

# STROKES

**This is a pack of stroke handouts that I have written, adapting both original source material and my own experience. Strokes are a useful concept from Transactional Analysis. Strokes motivate people and are the bedrock of productive relationships.**

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# STROKES

## UNITS OF RECOGNITION

### 1. MEETING OUR NEEDS

All human beings have a range of basic needs and Eric Berne suggested an essential need is that of *recognition*. If we do not acknowledge someone, for example if we send them 'to Coventry' this is one of the harshest ways we can deal with them. In order to survive and develop, people need to have this 'hunger' for recognition satisfied. Another key need is that of *stimulus*. This can trace its roots back to our distant ancestors, who would have groomed each other. The word 'stroke' is derived from the fact that the earliest form of recognition we receive is that of touch.

So a 'stroke' is a form of stimulus that recognises our existence. We give and receive strokes daily and these are part of our interactions with our self and with others.

### 2. TYPES OF STROKES

We can give our self strokes and we can give and receive strokes with others. Strokes can be *verbal* or *non-verbal*. When you give people strokes it's important you give them time to sink in one by one, so don't bombard people with positive strokes as they may be discounted.

The four types are shown below:

	<b>Conditional</b> <i>About what you do</i>	<b>Unconditional</b> <i>About who you are</i>
<b>Positive</b>	 When I experience <b>approval</b> : "That was an excellent report." "I really like your thinking." "You did that well."  These strokes help me to feel competent	 When I experience <b>acceptance</b> : "You're great to have around." "How was your holiday?" "I love you."  These strokes help me to feel loved and secure
<b>Negative</b>	 or  When I experience <b>disapproval</b> : "You spelled that word wrong." "I feel uncomfortable when you do that." "I don't like your shoes."  These strokes tell me that someone doesn't like a choice I have made or the way I'm behaving. I can now decide to do something different.	 When I experience <b>rejection</b> :  "I hate you." "You're ugly." "I don't like short people."  These strokes seriously undermine my self esteem and I feel not OK with myself and my world.

### **3. STROKES vs DISCOUNTS**

A straight *negative stroke* needs to be differentiated from a *discount*. A *discount* always contains some distortion of reality. It distorts who you are or what you do and is not a true reflection of reality. A discount minimises, belittles or ignores. You discount someone when you ignore their presence.

*Negative conditional stroke*: "I see that you spelled that word wrong."      *Discount*: "You can't spell."

*Negative conditional stroke*: "I feel uncomfortable when you say that."

*Discount*: "You make me feel uncomfortable when you do that." (I can't make you feel anything, you own your own feelings).

*Negative unconditional stroke*: "I hate you."      *Discount*: "You're hateful."

People can themselves discount strokes, which is called their *Stroke Filter*. If I stroke you and it does not fit in with your view of the world you may say "thanks", but curl up your lip, as if to say "I don't accept your stroke." For example:

*Positive conditional stroke*: "I like the way you've styled your hair."

*Discount*: "Oh, I must remember to get it cut."

People can learn to accept genuine strokes which are given in a straight way and this can help to improve their self esteem and their motivation.

### **4. COUNTERFEIT STROKES**

These are when a stroke is not sincere or straight. These are also called *Plastic Strokes* or *Marshmallows* (soft and syrupy, with no nourishment).

"You did that well, for a woman."

"I like your tie. Did you buy it second hand?"

"You did that well, more or less."

"Your report was excellent, for a beginner."

### **5. THE STROKE ECONOMY**

Claude Steiner suggests that as children our parents give us 5 restrictive rules about stroking:

***Don't give strokes when you have them to give***

***Don't ask for strokes when you need them***

***Don't accept strokes if you want them***

***Don't reject strokes when you don't want them***

***Don't give yourself strokes***

Steiner believes parents do this as a way of controlling children. Strokes are limitless, but by limiting them, children learn to perform in ways which will get them strokes. As adults we still continue to live by these rules and live in a state of constant stroke deprivation. However, we can reject this 'basic training'. Most of us restrict our stroke exchange in accordance with our childhood decisions. These decisions were made as a result of the pressure we experienced from our parents. As grown-ups we can reassess these decisions and change them if we want to.

### **6. STROKE BANK**

We can 'store' strokes from others or ourselves. Later, we can replay these strokes and use them as self-strokes. However, they may lose their potency over time and so we need to top up our bank with new strokes.

***Take away message: You get what you stroke.***

## Exercise: Giving & Receiving Strokes

<p><b>Think about the strokes you give and the strokes you receive:</b></p> <p><b>Question 1.</b> What strokes have you given recently? (Verbal and non-verbal)</p> <p><b>Question 2.</b> What strokes have you received recently? (Verbal and non-verbal)</p> <p><b>Question 3.</b> Who do you stroke often? Who do you stroke rarely?</p> <p><b>Question 4.</b> Who do you give positive strokes to?</p> <p><b>Question 5.</b> Who do you give negative strokes to? What do you do / say?</p>	<p><b>Stroking Summary:</b></p> <p>Strokes can be conditional (I do / You do) or unconditional (I am / You are), positive and negative, verbal and non-verbal.</p> <p>Stroke the behaviour you want and give people straight feedback on the behaviour you don't want.</p> <p>Instead of using 'good' and 'bad' tell people what they have 'done well' or 'not done well'.</p> <p>Instead of simply saying "stop that" tell people what you want and explain your thinking. For example, this approach can be effective: "Don't do that...because...instead I would like you to do this..."</p> <p><b>Write down the names of three people you work with. Next to each one write down a verbal and a non-verbal stroke you could give them when you next see them:</b></p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
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# RECOGNITION PATTERNS

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## PERMISSIONS & STROKES

Think about yourself and your organisation.

1. Does everyone know you are there?
2. What do you do to get noticed?
3. What are the structures for communication? What is being communicated?
4. How are recognition and affirmation given and received?
5. Are there different recognition patterns for different groups?
6. How are new ideas or suggestions received? What happens when something is changed?
7. What happens when people join / leave?
8. How would you describe in one sentence the team's way of working?
9. What shift would you like to make?

Change stroke patterns and change culture...