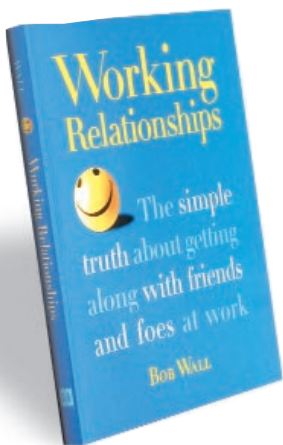




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FILE: SUCCESS/CAREER
TECHNIQUES

By Bob Wall

The Simple Truth About Getting Along with Friends and Foes at Work

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

No matter how good you are at what you do, no matter how talented, skilled and knowledgeable you are, the most important and the most frustrating factor in determining your success and satisfaction in the workplace is your ability to forge effective relationships with others. Work is where you spend many of your waking hours, and where many of your most important relationships develop. Managing those relationships effectively is a challenge in any workplace. Helping you meet this challenge is the purpose of this summary.

In the first section of the summary, author Bob Wall explains what he calls “the tangled web of relationships in the workplace.” In this section, you will learn the importance of keeping personal and professional relationships separate. You will discover the danger of viewing the workplace as an extension of the rest of your life, as one big happy family. You will also learn the reasons that teamwork often disintegrates, how your behavior may not match your good intentions and how leaders are often the cause of conflict.

In the second section of the summary, you will discover some of the ways to fix what’s wrong. You will discover new ways to communicate with your work team. You will learn how emotions disrupt and silence kills — and what you can do about it. With a few simple tools, you will learn teamwork and cooperation, how to gather input on decisions and how to structure conversations. You will also see how problems should be approached, and how your suggestions can become win-win scenarios for everyone.

In the final section of the summary, you will embark on a self-discovery journey as you learn to balance professional and personal relationships in a way that furthers your company’s business while satisfying your desire for growth and personal development.

There are no revolutionary theories or methods in this summary — just some common-sense talk about issues that, unaddressed, can undermine the performance and productivity of your employees and your company.



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WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

by Bob Wall

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

The Tangled Web of Relationships in the Workplace

Every job requires interaction with people. At the very least, we all have a boss to deal with. Most of us also have co-workers with whom we must share resources, coordinate efforts and manage the complications that come from working together. Being able to work effectively is one of the most important factors in determining your success on the job. The simple truth is that being good at what you do simply isn't good enough if you can't work with people.

Technical abilities may get you into management, but it takes interpersonal abilities to keep you there. But promotions aren't the only reason to work on your ability to work well with others. Job satisfaction is another. The quality of your work life affects the rest of your life. Good working relationships can make even the worst job bearable. Think what they can do for a good job!

Friends and Colleagues

Personal relationships at work are important for friendship and mutual support. Think back to a job you held before your current one. You probably remember some people with real affection. But there are probably others you don't miss at all. These were the people you wouldn't have chosen to associate with except that they came with the job.

In effect, there are two types of relationships that develop at work. One is a personal one and the other is professional. The professional relationship is always the most important one. After all, your primary purpose on

Identifying Relationships to Improve

Perform this exercise to identify troubled relationships:

- Name two people at work with whom you would like to develop a better relationship.
- Ask yourself what will happen to your job effectiveness and satisfaction if the relationships don't improve.
- If you haven't attempted to address concerns, why not? What is holding you back?

The Myth of the Big, Happy Family

Many business leaders insist that their workplace is just like a big, happy family. They talk at length about the warm family feelings that mark the culture of their organization. They go to great length to help a worker in crisis. Unfortunately, these owners and leaders are unintentionally setting themselves up to be a disappointment to the very people they have strong feelings about. Sooner or later, difficult decisions must be made for the good of the business. These decisions will be inconsistent with the company view that they are all one big, happy family.

You must learn how to set appropriate professional limits to personal relationships at work. If you don't, you will find that serious problems will go unaddressed for fear of disturbing personal relationships and hard decisions will go unmade.

the job is to accomplish work for your company. To make both personal and professional relationships work, you must recognize the problems that come with mixing work and personal relationships. These trouble areas are:

- Failing to distinguish what is personal from what is professional,
- Failing to realize personal and professional relationships have different purposes, and
- Failing to realize that personal and professional relationships require different communication methods.

A professional relationship exists solely for the purpose of getting work accomplished. Even though you may work with someone you consider a friend, you must keep the work aspects of the relationship profes-

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The Tangled Web of Relationships in the Workplace

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sional. In a professional relationship, your feelings about the other person are irrelevant.

In a personal relationship, there is an assumption of equality. However, in professional relationships, the dynamic is different. Professional relationships are hierarchical. Someone is in charge. Communication among professionals is straightforward, business-focused and has nothing to do with feelings and intimacy. One of the most difficult work situations is managing someone who was a co-worker. Sometimes it simply isn't possible for the personal relationship to survive the promotion. A good manager recognizes that reality and accepts it.

How, then, can you mix personal and professional relationships? It is difficult, but not impossible. First, everyone involved must understand the difference between personal and business relationships. Next, everyone must learn to communicate professionally. Finally, everyone must collaborate to get the job done. ■

When Good Teams Go Bad

Teamwork doesn't come naturally. That's a common myth that permeates the workplace. Many managers assume that if they assemble a team of talented, hard-working, ethical workers and give them the resources needed to accomplish the task, success will follow. Often, it doesn't. And the reason is that few people are trained in communication. Instead, their education focuses on technical proficiency.

Many companies assume that their staff naturally know how to build good working relationships with their co-workers, that they will know how to identify problems and resolve conflicts. The good news is that most of us do pretty well with teamwork most of the

The Problem With Explosive Conflict

When two people conclude that the other is a jerk or is incompetent, the potential for an emotional explosion is great. If one party gets up the nerve to tell the other that he or she has serious personality problems, the result is fairly predictable. The person on the receiving end is going to be defensive. And the conflict escalates from there, getting louder and more bitter. Once unleashed, emotions almost always do more damage to the sender than the receiver.

Silence is Deadly

When teammates discover that open hostility doesn't work, they often go to the other extreme. Instead of dealing with conflict rationally and professionally, they instead bottle up their resentment and anger. But nothing kills relationships more surely than issues left unspoken. As a manager, you must teach your team that issues must be discussed without resorting to explosive behavior.

time. Unfortunately, there are times when that doesn't happen. Heavy workloads and long hours result in tired, frustrated people who sometimes say things they wouldn't normally say.

There are techniques you can learn to make a team effective. In fact, conflict properly managed can seed growth, creativity and change. It isn't conflict in and of itself that is the problem. A certain amount of conflict is good. It lets members of the team air opposing views and ideas, allowing the group to take advantage of their collective intelligence. But more often, unmanaged conflict simply tears the team apart.

There are two very common explanations for conflict. Both are wrong. Flawed conflict diagnosis # 1 is that the other person's personality is flawed. He or she is "a jerk," "overbearing," "arrogant," "aggressive," "selfish" and otherwise impossible to work with. In other words, the conflict is allegedly caused by a "personality conflict," and the personality at fault is never the speaker's! Flawed conflict diagnosis # 2 is that the other person is "incompetent." He or she lacks the intelligence, ability or training needed to get the work done. Again, the cause of the conflict is the shortcomings of the other party.

Lack of Communication Across Department Lines

Consider what happens when departments don't talk to each other about a common problem. In one case, an insurance company claims department complained that the data entry department was careless when entering claims. As a result, the claims department had to respond to customer complaints about mistakes in the claims process. The claims department blamed the problem on the "jerks and incompetents" in the data entry section. They assumed the data entry clerks didn't care about the problems they were creating.

During one meeting, when the name calling was getting very intense, one young woman in the back of the room raised her hand to speak. She had just transferred from the other department and told the group that simi-

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When Good Teams Go Bad

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lar discussions occurred in the data entry department. It turned out that some of the problems were caused by technical problems in the entry system, and not by carelessness or incompetence at all. Both departments wanted to do a good job. Nevertheless, the claims people reduced problems in the data entry section to “carelessness.”

Because the employees in one department didn’t tell workers in the other department about their frustrations, the real reason for the problems didn’t surface until much later. Silence took its toll. It would have been far better if the parties had been able to discuss the problem rationally and calmly much earlier. ■

When Behavior Falls Short Of Good Intentions

All it takes is one person to ruin what might otherwise be a very good job. That person might be your boss or perhaps a co-worker who seems intent on making your life miserable. Or it may be someone who is apparently incapable of making a decision. Learning to work with and understand such problem people may be the most important survival skill you develop.

Consider the following examples. Raoul is a senior vice president in a manufacturing firm. He has a reputation for hard work, long hours and a passionate commitment to serving his customers’ needs. In turn, his customers love him. He may well be in line to be the next president of the firm but for one problem: Almost no one on the staff wants to work for him. He has a reputation as a tyrant.

One by one, other employees tell tales of horror. Raoul doesn’t ask people to do something; he issues a command. Raoul is quick to anger. One worker described it like this: “He looks angry. His face gets red. I feel like hiding under my desk when I see him coming my way.” Raoul also is prone to paging people over the public address system in a tone that let’s everyone know there is trouble coming for the person being summoned. The only employees who can work with him manage it by adopting Raoul’s aggressive style. The rest avoid him at all cost.

Then there is Josh, a manager in a blue collar environment. Josh is a really nice guy who works hard and is genuinely liked by those around him. He has a deep commitment to the study of leadership. When things are going smoothly, Josh does fine as a manager. But when it comes time for him to actually behave like a leader, he is unable to deliver. He is unable to make a decision,

Walking in the Other Person’s Shoes

No matter what you may first think, the people who drive you crazy usually have good intentions. Try seeing the world from their vantage point with this exercise. Think about a recent incident involving the person and:

- Objectively describe the incident.
- Write a description of the incident from the other person’s point of view.
- How do you think he or she would view the incident?
- What would he or she say about his or her intentions?
- What thoughts, beliefs and attitudes are leading him or her to behave that way?
- What is he or she trying to accomplish?

perhaps because he is so eager to please everyone.

Finally, consider Julia, who works in a small bank branch office. This is her first full time job. In the evening, she attends school. She is a member of a small team which is required to work closely together. Although Julia is mastering her job, she is a source of great tension on the team. The others complain that she “has an attitude.” She complains about everything and everyone. When asked to do something she doesn’t want to do, she sulks and lets everyone know how unhappy she is by her demeanor. As a result, no one wants to ask her for help.

All three individuals are undermining their teams in their own way. The only way to get their teams back on track is to intervene with the problem individuals directly. For example, Raoul has to be told that his leadership style is reminiscent of Attila the Hun. Only then will he have the opportunity to change.

You will almost never run into someone whose basic intentions in the workplace are evil. Most people honestly mean well. They want things to work out for themselves, and their co-workers. It’s just that sometimes we all do things that fall short of our good intentions.

Taking Responsibility

You must take personal responsibility for the way things are for you at work and take the appropriate actions to make things happen. Doing so depends on trust. You must be willing to believe that the bad behavior around you is not intentional. And you must be able to risk speaking up. ■

When You Are Your Own Worst Enemy

Sometimes we are saboteurs of our good intentions. We do not see ourselves very clearly, while we certainly see another person's faults easily. If no one tells us what we are really like, we can labor under the impression that we are reasonable people who are easy to approach for years. Each of us is two people: the person we like to think we are and the "evil twin" people have to work with.

If you are blind to the impact that your behavior has on those around you, if you don't know how serious the impact of your behavior is, you aren't likely to change the behavior on your own. And the person suffering because of your behavior probably thinks you are acting the way you do intentionally. If that's the thought, he or she is unlikely to approach you. After all, if your behavior is intentional, what good would discussing it do?

If you are in a leadership position, you may be doing things that severally affect the morale and performance of your team. But they will be reluctant to point it out. This is the perfect recipe for failed expectations.

Remember Raoul? Raoul didn't see himself as excessively demanding. Instead, he saw himself as setting high standards. He didn't see what an impact his behavior had on his team. Once he did, he made changes. The first was to meet privately with everyone he had publicly berated and offer an apology. And Josh? He saw himself as sensitive and a consensus builder while his team saw him as abdicating decision-making to others. When he realized what he was doing, he elected to step down into a line position rather than step up to the plate and become a decision-maker. And Julia has changed her behavior enough that the team can again work together. ■

Fixing the Relationships That Are Not Working

Whenever problems or conflicts occur when working together, you may immediately start looking for the source of the problems in the personality, character, intentions or capabilities of the other people involved.

Guidelines for Working Together

In order to change how you deal with your working relationships, you need to change how you think about them. You need to take the concept of teamwork to a new level. Do that by bringing some simple and practical guidelines for working together into the workplace, guidelines necessary to build effective working relationships and identify and resolve the breakdowns in teamwork that will always occur.

To build a foundation for effective teamwork, start by

The Real Problem: A Case Study

The owner of a growing company asked author Bob Wall to give the company's management team training in assertion skills. The owner complained that the managers were not participating in meetings. Instead of offering possible solutions or next steps to address problems on the agenda, managers stayed silent. "I usually wind up doing most of the talking," the owner told Wall. "It is clear to me that they need assertion training."

Wall asked the owner permission to interview the managers before designing the training curriculum. "He was skeptical," Wall says, "but he gave me permission to proceed with the interviews."

As suspected, the interviews with the company's executive staff revealed that the source of the problem was the authoritarian approach of the owner. He focused exclusively on the negative, harshly criticizing managers for any problems but never praising them for successes. He scowled angrily if anyone said something that he didn't agree with. And if a discussion did begin, he would drum his fingers impatiently, as if to say, "Are you finished yet?"

Wall informed the owner of the results of the interviews. Dismayed, the owner realized that he was sending the wrong message to his staff. In an informal meeting with the executive staff, Wall facilitated a candid discussion with the owner about his authoritarianism, impatience and negativity. Guidelines were set for future meetings, including an agenda item at each meeting to celebrate successes. A rotating chair for the meeting was established as well, so that the president did not lead the discussion each time.

Wall remained available if the owner still felt that assertiveness training was necessary. It never was.

agreeing on goals, roles and procedures. Team members should ask themselves:

What goals are we going to accomplish?

What role is expected of every team member?

How will we coordinate our work with each other?

These guidelines will help accurately identify the source of conflicts that occur in teamwork. ■

Why Teams Break Down

The most common source of problems in teamwork is ambiguity. Team members don't always share their goals, roles and procedures with each other. Often, individual team members simply make assumptions about what the team is supposed to accomplish and how they are supposed to do it. For people on a team to work

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Why Teams Break Down

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effectively, each person must understand what is expected of him or her and what other members of the team will be doing to ensure the team achieves its goals.

On the other hand, goals are sometimes clearly defined but leave people overloaded. This sometimes happens when highly motivated people take on too much and begin working long hours. Their strategy works for a while, but eventually the team becomes tired and frustrated. Ask too much from too few for too long and even the most stable teams will show the strain.

You must also assure that there are procedures in place that will enable teams to function. There are two types of procedures you need to put into place: technical and interpersonal. Technical procedures assure essential enterprise functions are carried out. For example, in a hospital, the medication distribution is critical. All shifts have to use the same technical procedures. Other procedures are softer, more personal. These procedures might outline how resources and information are to be shared between team members.

Finally, you must get team members to depersonalize conflicts. Instead, professionalize them. Remind everyone that the cause of team conflict probably isn't personal. Remember that everyone on the team probably means well and has the skills needed to get the job done. ■

Participating In Decision Making

If there is one theme that captured organizational development theory in the last decade, it is the participatory decision making model. W. Edwards Deming originated the movement by calling attention to the idea of continuous quality improvement through expanded employee participation. He devoted his life to helping companies produce higher quality goods and services

System Errors at Work

A factory foreman wanted to discipline workers who continually made errors loading trucks. He felt they had "an attitude problem." A closer examination of the problem revealed that it was the cumbersome order processing procedure that contributed to the errors, not personal attitude. After the paperwork and procedure for processing orders was simplified, error rates plummeted. It was the system, not the workers, that was the problem.

Forcing Risky Decisions

Avoiding risky decisions can be as dangerous as making them. Consider the case of the president of a small company who sought help because his wife complained he was working longer hours and didn't seem his normal, upbeat self. It seemed that company executives had taken to referring all difficult decisions to the president rather than making them. The result was that the president was overwhelmed with requests for "advice" on what decision to make.

To end the logjam, the president purchased a roll of stickers with a large "D" on them. When an executive asked for "advice" the president slapped a "D" on the memo and sent it back. Soon the executives were forced to make decisions.

while realizing astounding cost savings through the reduction of waste, errors and inefficiency.

Deming's contribution centers on his observation about how companies think about organizational problems. He realized that productivity was about more than identifying tasks for workers to do and telling them how to do it. Deming theorized that when there was error, waste or inefficiency in the workplace, there were only two possible causes: the individual worker or the system. He also concluded that a mere 5% of errors, waste and inefficiency was caused by the individual worker, while 95% was the fault of the system. He concluded that asking workers to participate in the management of companies would identify system problems.

The participatory movement is working on breaking down barriers between management and the workers who do the work necessary to build products and deliver services. But a word of caution: the process for participating in decision making needs to be clear. This includes designating a decision maker, identifying those who will be consulted before a decision is made and those who will be informed after.

Who had the "D?"

One of the most important questions to ask on any team is who has the authority and responsibility to make any particular decision, which is commonly referred to as the "D." Usually, only one person on a team has the "D." That person is the "Big D."

You must make sure that there is no ambiguity as to who has the "D." Although it is possible for more than one person to be the decision maker, be aware that the more people who have to agree, the more ambiguity you have tossed into the process. Be sure you define how

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Participating In Decision Making

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Steps for Structuring Conversations

- Ask for time.
- Make a brief opening statement.
- If the answer is yes, nail down the agreement details.
- If the answer is no, focus discussion on the issue and impact to persuade the other person.
- Look for a win-win solution.
- End by restating any agreement reached.
- If no agreement is reached, describe your next step, if any.

joint decisions are made. Is it to be by majority vote, or by consensus?

You must make absolutely clear when you are going to retain the “D” and when the other members of the team are to play a pre-decision consulting role. When team members know they are there for input, they stop wasting their time arguing about the decision and instead spend the time trying to influence the decision maker.

Announcing the Decision

Once a decision has been made, it’s time to let everyone know what the decision was. You need to create procedures that assure decisions are passed down to all who are affected by them. Today, that may mean distributing information via email or posting it on an internal web site.

Remember, participatory decision making does not mean every decision is reduced to a vote. Rather, it means that everyone whose voice should be heard has

Assessing a Problem’s Impact

A manager had insisted that the members of his team not come to work wearing white socks with dark suits. He felt that wearing white socks was a problem. When he thought about the problem, though, he concluded that in the setting his team worked, white socks had no impact whatsoever. The rule reflected his personal preference. Had the team members been in the public eye, the rule might have made sense.

an opportunity to provide input. The decision is still likely to be made high up in the company hierarchy. ■

Conversations Dying to Happen

Taking corrective action requires two sets of skills: thinking skills and conversation skills. Up to now you have been developing thinking skills. Next it’s time to develop communications skills.

Teamwork comes down to an endless series of conversations about work and how to get things done. Yet many people simply don’t engage in the necessary conversations. If your team members aren’t talking, there may be a reason, and it may be you. If you think that people are intimidated by your power, take a closer look. It just might be possible that you are not a very pleasant person to work with. Think back to the last time you did communicate with the team. Could it have been an unpleasant experience for them? Some people shut down for a long time if you make them feel stupid or exposed.

To avoid repeating unpleasant conversations, learn the value of thinking before speaking. Remember that few people are able to think clearly in anger. It’s easy to think of the perfect thing to say six hours later. But of course, by then it’s too late; the damage has been done. Instead, take the time to gather your thoughts before

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Five Years From Now

Perform this exercise to focus where you are and where you are going. Pretend you are a journalist who has just met you five years from now. Write the article she would write about you, and be sure to include:

- Describe yourself in glowing terms.
- Describe your professional success in five years.
- Write about your work relationships. How will others perceive you when they are asked about the future you?
- What will your family life be like?
- What will your health be like? Will you have practiced self-care and have reached the level of wellness you wanted?
- What type of person have you become spiritually?
- What will your social life be like in five years?
- What things have you done that you didn’t think you would? Are you involved in community service? When you are done, use the article to focus your self-improvement efforts.

Conversations Dying to Happen

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you act. It's good stress management and also a good career preservation strategy.

There are techniques you can use to begin difficult conversations. The best and most productive conversations follow an outline. First, you must identify the problem. Describe the problem in an objective, non-judgmental way. You will find that this goes a long way towards reducing resentment and defensiveness.

After you have described the issue in an objective, professional way, you need to describe why this situation concerns you. You need to articulate the problem's impact on yourself and others. You will have to be persuasive, and think about what's in this for the other per-

Making the Good Relationships Better

Up until now, we have focused almost exclusively on building strong professional relationships directed at one thing: getting the job done. Your company needs you and your co-workers to work together and get things done. But none of this diminishes the importance of the *personal* relationships we develop at work.

Deepening Your Relationships

Work gives people the opportunity for human connection. Especially today, we move from house to house, from city to city, from job to job. Many of us live in cities where we don't know the people in the house next door. For many, our closest blood relatives live miles away. But if you are going to spend forty or more hours a week with a group of people, chances are you will make personal connections with some of them.

It is possible to work hard and carry on a professional relationship at work while developing personal relationships with some co-workers. People can disagree openly about professional issues without taking things personally, all the while caring about each other very much. Pulling this off successfully takes discipline and the ability to know what's personal and what's not. But it also takes a conscious effort to build and maintain closer, more personal relationships.

Getting to know people takes the willingness to be known by them. Without self-disclosure, true intimacy is impossible. But be careful; your job is not a support group. Endless public suffering and emotional crises are tiresome and distracting.

Everyone messes up sometimes. Good personal relationships survive these times if the guilty party makes amends. Making amends is not groveling. Instead, it is

son. Remember that your personal feelings are irrelevant.

Don't start problem conversations without knowing what you will request in the way of a solution. No one likes complaints. Always bring a specific request, suggestion or solution to the table. Be prepared to list the benefits that go with your solution.

If an issue is important, discussing it deserves attention. And if you are prepared, it's likely you took notes. Should you refer to them during your conversation? Why not? Written notes can make a big difference and are especially important if the issue is complicated. And written notes certainly help keep the discussion on track.

Finally, avoid ultimatums. Give your boss an ultimatum instead of a reasoned suggestion, and the likely result is that you will get an opportunity to polish your job-seeking skills. ■

doing what is necessary to make something right again. Your willingness to make amends builds trust.

Another simple relationship builder is acknowledgment. A simple "Thank you" goes a long way. Think about the many times a co-worker helped you get a project finished on time or a boss gave you the decision-making power you needed to become more effective. Make a point of giving praise when it's due. A personal handwritten note can make all the difference in the world in how others feel about the workplace. ■

Living Up to Your Aspirations

One of the absolute requirements for a full and satisfying life is living life as an expression of personal vision. This includes creating clarity about your destination. Where are you going? Why are you going there? One way to clarify your personal vision is to ask both yourself and others for feedback.

Begin by asking where you are on target. Next, assess who you want to be down the road. Does your vision require you to get additional training or experience? If so, come up with a plan to do that. But while you can self-analyze, you probably will find that you're not very good at identifying flaws. Let someone help you discover your blind spots.

Seek out two or three people for feedback. For the exercise to have any merit, the people you choose must be willing to speak frankly. Come up with questions you would like feedback on. Schedule the conversations in a comfortable place and at a comfortable time. Remind yourself to relax and be casual. Listen. Ask open-ended questions that require a detailed response. Don't become defensive. Ask for examples to clarify broad generalizations. And finally, take action on the feedback.