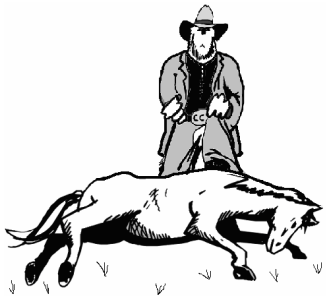
ATHLETICS OMNIBUS – PEOPLE SKILLS

From the Athletics Omnibus of Richard Stander, Boland Athletics, South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

When you discover that you are riding a dead horse, do you:



1.1. Change riders
1.2. Buy a stronger whip to hit the horse with
1.3. Appoint a committee to study the dead horse
1.4. Reclassify the dead horse as 'living impaired'
1.5. Hire outside contractors to ride the dead horse
1.6. Promote the dead horse to a supervisory position
1.7. Harness several dead horses together to increase speed
1.8. Lower the standards so that the dead horse can be included
1.9. Rewriting the expected performance requirements for all horses
1.10. Arrange to visit other countries to see how other cultures ride dead horses
1.11. Provide additional funding and / or training to increase the dead horse's performance
1.12. Do a productivity study to see if lighter riders would improve the dead horse's performance.
1.13. Sent a memo, apologizing for the delay, and explain that the dead horse will soon be fit for duty
1.14. Declare that as the dead horse does not have to be fed, it is less costly, carries lower overhead expenses to the company, and therefore contributes substantially more to the competitiveness of the company than other horses.
1.15. Change horses

Taking decisions is not as easy as the example above clearly demonstrates. To change horses is not such an obvious choice when confronted with many other choices.

The Leader and Manager that do not apply people skills will have difficulty evaluating the above situation. In the real world, the Leader and Manager that fails to make decisions will be branded a follower.

As pointed out in the chapter, “The Winning Formula”, taking the right or the wrong decision is often surprisingly similar. It is just different, not the opposite. It has its own configuration. In fact, it is the decision not taken, that is the anomaly.

2. CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON PEOPLE SKILLS

The decision making process require people skills to ensure that decisions taken are implemented effectively. Some of the most common decision making processes are interactive, selective and autocratic decision making processes.

The type of decision making process will depend on the culture or community the Leader or Manager grew up in. These cultural influences on the decision making process take place subconsciously and may take place without the Leader or Manager noticing it.

All the decision making processes, be it interactive, selective or autocratic, require “People Skills” as a generic ingredient. Leaders and Managers will apply people skills differently. Generally, Leaders look outwards and Managers look inwards in applying people skills.

Great leaders are visionaries, strategic thinkers and activators. They look outwards towards the opposition, finding a broad pattern, connections, cracks, etc., continuously seeking for the weak spots of the opposition and capitalize on it. Great Leaders will ensure that there are no obstacles in the way of the Managers.

Great Managers are successful strategists and set clear objectives to achieve for their Staff Members. Managers look inwards, individually at people’s differences in style, goals, needs and what motivates them. They seek the right way of releasing each person’s unique talent to performance and to be productive. Great Managers will ensure that there are no obstacles in the way of the Subordinates.

Great Subordinates are primarily productive, objective driven and qualitative by nature. Values such as loyalty and honesty are a prerequisite for Subordinates, Managers and Leaders alike, and a topic for another discussion.

The process of achieving the objectives of each of the projects in the Federation's Business Plan must be swift and effective. People Skills can assist the Leader and the Manager to achieve their objectives faster and more effective.

3. THE NEEDS HIERARCHY OF MASLOW

When Leaders/Managers apply People Skills, Maslow's needs hierarchy must be kept in mind. It is important that Leaders and Managers understand which human needs influence the actions of their staff. These needs are prioritized by Maslow as follows:

3.1. Food, sleep, heat and sex are regarded as the most basic needs of people. A person will not concentrate effectively, will be aggressive towards others and will not be productive in the workplace or sports field if a person experiences a shortage of food, sleep, heat and/or sex. If these are ignored, no people skills will be effective and the easiest of all objectives will not be achieved.

3.2. The need to feel safe and secure is regarded as the 2nd most important need of people. If a person feels unsafe or insecure it will be difficult to develop a sense of belonging or ownership among staff Members.

3.3. The need to be loved, peer group expectations, social acceptance and affection are regarded as the 3rd most important need. People can be productive in an environment that lacks love, peer group expectance or social acceptance, but they will be easily distracted if any of these needs are offered to them.

3.4. Respect for yourself and others are regarded as the 4th most important need of humans. People can be productive in an environment where the person does not respect himself/herself or others, but the person will never reach full satisfaction in what is achieved.

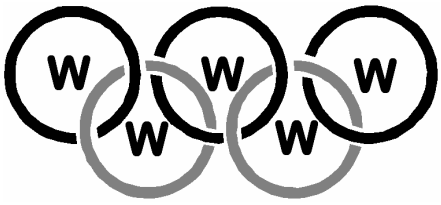
3.5. The ideal is to achieve self realization. Only by understanding your own potential, weakness and strengths, will it be possible to reach your full potential in the workplace or on the sports field. "You will be a great person once your inner person catches up with you outer person".

4. THE 5 W 'S OF AFFECTIVE PEOPLE SKILLS

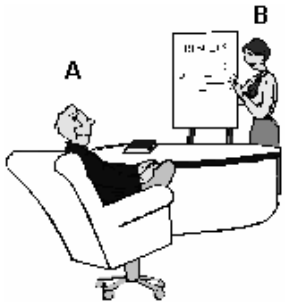
For the Leader/Manager to obtain the facts as fast as possible in an affective manner without frustrating or irritating people the 5 W's must form part of the questions / explanations.

The 5 W's are:

4.1. Who
4.2. What
4.3. Where
4.4. When
4.5. Why



The sketch below shows 2 people "A" and "B" and demonstrate a People Skills communication game.



- Ask "B" to mark a spot on the back of the writing pad without "A" looking.
- Ask "A" to open the eyes and ask "B' where the spot is on the back of the writing pad without using the 5 W's in the questions.
- Ask "B" again to mark a spot on the back of the writing pad without "A" looking.
- Ask "B' where the spot is on the back of the writing pad, now using the 5 W's in the questions.
- The 2nd time round, the position of the spot on the back of the writing pad will be determined much faster.

5. SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES – THE MONKEY ON THE SHOULDER PRINCIPLE

One of the most important People Skills of the Leader or Manager is to delegate responsibilities. Leaders and Managers that do not delegate their responsibilities will be less effective in what they doing. Leaders and Managers must learn to distinguish between big responsibilities and small responsibilities and delegate some of the smaller responsibilities.

5.1. Everybody has responsibilities (The monkey on the shoulder represents a responsibility).
5.2. If the responsibility is not taken care of, it becomes uncontrollable (The monkey will jump off your shoulder and onto the shoulder of your superior. When it jumps back on your shoulder, it will be uncontrollable).
5.3. Some responsibilities are more important than others (Big monkeys and small monkeys).
5.4. Prioritize the responsibilities according to importance.
5.5. Give less important responsibilities to somebody else.
5.6. Monitor the progress of the responsibilities delegated to others.
5.7. If the delegated responsibility comes back to you, explain what must be done and give the responsibility back to the person that the responsibility was delegated to.

6. THE PROCESS OF SETTING OBJECTIVES

Another important people Skill is the setting of objectives. Without objectives, people will have very little motivation to complete the task at hand.

When setting objectives, everybody involved in a project must be present. The following procedure is recommended:

6.1. When The Leader/Manager enters the room, the Leader/Manager must set everybody at ease by greeting them, followed by making positive courtesy comments that compliments the people. The comments must sound genuine.
6.2. Confirm that everybody in the room knows each other.
6.3. Confirm that everybody in the room knows what the purpose of the informal meeting is.
6.4. Discuss the previous objectives, give acknowledgement of previous successes, and discuss reasons for deviations and failures. Spend more time on the successes than the failures. (The sandwich principle)
6.5. Ask the opinion of everybody present what the new objective should be. If everybody remains silent, ask somebody what his or her opinion is.
6.6. Remember the silent person principle – The best ideas often lies within the silent person but are silenced by an individual in the group that talk too much. It is the responsibility of the Leader/Manager to strike a balance.
6.7. Summarize, and come to an agreement to what a measurable and realistic objective will be.
6.8. Come to an agreement as to what must be done by whom.
6.9. Offer your services if they experience problems during the implementation of the objective.
6.10. Come to an agreement to the follow-up actions, e.g. when will the next feedback session be.

7. WHEN TO TALK TO PEOPLE AND WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

The timing when to talk to people is an important People Skill.

Keep in mind Maslow's needs hierarchy, e.g. if you are facing a serious challenge and you need someone's assistance in this regard, do not ask for assistance when the person is hungry and lunch is about to start; or when a person is emotional; or when a person just arrived at the office in the morning; or is about to leave at the end of the day.

Monitor your body language while talking to people. At the same time, monitor the body language of the person you are talking too. It will give you a good indication if you are successful or not.

It is suggested that the discussion is structure as follows:

7.1. The first sentence

7.1.1. State what you are going to talk about.
7.1.2. Say it with impact and in a lively manner or with authority and confidence.

7.2. The substance of the information

7.2.1. Give facts – Use the 5 “W”s to elaborate.
7.2.2. Elaborate on the 5 “W”s by using examples or tell a story.
7.2.3. Try to confine the information to 1 or 2 points. Never discuss more than 7 points at any given time. Keep in mind, there is a very good reason why a telephone number has only 7 numbers. The average person can not remember more than 7 discussion points at a time.

7.3. The last sentence

Summarize, by repeating what you said in the first sentence.

8. TALKING WITH AUTHORITY

To talk with authority or to talk in such a way that you sound believable is also an important People Skill.

The following pointers are useful to remember:

8.1. Get clarity in your mind what you want to talk about before you start to talk.
8.2. Compile the talk using the 5 “W”s.
8.3. Write down the key points to avoid you from forgetting some of the points.
8.4. Visualize and prioritize in your mind what you want to talk about.
8.5. When you start talking, keep it short and to the point; 1 – 5 minutes is the general length for talking. You will lose the interest of the listener if you talk for longer than 5 minutes.
8.6. Be sure that your level of communication is suited for your listener, e.g. do not use scientific facts when talking to a toddler.
8.7. Speak in a lively manner. Use your eyes, face and hands to help you emphasise your point.
8.8. Catch your audience’s eyes.
8.9. Avoid distracters – Do not fumble or move around too much.
8.10. Speak clearly – do not mumble
8.11. Use visual aids, such as power point projections, slides, copies of the talk, etc.

9. THE PROCESS OF DELEGATING

Delegation is also an important People Skill. If the delegating process is not handled responsibility, the person the work is delegated to, will refuse to accept the responsibility to work productively.

It is suggested that the process of delegation is structured as follows:

9.1. First tell the person what needs to be done.
9.2. Show the person what needs to be done – The person will look and ask questions.
9.3. Explain and help the person – The person tries and criticise.
9.4. Teach the person – The person does it and asks questions.
9.5. Verify the correctness of the completed task – The person continues to do the remainder of the task independently.

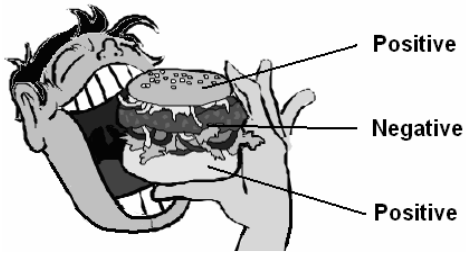
10. FEEDBACK SESSIONS

To give feedback is a People Skill. It is suggested that the process of feedback is structured as follows:

10.1. HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK – THE SANDWICH PRINCIPLE

Giving feedback, particularly if the feedback information contains negative information, must be presented in a “sandwich” format;

- **Positive** - First say what was done right.
- **Negative** - Follow up with what was done wrong or what he / she could have done better.
- **Positive** - Conclude by explaining what was learned or gained from the mistake.



10.2. RULES OF FEEDBACK SESSIONS

10.2.1. First gather all the facts before the feedback session.
10.2.2. Plan the feedback session with the facts in a chronological order.

10.2.3. Do not assume that they know what you are talking about.
10.2.4. Do not exaggerate or play down the facts.
10.2.5. Do not over-emphasize your role or contribution.
10.2.6. Do not keep a negative report back.
10.2.7. Always tell the truth.
10.2.8. The timing of the feedback session is important.

11. HANDLE NEGATIVE ENERGY OF PEOPLE

To manage negative energy, it is often necessary to compromise. “To compromise is strength and not a weakness”. The skill to compromise is one of the most important People Skills for Leaders and Managers.

It is suggested that the following structure is used when compromising:

11.1. HANDLE UNSATISFACTORY WORK ETHICS OR DISCIPLINE

11.1.1. Call the person away from the other employees
11.1.2. Ask a third person to be present to act as witness. You will need him/her to verify the facts during later legal or disciplinary actions if necessary.
11.1.3. Greet the person.
11.1.4. Tell the person what you have seen and why it is unacceptable.
11.1.5. Ask the person why he or she acted in the manner that he/she did.
11.1.6. Ask the person what he or she will do to rectify it.
11.1.7. Discuss his or her proposals. If the person’s tone of voice rises, wait for the person to finish the sentence. Respond back also in a raised tone of voice and gradually lower the tone of voice to normal. If the person continues talking with a raised voice, speak softer until the person brings his or her tone of voice down.
11.1.8. Explain what will happen if it happens again.
11.1.9. Come to an agreement what the disciplinary action will be. If follow-up actions are necessary, do it in writing.
11.1.10. Ask the third person to treat the discussion as confidential and thank the third person for being present. It will serve as an unspoken warning to the accused person that his or her actions will be monitored.

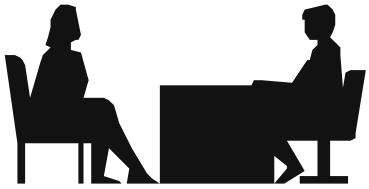
11.2. HANDLE GRIEVES, GRUDGES OR COMPLAINTS

11.2.1. Put the person at ease and pay close attention to what is said.
11.2.2. Repeat the complaint in a summarized version using a calm tone of voice. It will give the person the impression that you care.
11.2.3. Explain the position of the company by referring to rules and regulations.
11.2.4. Determine the real problem and ask the person what his or her proposal is on how to solve the problem.
11.2.5. If necessary, obtain more background information.
11.2.6. Come to a conclusion on what steps must be taken.

11.3. HANDLE CONFLICT

11.3.1. Put the person at ease before trying to determine the facts.
11.3.2. Identify the common problem
- Show that you are interested in his or her problem.
- Put your own problem to him or her.

11.3.3. Listen to his/her view on the matter.
- Identify solutions
- Ask him/her or her for ideas.



11.3.4. Elaborate on his/her ideas.
11.3.5. Come to an agreement on the best solution.
11.3.6. Come to an agreement on the follow-up action.

11.4. PROBLEM SOLVING

11.4.1. Identify the apparent problem.
11.4.2. Gather facts that caused the problem.
11.4.3. Determine the real problem.
11.4.4. Evaluate possible solutions.
11.4.5. Select the best solution.

11.4.6. Decide on the method of action.

11.5. RAISE A COMPLAINT

11.5.1. Greet the subordinate friendly.
11.5.2. Explain to him or her problem.
11.5.3. Put it to him or her that you are in need of advice.
11.5.4. Explain the problem in detail.
11.5.5. Explain why the problem is bothering you.
11.5.6. Stay calm.
11.5.7. Stick to the facts.
11.5.8. Listen carefully to what he or she is saying.
11.5.9. Discuss the matter in a mature manner.
11.5.10. Make constructive suggestions to solve the problem.
11.5.11. Thank him or her for giving attention to your problem.

11.6. MAKING CHANGES

11.6.1. Explain reasons for changes.
11.6.2. Give opportunity for reaction.
11.6.3. Ask for suggestions to handle the problem.
11.6.4. Give the solutions provided by management and yourself and point out the resemblance between the various solutions.
11.6.5. Demonstrate/Explain the new method and how it will affect them.
11.6.6. Ask for suggestions to remove the problems/obstacles.
11.6.7. Obtain acceptance for the new changes and provide assistance and training where necessary.

12. BODY LANGUAGE

Understanding how people react on during a conversation is an important People Skill. Leaders/Managers must pay attention on how people react when talking to them. Often, how people communicate with their body (body language) is more important than what people say.

It is possible to predict how a person will react to you by dressing correctly and wearing specific colours of clothing for specific situations.

The diagram illustrates how a person should be dressed for a meeting where important decisions will be taken, or if the person wants to enforce respect and authority.

The type of clothing people will wear to business meetings will differ according to the culture or community they come from but the colours of the clothing have a generic impact on how people react, e.g. red reflects power, blue reflects honesty, yellow reflects a willingness to negotiate, etc.

This practice of using colours and clothing as a negotiating skill is called ‘Power Dressing”.

It is also possible to predict how a person will act or what they are going to say by monitoring the body language of people. For a Leader/Manager to communicate effectively, the movement of the body as well as facial expressions is important as the listener subconsciously reacts on these movements.

12.1. THE EYES

It is important to maintain eye contact during communication. More than 80% of information received or carried across is done through the eyes.

The movement of the eyes gives away how the speaker values the contents of what is spoken about:

- If the eyes rise to the left top corner while talking, the person is comparing information with previous situations.
- If the eyes rise to the right top corner while talking, the person is trying to find solutions or planning ahead.
- If the eyes drop to the left bottom corner while talking, the person is not honest.
- If the eyes drop to the right bottom corner while talking, the person is not sure.

Even the size of the pupil in the eye gives away information. The pupil will reduce in size during bright sunny days and will increase as it become darker. However, during a conversation, the pupil will enlarge when information received is appealing to the listener and the pupil will reduce in size when the listener become angry or frustrated.

12.2. FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

The face is capable of hundreds of different types of expressions. To monitor facial expressions during meetings, the Leader/Manager should focus on the upper part of the face e.g. the eyes and the forehead. During social gatherings, the Leader/Manager should focus on the lower part of the face e.g. eyes, nose and mouth.

Facial expressions give away how the speaker values the person, or how the listener value the information received, e.g.:

12.2.1. A smile reflects expectance of the person or the contents of the words in an informal conversation. In a formal conversation, a smile can reflect sarcasm or disbelieve.

12.2.2. Tight lips usually reflect a person been tense, agitated or frustrated.

12.2.3. A frown on the forehead of the face usually indicates a person questioning the information received.

12.2.4. A person yawning reflects boredom or a lack of interest. In a room filed with people, it can also be a sign of a lack of oxygen in the room.

12.3. MOVEMENT AND POSITION OF THE BODY

The movement of the body expresses how the speaker values the person that is spoken to:

12.3.1. The up and down nodding of the head usually indicates that the person agrees. The sideways nodding of the head usually indicates that the person does not agree what you are saying or doing. Unfortunately the movement of the head is not reliable as the movements of the head are executed differently in some cultures and communities.

12.3.2. The crossing of arms and legs usually indicates that the person does not accept your credentials or does not want to be part of what you are saying or doing.

12.3.3. Movement of arms or legs while talking is a method used by people to emphasize what they are saying. Elaborate movements of body parts usually reflect a nervous, tensed or aggressive person.

12.3.4. Hand movements must mostly be with palms facing towards the body and the arms moving towards the body, suggesting the person to come closer.

12.3.5. Palms, facing away from the body, projects either aggression or sex-appeal. Both emotions are not very productive in a business environment.

12.3.6. Avoid playing with something in the hands while talking to people. It distracts the attention of the listener and gives away the tension/boredom/frustration level of the Leader/Manager.

12.3.7. When shaking hands, have a strong grip, with the fingers rapt around the palm rather than the fingers. Keep the thump on top during the handshake and avoid the hand from turning sideways. Do not put the other hand on top of the handshake as this create a sense of dominance and a sense of rejection on the part of the opposite party.

12.3.8. Vigorous movements of the arms, handshakes included, reflect nervousness or a lack of confidence. Small, slow, controlled arm and hand movements reflect that you are in control and relaxed.

12.3.9. If the foot moves from left to right across the body during communication, the person would like to end the conversation. If the person moves forward and backwards, the person

would like you to hurry up. If the body movement is backwards only, the person is shying away and if the person moves forward it indicate either interest or aggression. The facial expression will help to tell the difference.

12.3.10. A person lying back in a chair during a meeting reflects boredom or a lack of respect. The person leaning forward shows interest in what is said, and if the person leans forward with the hands or arms resting on the table, the person wants to be given an opportunity to speak. Sticking up a hand in the air is a sign of a person that want to be given an opportunity to speak but not very helpful when you want to project authority.

12.3.11. The body must be kept in an upright position when standing or sitting, and the arms and legs must remain uncrossed.

The sketch below shows 3 people (A, B and C) standing next to a table, engaged in a conversation.

The left foot of “A” placed in a forward position and the body leaning forward suggest that “A” tries to convince “B” of her point. “B” leans on the table suggesting disrespect to “A”. “B” has no eye contact with “A” suggesting bad communication between “A” and “B”.

The right hand finger that “B” presses on the table suggests that “B” wants to enforce a point.

The suitcase placed between “A” and “B” reflects insecurity on the part of “B”.

“C” leans with the right hand on the table suggesting that “C” is frustrated and wants to make a point. The left hand of “C” that covers the mouth suggests that “C” wants “A” and “B” to listen to “C”.

The left foot in a forward position suggest that “C” want to become part of the conversation. The head looking down suggest that “C” has a problem with the topic of the conversation between “A” and “B”. The fact that the table is next to A, B and C, and not between them, is a good indication that the discussion will have a positive outcome.

The sketch below shows 2 people (A and B) sitting with a table between them, engaged in a conversation.

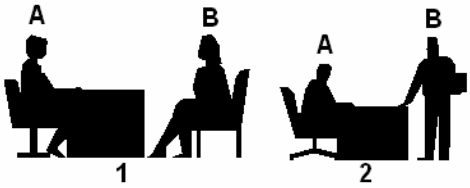
The table between them creates a safety barrier, and will encourage communication between 2 strangers, but will restrict the range of communication possibilities if “A” and “B” knows each other well. “A” is much more open for communication with the hands in an “open position” and no objects on the table in front of “A”.

“B” is not very open for communication with the hands in a “closed” position, and with objects on the table in front of, “B” and between “A” and “AB”.

If “B” moves the objects out of the way during the conversation, the movement indicates that “B” is interested in the conversation. If “B” moves the objects closer to “A”, “B” rejects either the person or the content of the conversation. If “B” moves the objects closer to the body, “B” is not very comfortable with the conversation.

Judging from the body positions, in situation 1 and 2 below, “B” is the subordinate and “A” is in charge.

- In situation 1, “B” is tense or nervous and in situation 2, “B” is appearing to be in a hurry.
- In situation 1 and 2 the table is between “A” and “B”.
- The table between “A” and “B” provides protection or ensures authority on the part of the person in charge but is not very helpful when you want to gain the confidence of a person.



The sketch below shows 3 people (A, B and C) sitting next to a table, engaged in a conversation.

They are sitting very close to each other suggesting that all parties in the conversation are comfortable with the content.

- "C" is leaning towards "B" indicating that "C" is relying on the support from "B".
- "A" holds a document in the hand and is steering the conversation in a specific direction.
- As long as "B" and "C" leans forward, they approve of the content of the information.
- If "B" and "C" sits back while "A" is talking, they do not accept the information provided by "A" or regard the discussion as completed.

The table is next to A, B and C, and not between them, and is a good indication that the discussion will have a positive outcome.

13. MEDIATION, ARBITRATION OR GOING TO COURT

The communication gab between Leaders/Managers and their staff may at times become too big for any "one on one" communication to be effective. Trying to reach a conclusion when both parties cannot see "eye to eye" will only result in one or both parties becoming anti-social in their behaviour.

In these types of aggravated conflict situations, a process of mediation, arbitration or even legal action is required.

13.1. Mediation – As a first alternative to "one on one" communication a process of mediation is advised. During the mediation process human emotion and perceptions can be dealt with. The two parties in conflict will, on a voluntary basis, identify a mutually acceptable third party (Mediator) to help the two parties in conflict so solve the dispute or to reach a settlement. The Mediator will hear the respective cases of the two parties in conflict and then determines cause of the dispute between the two parties. The Mediator will then try to reach a settlement. Any third person can be used to mediate and it is not a costly exercise. The settlement may be an ad hoc or long term solution. Settlements reached during mediation are not binding in court.

13.2. Arbitration - Here the two parties in conflict will, on a voluntary basis, obtain the services of an Arbitrator to help the two parties in conflict to solve the dispute. During the arbitration process human emotion and perceptions can be dealt with. The Arbitrator will hear the respective cases of the two parties in conflict and then determines cause of the dispute between the two parties. The Arbitrator will then try to reach a settlement. The settlement is subject to review but not to appeal. The Arbitrator must be a skilled person and the Arbitration process may be costly. The settlement may be an ad hoc or automatic. Settlements reached during Arbitration are binding and can not be recalled in a court of law.

13.3. Going to Court – Once a conflict needs to be resolved in court, the process of finding a settlement becomes compulsory. The court can only determine between right and wrong and will not deal with human emotion and perceptions. This is a costly exercise and the outcome very seldom is to your satisfaction. The Judge or magistrate will hear the cases of the two respective parties and then determine the dispute between them. The process is subject to review and appeal.

14. CONCLUSION

Successful Leaders and Managers understand that decision making is a process rather than a single act. Take the initiative, make a decision, and manage the outcome of the decision with people skills.

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