



Chapter 3

Achiever - Problem Solver

Some years ago, I boarded a flight from Boston to Denver. I had an aisle seat in the middle of a DC-10. To my right sat a six-year-old girl with long, curly blonde hair. Her mother, a brunette sat to her right. All was quiet until the plane took off.

Then, the little girl started kicking the seat in front of her, gently at first and then with more vigor. I saw the businessman look back and scowl. The girl's mother told her to *stop* kicking the man's chair. With renewed vigor, the girl started kicking faster and harder.

Having just learned some of the techniques you'll discover in this chapter, I decided to try them out. I turned





Achiever- Problem Solver

*The best stimulus for
running ahead is to
have something we
must run from.*

-Eric Hoffer

Achiever–Problem Solver

Achievers are easily motivated to set and achieve goals. Goal setting is ideal for them.

Problem Solvers get motivated to overcome difficulties and avoid obstacles. Goals help them stay focused, but will not trigger them into action. Acquiring wealth, for a problem solver, is not as exciting as avoiding poverty in retirement.



to the girl and said: "*Don't stop* kicking that man's chair"...and her little leg swung to a stop. She knew she'd been had, but she didn't know how, so she started kicking again.

I said: "*Don't stop* kicking that man's chair"...and her leg swung to a stop again. She frowned briefly and then she smiled.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"It's Jay," I said.

"No it's not," she said, her smile growing wider.

I said, "You're right, it's not."

"Yes it is," she said, the beginning of a frown creasing her brow.

"No it's not," I replied.

"Yes it is!" she demanded. "You're name's Jay! Say it."

"Whatever you say," I replied.

By this time, her mother was looking at me with that how-do-you-know-how-to-run-my-child look. The little girl was fine the rest of the flight. Someone had finally understood her.

This is an extreme example called mismatching, but offers many clues into the language pattern of the problem solver. While most books on motivation try to get you to move toward possibilities and opportunities, they miss the 40% of the population that get motivated by avoiding the consequences of action or inaction.

Motivation

Do you move *toward* pleasure or *away from* pain? Pleasure, unfortunately, is often only the promise of a

Questions & Answers

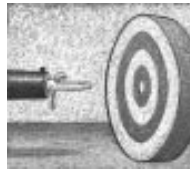
Question: What's important about ...?
Listen: power words and phrases

Question: Why is that *power word* important?
Listen: get, have, achieve (toward)
avoid, prevent, wouldn't, can't
(away)

Motivating Language

Achiever	Problem Solver
achieve accomplish get	avoid prevent not

future reward. Pain is much more immediate. Toward people see the glass as half full while the away-froms see the glass as half empty. Which one are you?



Achievers move *toward* opportunity and possibility. They often create the next step in human evolution, processes, or technology. They can, however, jump too easily into relationships, partnerships, or new ventures without clearly understanding the consequences of their actions.



Problem solvers move away from possible pain. They tend to be better at analyzing and solving problems. They can also create new things by amplifying the consequences of *not doing it*. They can be motivated to avoid ending up in the same circumstances as their parents or friends. I know some very successful people who get motivated this way! To achieve goals, problem solvers need to periodically refocus on their objectives, not just the consequences.

There is an old story of putting a frog in a pan of tepid water. If you raise the temperature slowly enough, you can literally boil the frog. Away-froms have this problem. If the *change* in pain isn't different enough, they won't jump into action to change things. Consider cult leaders or abusive partners who start with small indiscretions and increase them slowly to the boiling point.

It might seem logical that *toward* would be more associated with the future and that *away from* might be more associated with the past, but people can be motivated toward doing the same thing over and over again



Mistakes

Flops are part of life's menu and I've never been a girl to miss out on any of the courses.

-Rosalind Russell



because they were successful in the past. Similarly, people can be motivated away from the future consequences of doing something.

To influence **achievers**, use language that talks about the benefits (pleasure) of achieving an outcome. To influence **problem solvers**, talk about how to avoid the consequences of not achieving the outcome.

Tag Questions

Another way to use both *toward* and *away from* language in a sentence is by using a tag question: "Sounds like a good idea, doesn't it? You agree, don't you? That would be a good choice, wouldn't it?" In each case the toward is followed by an away-from tag question.

Family and Friends

On Friday night, my wife and I usually have a conversation about what to do:

"Well," I say, "we could *go* to a movie or we could *go* out to eat"

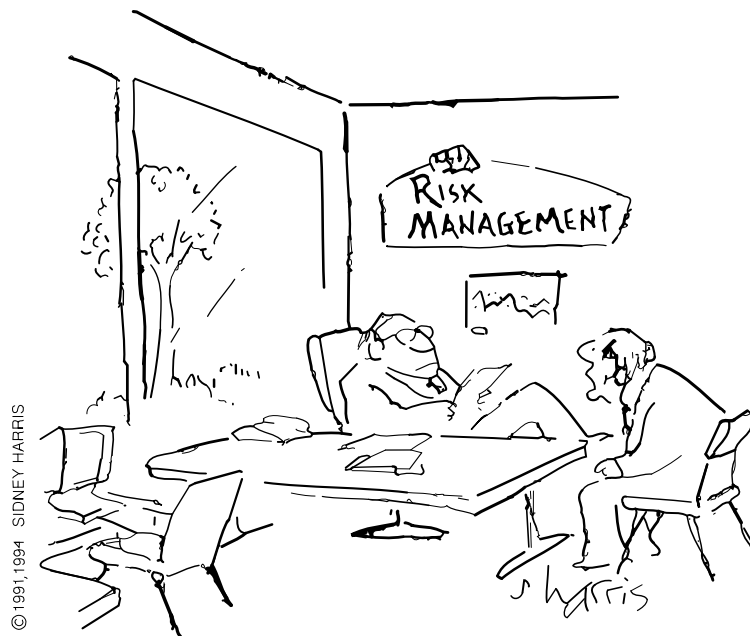
She says: "I *wouldn't* want to see anything *too violent* or *eat too much*."

As you'll learn, my wife and I are about as different as they come when it comes to language patterns. There are two opposing motivation programs concealed in this short dialog. When it comes to Friday night:

<u>Jay</u>	<u>Shirley</u>
Achiever	Problem Solver

My language is *outcome-oriented*: go, see, eat. Her language is *away-from*: avoiding the discomfort of violent movies or eating too much.

Risk Management



"Don't worry! All you can tell me is 'Don't Worry?'"

To motivate my wife, all I have to do is figure out what we could avoid by doing what I suggest. I need to use a lot of "not" words: don't, couldn't, wouldn't, etc.

"We *wouldn't* want to buy a car that costs *too* much."

"We *wouldn't* want our daughter to get a bad education, but we *wouldn't* want to spend a fortune on an out-of-state school. We wouldn't want her to be *too* far away."

Notice how these two sentences illuminate the possible downsides of a new car or an out-of-state school. Problem solvers can take this kind of language and find optimal solutions. (Both daughters went to instate schools less than 90 miles away.)

To motivate me, Shirley has figured out that all she needs to do is keep talking about the goal:

"*Won't* the kitchen *look nice after it's remodeled?*"

The goal: remodel the kitchen. By using the word, *after*, she's also implying that it will be remodeled, it's only a matter of time. By using the word, *won't*, she also handles the possibility of being mismatched (like the girl on the airline).

I have discovered that no matter how quickly these outcomes are achieved, she has an endless list, so I have to manage them to no more than one a year.

Understanding Criticism

We tend to dislike criticism because we often perceive it as blame, but most critics only want to avoid the consequences of behaviors. Their intent is positive, but their approach focuses on the negative. They state issues as general judgements about what is *not* wanted: "We wouldn't want the same sort of problem we had last year."

Team Creativity

BRAINSTORMING AT BBH+D



Business Applications

Perhaps the most frequent application of toward-away rears its ugly head in meetings. Based on Robert Dilt's study of Walt Disney's creativity strategy, there are three main characters in any effective team:

- **Dreamers** who invent the future
- **Realists** who bring the dream into reality
- **Critics** who help avoid all of the associated problems associated with the dream or the plan.

Teams invariably become combative and nonproductive when the critic, the devil's advocate, makes statements about potential problems rather than asking questions about how to avoid the problems. The dialogue goes like this:

Critic: "We *wouldn't* want the same sort of problems we had last year with product X." (The Dreamer and Realist both roll their eyes, because *of course* we wouldn't want that.)

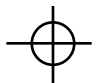
The Critic's statement is actually a thinly veiled "how" question: "How can we avoid the sort of problems we had last year with product X?" Given this sort of question, the Dreamer and Realist can easily figure out how to adjust the dream and the plan to make the product more robust and reliable. Whenever I facilitate a team, I invariably have to serve as an interpreter between the Critic and the other two. Once I understand the Critic's issue, I turn to the rest of the team and say: "So, you're asking *how* can we avoid this kind of problem?" And the rest of the team will nod because they finally understand the issue.



Team Creativity

*The ability to convert ideas
to things is the secret of
outward success.*

-Henry Ward Beecher



For critics to become more effective and likable, they need to learn how to turn criticisms into questions: "How can we avoid the kind of problems the neighbors had?" Better yet, explore the positive intent of the criticism (let's say a sturdy house, instead of termites) and ask: "How can we keep the house strong and impervious to termites?"

If you're a Critic, learn to ask "how" questions: "How can we avoid, eliminate, reduce, or prevent this kind of problem?" The Dreamers and Realists will understand your intention more easily and be able to make the needed changes quickly.

If you're a Dreamer or Realist, become an interpreter. Turn the Critic's statement into a question and check: "So, are you asking *how* we can avoid, eliminate, reduce, or prevent this kind of problem?" Once the Critic nods in agreement, explain how you will adapt the dream or plan to incorporate the Critic's concerns.

Another common conflict lies between management (toward) and Union (away from).

Management: "This will open up new market opportunities."

Union: "Our members won't lose their jobs, will they?"

You might consider learning to speak each other's native tongue: "How will expanding into this market create more and better paying jobs for everyone? How will not expanding into this market cost jobs and profits? How will not restricting the size of our business prevent loss of jobs and simultaneously increase profits and revenue?"

Marketing Research

To research customer patterns, you will want to narrow the situation or context. Ask: What's important to you when you decide to:

- hire a consultant?
- buy a similar product or service?
- take a vacation?

Then ask: "Why is that important?" to gather toward-away information. Do you take a vacation to *explore* other cultures or to *get away* from it all? Is it a *journey* or an *escape*?

Conclusions

Possibly the greatest drain on creativity and productivity that I find when working with teams is a conflict between the achievers and the problem solvers (critics and devil's advocates). Both are necessary to a successful marriage, partnership, or team. Without achievers there is no direction. Without problem solvers, there are too many mistakes and failures. Consider where and when you'll next be able to use these language patterns to integrate and align these two seemingly opposing forces into one unstoppable, high performance team. Try not to think about the pain you'll avoid and the success you'll enjoy.