

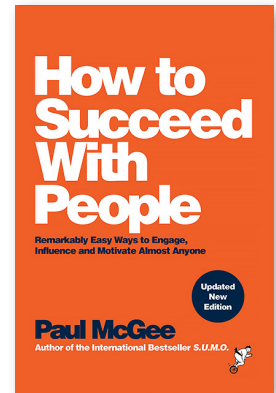


Executive Book Summaries[®]

How to Succeed with People

Remarkably Easy Ways to Engage, Influence and Motivate Almost Anyone

by **Paul McGee**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

People are complex, unpredictable, and endlessly fascinating. Unlike machines, they cannot simply be fixed when something goes wrong. Yet so often, we fall into the trap of trying to “fix” others—or even ourselves—when challenges arise. We assume there must be a flaw to correct, a behavior to change, or a problem to solve. The truth is, people are not broken; they are shaped by their experiences, their history, and the world around them. Understanding this is the first step toward building better relationships, whether at work, at home, or in our wider communities.

In *How to Succeed with People: Remarkably Easy Ways to Engage, Influence and Motivate Almost Anyone*, Paul McGee explores the principles and strategies for dealing effectively with people, drawing on real-life examples, psychology, and decades of experience managing individuals from all walks of life. From recognizing the impact of past experiences and generational differences to learning when to challenge, when to step back, and how to communicate in ways that truly resonate, the focus is on influence rather than control. By investing in relationships, showing respect, and fostering understanding, we can create environments where people thrive and where our interactions are more productive, meaningful, and positive.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

- Learn to recognize how past events shape behavior, attitudes, and responses in daily interactions
- Discover strategies to influence and motivate others through clear communication, feedback, and balanced assertiveness
- Develop the ability to manage change and resistance by guiding teams effectively
- Review your attitudes, biases, and expectations to improve relationships, practice empathy, and respond thoughtfully

SECTION ONE

Stop, Understand

People Can't Be Fixed

Clare seemed very distressed. “I’m thirty years old, unemployed, and still live at home with my parents. There are only two reasons why I can’t get a job: either there’s something wrong with the world, or there’s something wrong with me. Clearly, the world isn’t to blame, so the problem lies with me. I need fixing. Can you help?”

Clare had a very black and white view of life. But she fell into a trap many of us can fall into—believing people can be fixed. People are not machines. A car or computer may need a faulty part replacing, but people are more complex. As soon as you start looking to “fix” people or “fix” yourself, you’re in trouble.

We’re so used to getting “things” fixed that we start believing we can do the same with people. But there are no instruction manuals when it comes to dealing with people. We’re complex, inconsistent, and react differently depending on our mood. You cannot treat everybody the same and expect the same outcome.

So stop looking to fix people. People cannot be fixed—only helped, encouraged, understood, and influenced.

The Mystery of History (Part 1)

Imagine managing people from different backgrounds and nationalities, aged between 17 and 35, for over 25 years. Imagine your performance being judged not only by your boss but by millions around the world—every move scrutinized by the media. Welcome to the world of Sir Alex Ferguson, manager of Manchester United from 1986–2013, winner of 38 trophies, and proof that results can be achieved through people.

Sir Alex would never sign a player without exploring their history and background. To him, success was not just about talent, but also character. Everyone we encounter has a history. The more we understand it, the more we can understand their behavior and how to deal with them.

History matters. It shapes our values, perceptions, and ways of dealing with life. It explains differences across generations—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Gen Z—all shaped by vastly different worlds.

People’s behavior often stems from their past experiences. Resistance, negativity, and even cynicism may come from

past hurts. As Rachel Held Evans said, “Cynicism is calcified anger.”

If you work with, live with, or love someone, their history offers clues to understanding them.

The Mystery of History (Part 2)

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many people worked from home, enjoyed greater freedom and flexibility, avoided the daily commute, and reassessed their priorities. Having grown accustomed to this way of life, some now feel entitled to work on their own terms, which explains organizational challenges. Young people’s education and social lives were disrupted too, and it may be years before we see the full impact.

A previous work culture also matters. People may have worked in a very different work culture than the one they’re in now. So if you’re facing challenges with your team, find out how they were previously managed or what their expectations are. Depending on what they say, you might have to revise those expectations.

People’s upbringing will also influence how they both see and interact with the world. Everyone has a backstory, and that history could be vastly different from yours.

Spend more time being curious about people, and less time judging them. Differences are not always visible.

Most People Suffer From S.A.D.S

Ever known anyone for years and then realized you know lots about them, but they actually know very little about you? Or someone who seems very insightful about everyone but themselves?

Then you’ve probably met someone with S.A.D.S.—Self-Awareness Deficiency Syndrome. The very nature of this condition means the person suffering from it is entirely unaware of the fact. They’re oblivious to their behavior and the impact it has on others.

You yourself may be prone to bouts of S.A.D.S. Rarely do we truly see ourselves as others see us.

The condition can appear in varying degrees of severity. In extreme cases, there may even be a medical reason for people’s seemingly gross lack of interpersonal skills and self-awareness.

Although you may encounter people who show clear signs of this tendency, we can all experience mild symptoms. This insight will help you understand why some people you en-

People cannot be fixed—only helped, encouraged, understood, and influenced.



counter will be very difficult to deal with, but it will also keep you humble enough to recognize that none of us is immune from it, and that we all need help to improve from where we are now.

Some People Are Lightbulbs

The author, Paul McGee, trained to be a probation officer as part of his degree. People and how they behave fascinated him, but after four years, he decided not to pursue it as a career. During interviews for other jobs, he didn't want to get bogged down explaining why, having already fallen into that trap before. So he came up with a cunning plan.

Interviewer: "So why didn't you want to pursue a career as a probation officer?"

He replied: "How many probation officers does it take to change a lightbulb? One—but only if the lightbulb wants to change."

Most interviewers smiled and moved on. His plan had worked. But there's a deeper point: some people are lightbulbs—they refuse to change. Don't waste vast amounts of time and energy trying to change people who don't want to.

So why might someone behave like a lightbulb and not want to change? Some people want attention; others cling to fixed beliefs because it feels safe. Change requires courage and humility—qualities not everyone has. But people don't have to remain "lightbulbs." They can change, if *they* want to.

Why Intelligent People Do Stupid Things

Ever witnessed the behavior of someone and thought, "I can't believe they'd do something so stupid?" Ever thought to yourself, "I can't believe I just did that. What was I thinking?"

When we're closely involved in a situation or physically and emotionally tired, our rational perspective often takes a back seat. In its place steps up our emotional brain and takes a firm control of our decision-making—sometimes with dire consequences.

When you're feeling mad, bad, or sad, you're not thinking straight—our brains drive us to act, not think. Never ever assume that logic is running the show. It isn't. And drugs

and alcohol will exacerbate our "stupidness," but so too will increased stress.

You Get What You Tolerate

If you're managing people, you'll probably find these two statements useful: "We receive the performance (or behavior) we are willing to tolerate," and "My silence, denial, or avoidance gives approval to the situation."

Simple statements, yet very powerful.

Let's start with the first one: "We receive the performance (or behavior) we are willing to tolerate." If you tolerate people being continually late without there ever being any consequences, guess what will continue to happen? Tolerate people underperforming in your team, and they'll see no reason to change.

The question is, are you happy with what you're currently tolerating? Or do you just simply moan about it but continue to accept it?

Now onto that second statement: "My silence, denial, or avoidance gives approval to the situation." Let's chew over that one for a moment. In a nutshell, the reality is that your non-actions still have an impact. Doing nothing is still doing something.

When you stop tolerating and start talking, you lay down the path toward a better and potentially more positive relationship. And by doing so, you're more likely to succeed in dealing with people.

Why Change Is Complicated

Benjamin Franklin was a writer, inventor, scientist, and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. Amazing what people did with their time before social media. He's often credited with the following quote: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." If he was alive today, he might add a third—change.

Do we really hate change? There's a common, widely held belief that people don't like change.

The fact is, we're quite comfortable with change when. . .

- It's our choice
- We're in control
- We see the benefits of changing
- We see the downsides of not changing

We might not actually hate change as much as we're sometimes led to believe, but it can still be very challenging.

People have a love-hate relationship with change, and that's why change is complicated.

Five reasons people resist change:

1. Change can be seen as a threat
2. Change can lead to a loss of status
3. Change can lead to a loss of control
4. A poor relationship with those implementing the change
5. Previous experiences of change

Humiliation Is for Amateurs

When it comes to dealing with people, humiliation is a sign of someone who has their own self-esteem issues or an indication of a complete lack of knowledge and experience in dealing with others.

Deliberately humiliating someone is not a form of motivation, but it is laying down the foundation for bitterness, resentment, and perhaps, even revenge in the future.

If you do have to give someone some challenging feedback, remember this: Where you say it and who's present when you say it can be just as important as the actual words you use.

So if you want to influence and engage people and switch them on to your way of thinking, then take humiliation for a hike.

To make sure your communication is seen as less of a personal attack, and in order to soften the blow, if you have something to say try, "Do you mind if I play devil's advocate for a moment?" You're actually gaining the other person's permission to challenge their ideas.

Remember that people often find it easier to hear hard truths from themselves rather than from someone else. Instead of stating your critique outright, try asking, "*What've you learned from that experience? If you had a chance to do that again, what would you do differently?*"

People may need to be challenged, but they do not need to be humiliated. Ever.

Being Nice Won't Always Work

There's a huge myth around dealing with people that states you should always be nice to them. If your main goal in life is to be popular, go and sell ice cream.

Here's the deal: if you want to make a positive difference in life, you need to recognize that you're not always going to be liked by everyone. Being too nice can send mixed and unclear messages. The reality is that people can exploit your niceness as a weakness. You're not succeeding with people with this approach. You're failing. To be successful with people, it's more important to be respected than to be liked by others.

You may of course have built up such a good relationship with people that you're respected and liked. Great. Wonderful. But if you had to choose which of the two matters most, choose respect.

Now please don't go out of your way to be nasty. But if an underperforming team member sees you as less of a soft touch, then perhaps you're discovering the benefits of not being too nice. You don't have to ditch your diplomacy to do so, but you do need to ditch the need to always be liked.

It Takes Two to Tango

Very often when we begin to recount a particular event or incident, we'll have a tendency to immediately tell it with a certain degree of bias and emphasis. And to be fair, it's unlikely we'll want to present ourselves in the worst possible light. As a consequence, when we're telling our version of events, certain information may be completely left out, and the context or background to the event may be entirely overlooked.

So it's helpful to understand that we can all be prone to putting our own particular angle on a story and tend to subtly alter and distort the facts in our favor, sometimes without realizing we're doing so.

That's why when it comes to succeeding with people, we need to be especially aware of our own personal built-in bias to do this. So remind yourself that on occasions, it does take two to tango.

No Investment, No Return

Recently, a branch of a poorly performing retail store had been turned around by the introduction of a new manager.

That's not the most surprising thing you'll ever read, is it?

Where you say it and who's present when you say it can be just as important as the actual words you use. ”

But the next bit might be.

The hundred or so full- and part-time staff of the store reported one of the main reasons for their improved performance and increased morale was this: the new manager used and remembered everyone's names.

They actually showed an interest in them as people, not just in their performance. Never underestimate the large impact of a small gesture. It's easy to see people every day and yet not really know them. Great relationships with customers, colleagues, or loved ones don't just happen magically. They take time. When you fail to invest any time with people, don't be surprised when you fail to see any return.

If you really believe people are important, then quit hoping to *find* the time to invest in those relationships. *Make* the time.

If you're a manager, remember investing in people will also mean investing in their development. Recruiting talent can be a costly and time-consuming exercise, but if you want to retain people, recognize that you will need to invest in them if you want to see a return on their talent.

SECTION TWO

Move On

Have Realistic Expectations

Perhaps at the root of some of our disappointments, frustrations, and conflicts are the unrealistic expectations we have of other people and how they should respond and behave in situations.

At times, we may even try to justify these feelings by saying, "I would never behave like that if I were them." But that's the point: you're not them.

You won't always know their history, background, values, or who their own role models have been. You don't necessarily know what current challenges and concerns they may be facing, or insecurities they're struggling with.

It's understandable that you want others to live up to your standards, but it's not always realistic.

Let Sleeping Dogs Lie ... Sometimes

On some occasions, it might be best to accept a situation or behavior for the benefit of a long-term relationship.

Some may see this as contradictory advice—it isn't.

If you want to succeed with people, you need to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Being flexible and adaptable is crucial to dealing with people, so sometimes a different approach or strategy is required.

But what "things" might you want to tolerate? That's for you to decide. Assertive people sometimes choose not to be assertive. Perhaps an important question to answer is, "By letting sleeping dogs lie, am I comfortable both with the consequences of my decision and my reasons behind it?"

Choosing to lose the occasional battle in order to win the overall war can be an effective strategy. Choosing to be assertive all the time over every single issue is both tiring and boring. It can lead to issues escalating when they didn't need to, feelings being hurt and relationships being damaged.

Check Out Your Attitude

If you've ever changed cars, moved house, or been pregnant (or known someone close who has), you'll probably be aware of a strange phenomenon. Psychologists call it "attention awareness." When you're thinking of buying another car, you suddenly start spotting that particular model everywhere. When you put your house up for sale, you can't drive down a road without noticing "For Sale" signs. And when your partner is pregnant, you notice just how many women are also expecting.

Humans are very adept at noticing what is relevant or important to them at that particular time. If you notice and talk about a particular positive or negative trait in another person, you'll then continue to notice it. What you focus on magnifies. Your negative attitude toward someone is fueled by noticing negative things about them, which in turn reinforces your negative views of them.

So if you're not looking for the positives in people and only focusing on the negatives, guess what ends up in the junk box? Their positive traits and behaviors.

Be Willing to Be Wrong

We like people who are decisive, don't we? People who are clear about what they think and believe. People who don't dither or change their minds on a whim. Focus, determination, and confidence are all traits to be admired. They're signs of strength. They're traits every leader needs to possess to succeed.

And yet these qualities could also be the cause of your downfall. Focus can lead to being blinkered. Determination could result in stubbornness to change despite what the facts are telling you. Confidence could lead to a dangerous cocktail of arrogance and complacency.

Rarely at the top of a list of leaders' top traits would be "humility" and "a willingness to be wrong." But such traits could be invaluable if you're to succeed in life and with people.

An overused strength can actually become a weakness. There may only be a subtle difference between determination and stubbornness, but one leads to success whilst the other makes you look stupid.

A willingness to be wrong and an openness to listen to others' views can be invaluable. It's not a sign of weakness to admit you may be wrong; it's often a sign of wisdom.

Don't Treat People as You Want to Be Treated

It seems, on the surface, such a noble suggestion: treat people as you would want to be treated. And to be fair, it's pretty good advice—up to a point.

Treating people with the degree of respect and courtesy that we would appreciate does seem a fairly reasonable starting place when dealing with others. But please don't fall into the trap of thinking that what floats your boat also floats mine.

In fact, treating people as you want to be treated could have disastrous consequences and be the reason why you don't succeed with people.

Perhaps your relationship with someone has stalled because you've not taken time to consider what it is they see as important and what they would value. This applies equally at work as it does at home. Don't assume people value the same things you do. Our personalities are different, our interests may too, and perhaps more importantly, so may the things that do and don't motivate us.

Remember, what fits you might not fit them, so start treating people as they want to be treated. And if you're not sure how people want to be treated, ask.

How to Make Change a Success

If you're going to succeed with people, you'll need to know how to help them deal with change. Change can be embraced or fiercely resisted. To make it less scary and more achievable, apply these five strategies:

1. **Give clarity.** When people feel in the dark, they draw negative conclusions. Silence creates an environment where people speculate and anxiety escalates. Be clear about the situation and answer questions such as "How will this change affect me?" and "What's expected of me?" A lack of clarity breeds confusion.
2. **Develop competence.** People feel threatened when they're out of their comfort zone and lack the tools or training they need. Support them and recognize that some will adjust faster than others.
3. **Nurture confidence.** Confidence is rooted in competence and experience. Give feedback, encouragement, and help people focus on progress, not perfection.
4. **Give control when possible.** To positively embrace change, people need to feel consulted and involved in as many aspects of the change as possible. When there is an opportunity to give people some control, no matter how small it might be, take it.
5. **Help people feel cared for.** Treat them as individuals, not numbers. Keep them informed, be available, and show you have their back.

Four Killer Questions You Have to Ask Yourself

Think of a person with whom your relationship is important—someone where a breakdown would have consequences. With this person in mind, reflect on these four questions:

1. What's going on in their world at the moment?
It's easy to be wrapped up in your world and fail to show interest in others. If your answer is sketchy, spend more time asking about them.
2. What's important to them at this time?
People may need feedback, time, support, or space.
3. Are you listening to understand or listening to defend?
Try lowering your defense. Listening to understand doesn't mean you agree—it means you value their perspective.
4. Have you clearly communicated your perspective?
Don't assume people know your priorities. Explain the "why" behind your actions.

When there is an opportunity to give people some control, no matter how small it might be, take it.

”

How to Make Criticism Count, Not Crucify

Have you ever received criticism or had to give feedback to anyone? It's not easy, is it? Sensitivity, diplomacy, and a balanced, constructive approach are required when feedback could be construed as criticism. No matter how self-assured you are, you're more likely to fast-forward past "constructive" and pause on "criticism." Using certain words can backfire, so stay clear of "weaknesses" and avoid using the phrase "constructive criticism" altogether.

Challenging people without undermining their confidence is not easy. Rather than sugar-coating or attacking, focus on solving issues—not fixing blame. When giving feedback, talk about "what worked well" and "even better if..."

For example: "What worked well was the start of your presentation." "Even better if you gave more thought to how you ended it."

You've made your criticism count, not crucify.

Fix problems, not blame.

Work Out Why They're Whinging

There's a lot to moan about in the world, but negativity is normal. In fact, it might even be necessary. An over-optimistic approach can lead to self-delusion. The issue is not whether people are negative, but what has caused them to feel that way and how long they're likely to stay in that mindset. Negative people can often be mocked and dismissed. But rather than ignore their behavior, try to uncover "what you don't see." Be less dismissive and seek to understand why people are thinking and behaving as they are.

Some people wear their coat of negativity like an old friend—it's comfortable. They may never become naturally optimistic, but you can help them manage it and focus more on the positives. Others may lack self-confidence; their negativity could be a confused cry for help. Encourage them and play to their strengths.

Sometimes negativity comes from a perceived sense of injustice. Appreciate where they're coming from. Your goal is to help people identify the reasons for their negativity and help them through it.

How to Make People Feel S.P.E.C.I.A.L

Have you ever thought about why people fall out with each other? Behind all the gossip and fallout lies a simple fact: "I didn't feel important." Feeling ignored, ridiculed, or taken for granted can trigger frustration and hurt. When you peel back the layers of anger, you'll often find someone who doesn't feel valued or important.

When people feel valued and important, you'll find them easier to communicate and deal with, reduce the amount of conflict you experience, and increase the quality and depth of your relationship with them, both in and outside the workplace.

To help us achieve that outcome, remember S.P.E.C.I.A.L.:

S – Serve

Focus on meeting others' needs. Success comes from helping others achieve their goals. Serving is an attitude from which your behavior flows.

P – Personalize

Make encounters personal. Treat people as unique individuals, not one of the crowd. Showing thought, even in small ways, has a huge impact.

E – Encourage

Encourage others. No one ever says, "I've had too much encouragement." The word means "to give courage"—to start, not to quit, or to aim higher. Words are powerful; they build up or bring down. In a world of setbacks and criticism, everyone needs the oxygen of encouragement.

C – Courtesy

Courtesy lies at the heart of showing respect for others. It is about thinking of other people's needs as well as your own—replying to emails, returning calls, being on time, and not checking your phone during conversations. When you show courtesy, you build likeability and increase your chances of influencing others.

I – Interest

Be interested in people. Stop obsessing about your own world. Ask questions and listen to answers. Remember what's been said; it helps you stand out.

A – Appreciate

Show appreciation. Don't take others for granted. Write a note, send a text, make a call, or give thanks—just do it.

L – Listen

Listening is hard, but it helps others feel understood and important. Sometimes people don't want advice—they just want to be heard.

How to Pick People Up When They're Feeling Down

When someone is feeling dejected or demoralized, help them recognize that emotional responses to setbacks are normal. Feeling mad, bad, or sad is okay, but people can stay “wallowing” too long, which can lead to irrational judgments.

Help them see their emotions as temporary. Reframe failure: failing isn't final, and it doesn't make someone a failure. It's simply a part of their learning journey. Acknowledge disappointment, then help them see it as feedback for next time. Look for positives. Point out successes without dismissing pain and ask questions to help them identify positives themselves. Go for quick wins. Small accomplishments build confidence and momentum.

Focus on progress, not perfection. Then ask, “What's the one action we can take now that shows progress?”

Change location. A new environment—pub, cafe, countryside, or a few days away—can provide perspective, stimulate ideas, and help people rebuild, recover, and recharge.

How to Talk So People Listen

To successfully influence, engage, and motivate others, it's important to understand what does and doesn't work when communicating. Three common mistakes switch people off:

1. Drowning people in detail
2. Failing to make your message relevant to your audience
3. Focusing on facts while forgetting feelings

People seek clarity amidst clutter, so brevity is best. Make your message relevant by considering what your audience needs to hear. Appeal to both intellect and emotion; facts alone rarely bring change.

Here are five practical solutions that can help you communicate in a way people listen to:

1. **Recognize their reality** by understanding their needs and concerns.

2. **Remember the 90/90 rule:** 90% of your impression is made in the first 90 seconds.
3. **Begin with the end in mind** by being clear on the purpose and outcomes of your communication.
4. **Point out the pain before providing the prescription** so people feel the problem before accepting a solution.
5. **Invest in yourself** by practicing and applying these approaches. Communicate facts and feelings to engage people and prompt action.

The Ball's in Your Court

Applying even a few of the ideas we've explored can be life-changing in both your personal and professional lives. But whether they make a difference is entirely up to you.

Your challenge is not acquiring more knowledge. It's not even about coming up with new ideas. It's about doing something with what you know. Everything we've explored so far is easy to do—but it's just as easy not to do.

The hope is that you now feel equipped and inspired to leave your own legacy in people's lives. The great thing is, you can—you can actually start today if you want to.

The ball is in your court.



Paul McGee's career has been anything but linear—from working as a probation officer in West Yorkshire to managing a team in a beefburger factory in East Anglia. After developing ME, a chronic fatigue syndrome, in his twenties, he rebuilt his life by starting his own business and eventually became an international speaker, coach, and bestselling author. Over the last 30 years, Paul has spoken in more than 40 countries on change, resilience, self-leadership, and communication. In 2019, he was awarded the title of Visiting Professor by the University of Chester. He enjoys warm days outdoors, comedy, football, and time with his wife, children, and cats.

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