go around. Wherever this belief came from (and it is unlikely to be the business), it is a common one and accounts for why competition (a codified form of taking) shows up in so many people independently that it is considered to be part of the world of work (and, of course, the rest of life).

The way forward is to recognise that, in a business relationship, the other person’s interests and our own are the same. If we believe in, and invest in, the other person’s success then it becomes our own. But, if they lose, we, or the business generally, will have to make up for it.

**Fear of the next step**

Arguably this is the crux of the dead zone. We all fear change—or, rather we are anxious about how the results of the change will affect us.

This is not a trivial distinction. If a fierce lion is running straight at me, all my fear responses will be triggered: they are instinctive, triggered without my conscious volition. I will go into fight or flight mode.

But, if I am sitting in my office, ‘fearful’ lest a fierce lion leap into the room and make straight for me, given that I am sitting in semi-rural Gloucestershire and the likelihood of this happening is rather small, this is about my imagining of what I think might happen. It isn’t fear at all, it’s anxiety, created more or less consciously. And if it is created, it can be ‘unchecked’. As Viktor Frankl observed, “everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way”.
So, typically, we anticipate being rejected, or failing, or succeeding, or being found out (feeling a fraud); we might believe we will lose something or lose control. Actually all we need to lose are our self-imposed limitations.

It can often be useful if we encapsulate this with the word, ‘doubt’. We doubt that we can do it, we doubt that we will be accepted if we do it, we doubt the people we need to help us do it will help us, and so on and so on. We are limited only by our imaginations in what we decide to doubt.

Case study: The first stage of the development of any new business is ‘start up’. The trouble was, Jane’s business was still in start up after ten years or trading, just about surviving. When we discussed the idea that she might be fearful of something and, if so, what that might be, she said pretty much these words, “I am scared that we will be discovered and exposed by the Daily Mirror as frauds”.

In this case, pretty much all the relationships in the business, not just those between Jane and her colleagues, were in dead zone.

Case study: John’s first business was successful—at least until it reached a particular point, at which it spectacularly collapsed. Undaunted, he started a second business which reached pretty much the same point—and then collapsed. Still undaunted, he started a third business, which was just approaching the same point. Interestingly, he was a philanthropic employer: his business paid to have its staff given individual coaching. But he would not pay for coaching for himself and the inevitable happened.

Here, it is mostly John’s relationship with the business which is in dead zone.

The way forward is commit to change and taking risks. Be willing to go outside your comfort zone. Don’t decide you need the confidence before you’ll take the next step—take the step and you will become confident.

In the well known scene in Indiana Jones and the raiders of the lost ark, Mr Jones has to cross an abyss, trusting that the bridge he has told is there, but which he can’t see, will support him.

Relationships go through a number of stages—honeymoon, power struggle, dead zone, partnership, leadership, of which the fourth and fifth are covered here.

Progress isn’t all one way: we can and do slip and slide back and forth.

Although relationships in business tend to be more muted than personal ones, that doesn’t mean they don’t go through the same stages in the same way and for the same reasons. And, if the following descriptions seem rather flamboyant for the world of work, it is as well to be able to recognise the stages clearly when they do show up in work.

The story so far

So far, it’s looking a bit gloomy. The most important message is that this is not the end of process. Too many people believe, though, that when the plates start flying, metaphorically if not literally, then the relationship—whether in business or more personally—is over. Ben certainly did in the case study used in the honeymoon stage.

But it’s essential to see the dead zone as not only where people retreat to lick their wounds, but also as a hiding place where people stay rather than take the next step. Although Chuck Spezzano has been known to say, rather theatrically, that people would rather die—literally—in the dead zone rather than take the next step, it’s equally true that many work relationships sail with ease through any minor difficulties which might be described as power struggle or dead zone.

For them the question might be: “if the dead zone and power struggle can be so toxic, how can we make sure we’re in the honeymoon stage as much as possible?”
Perception is projection

Perception and projection are two psychological processes. They are values-neutral, neither good nor bad in themselves. We repress stuff in our minds which we find it hard to cope with—this ‘stuff’ is made up of beliefs and ideas, emotions and feelings about ourselves and about other people and the world. Interestingly, we repress good stuff about ourselves—stuff we might have had difficulty accepting at the time we repressed it—as well as the more obviously negative things.

Projection is where we see attributes that we possess showing up in other people. It’s essential to recognise that, if we didn’t, at some level, believe we possessed these attributes ourselves, we could never see it in others (hence “perception is projection”). Of course, much—or all—of what we see in others can be stuff we’ve repressed in ourselves, which makes the whole process all the more mysterious. Which is exactly what happened to Ben when he met Bill in the case study.

Many of us have experienced this honeymoon feeling when we’ve started a new job, or perhaps started working with a new client.

Projection is at the heart of the honeymoon and power struggle stages. In the honeymoon stage, we see in the other person all the good things in ourselves; in the power struggle stage we see the bad things. That’s why, in the power struggle stage, each party is so good at pressing the other’s buttons: they know only too well where they are.

And this is why the honeymoon stage is an illusion (however enjoyable).

Honeymoon and power struggle are two sides of the same coin (characterised by good and bad in just the same way that the power struggle characterises the two players in highly polarised ways). But power struggle and dead zone are also two sides of a coin, typified by active and passive attitudes.

I like to think of all three as one huge upbeat to the point of doubt. Will he, won’t he... commit to taking that step like Indiana Jones? Will she, won’t she... make the work relationship more important than the stuff going on it?

Case study: This is the tragedy of so many political relationships. Consider David Cameron and Nick Clegg [prime minister and deputy in the UK government]. They are in what they call a coalition. As Wikipedia puts it succinctly, “A coalition is a pact or treaty among individuals or groups, during which they cooperate in joint action, each in their own self-interest, joining forces together for a common cause” [my emphasis].

‘Nuff said. As the Daily Telegraph reported, “David Cameron and Nick Clegg spent the first morning of their honeymoon throwing a party for a few close friends... The atmosphere looked a bit subdued, but it no doubt warmed up later, after everyone had drunk a glass of water”.

I’m not sure how much the two participants enjoyed their honeymoon—or how long it lasted—but, given that their declared intention upfront was that they were not going to make any effort to get into partnership (a coalition being a matter of self-interest), is it any wonder that the coalition has given all the appearance of a government shifting between power struggle and dead zone? And the government and opposition parties are in the same bind, except that, as the coalition is in power, Labour has to struggle for supremacy in other spheres (such as “making the weather” which, at the time of writing, August 2013, it has been criticised for not doing.

4 Partnership stage

The partnership stage is where work relationships can get really productive. Immediately, it’s obvious that this is a far more useful place than honeymoon. Ultimately, in honeymoon, it is about what can each person get form the relationship whereas, in partnership, it’s about how can both people work together for the benefit of whatever enterprise the relationship is engaged upon.
When the people in a business are in partnership relationships, they have a real sense of being part of a team; of seeing others as equals. People are more likely to share and, as that includes communication, people feel more connected and that strengthens the bonds of partnership.

**Case study:** The John Lewis Partnership. Elsewhere, I tell the true story of a client’s experiences trying to buy computers in a well known pc retailer and then in John Lewis. The latter store’s success was down to the attitude of the sales person who was not in competition with his colleagues, who wasn’t reading from a prepared script irrespective of the customer’s wishes, and who knew that, legally he was a partner not an employee in the business.

However, as with the previous stages, there are traps here too.

**Temptation**

This can be summarised as “things are going well here, so maybe I can do even better elsewhere”.

A belief that the work relationship has got nowhere else to go, now that it’s got through all the ‘difficult’ stuff. The mind can con us by providing spuriously plausible reasons (“My time here is over”). But, of course, the logical point is, if you can do better elsewhere, wouldn’t it be easier to do even better where you are?

This is an attitude bellowed of serial job-changers. They seem to think the current relationship is over, so they need to move on. In fact, it might be worth exploring if there wasn’t a bit of the old ‘fear of success’ going on.

**The way forward.** Commitment means making the relationship more important than anything that comes up in the relationship.

**Fear of disaster**

This is largely the opposite of temptation: “things are going well here, something really bad is bound to hit us”.

These ‘imaginary’ disasters are really parts of ourselves which threaten to surface, now that a lot of difficulties in the relationship have been cleared up. They might come from failures in previous jobs or businesses that weren’t handled well, either at the time or afterwards. They are not necessarily irrational. Rather, like the story of the fierce lion, it is about anxiety about something that might happen in the future not a instinctive response to something that is happening now.

**The way forward** is to expect the ‘disaster’ and know that you are resourceful enough now to face and overcome it. As Susan Jeffers has said, “feel the fear and do it anyway”.

One good way forward is to commit to the relationship moving into the next stage, leadership. Elsewhere, I advocate that one of four things that set apart leaders from others is their willingness to address issues that come up for them. It’s possible (eg, in the case of Mike) that these issues came up from well before the individual started any form of work. Well, that doesn’t mean that they aren’t affecting the business now.

### 5 Leadership stage

In the leadership stage, both parties in the relationship see that “making the other person more important than you” is a particularly fruitful way of collaborating, of being in partnership. By having this attitude, of course, they encourage others in the business, or the team, to do the same. By applying this approach uniformly, whether with colleagues, clients or suppliers, they contribute to a cultural shift.
Leaders differentiate themselves from others by their attitude, not their behaviour (though they may behave differently as a result of taking a leadership approach).

A key defining issue for any leader of a team is that, in leadership, they are not looking to other people to meet their needs. This is emphatically not recommending people to revert to the independent attitude that can characterise power struggle. But, demanding that others meet their needs is incompatible with making them more important.

**Case study:** Marion had a notoriously dysfunctional team within a large organisation. Over the course of a number of conversations it became clear that she had set up all sorts of management devices to undermine her own authority. She clearly didn’t like the idea of being an authoritarian, dictating what the team members did; she wanted to be their friend. I pointed out that leadership was an attitude whereas telling people what to do was a role which, while essential, wasn’t a leadership role. I asked her how she got people to do things. Rather than say “do X”, she would say something like “I need you to do X”.

Because leaders do not make demands on others (particularly those in their team) to meet their needs, in using the word “need” she was explicitly telling her staff that she was abrogating her leadership position in order to be their friend. (Actually, there’s no reason why leaders can’t also be friends with those they lead.)

As with all the work relationship stages, there are traps.

**Using people**

A leadership position is one which risks exploiting people for our own ends.

**Case study:** On the whole, Dave was a good leader. As the manager of a team in a large corporate business, he was good at delegation, extending responsibility to others while at the same time being supportive and helpful. However, there were times when it was clear that his first priority was his own position in the business and the extent that he was well regarded by his bosses. This often showed up as inconsistency: as these objectives were to an extent in conflict, so the requirements he made of the team were also, on occasion, contradictory.

In leadership, there is also a fear of failure and humiliation, of not making the grade. Inevitably, the leadership position can feel exposed. But it is important to see that consistently making oneself available to others, being available to others’ calls for help, is the most effective way of ensuring the enterprise on which the team is engaged can thrive.

And, given that we consider leadership is an attitude, everyone in the team can usefully benefit from practising it. So, far from being in an isolated position, the person in charge can benefit from the support of everyone else who are making him/her more important than them.

**The way forward** is to listen to others and respect their contribution. Keep the leadership principle in mind—put other people’s problems ahead of your own—and commit to giving unconditionally without expectations.

**Deep fractures**

This sounds dramatic but, in truth, many problems in work relationships result from old stuff (from work and personal life) which comes up again and again to be dealt with. As you clear out the lesser stuff in earlier stages, so the deepest stuff shows up.

**Case studies:** So, Mike realised that things he was doing in the business aged 35, “I’ve been doing that since I was a small boy”.

Jack saw that the reasons he was controlling at work stemmed from much earlier in his life.
The way forward is to expect that old stuff will come up; to see that it is not the truth about the current business; and know that you are resourceful enough now to face and overcome whatever it is. Use your intuition to find the way forward. And, again, "feel the fear and do it".

Coda

If just one person in a relationship changes, the relationship changes.

If the relationship changes, the other person in the relationship cannot not change. This is a values-neutral observation, of course, and this mechanism can result in a downward spiral as easily as an a upwards spiral. If the relationship is informed by the intention to make the other person more important; if it’s informed by an approach which puts the relationship, the team, and the enterprise it’s engaged upon, before the stuff that might be coming up in it; then the relationship will thrive and grow.

Jeremy Marchant