

Cover

Siegel's People Skills – A 2 Part Set

Part 1 – Key People Skills for Survival in a Harsh Stress Inducing Management Style at Work

An easy guide of 30 rules to survive when encountering a
tough stress-inducing executive management environment
and abusive management style
(Don't Answer Statements!)

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Part 2 – Key Leadership People Skills for Better & More Effective Relationships at Home & at Work

An easy guide of 20 leadership behavioral competencies
worth embracing for better and more effective relationships
at home and at work
(Adhere to 'Rational Decency'!)

by S. A. Siegel

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copies of this material. Also, the site is a gateway to obtain
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guidance for related career success.*

About the author Stuart A. Siegel:



Stuart is a retired electrical engineer and former defense industry executive spanning a career of over thirty years helping to protect those who protect us. He has a Bachelors of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering (BSEE) from the Polytechnic Institute of New York and a Masters of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering (MSEE) from the University of Pennsylvania's Moore School of Engineering. He has written several non-fiction texts

for engineers, engineering managers, and program managers providing in depth guides for managing high technology programs, for managing high technology proposals where businesses are in a competitive environment, and for learning program management basics applicable for engineering and business management majors alike.

He was born and raised in Queens New York and currently lives on Long Island New York with his wife. They have three grown children and six grand children. He enjoys skiing, sailing, and golf and in his spare time he writes. Having mostly written non-fiction educational material he is currently experimenting with writing fictional accounts of money, sex and power, within the defense industrial complex.

Part 1 – Key People Skills for Survival in a Harsh Stress Inducing Management Style at Work

An easy guide of 30 rules to survive when encountering a
tough stress-inducing executive management environment
and abusive management style
(Don't Answer Statements!)

What follows is not representative of all senior management and although it may be seen as a harsh view of some senior management styles it is not to be seen that this is a bad thing. Rather what follows is intended to aid your behavior in surviving in a 'tough' work environment by understanding the motivation of senior management and thereby help you be successful on your own behalf.

Ultimately it is up to you the reader to decide if they resonate and are worth embracing. There is no guarantee implied or otherwise that the outcomes of choosing to embrace any or all of the rules contained herein are going to be satisfactory for all. It is a guide being shared from personal experience only that worked for me and outcomes may vary widely for each individual.

Author's note and added perspective for the reader

I feel fortunate in that people I care about were kind enough to give me feedback on this and interestingly enough, I've had comments from 'A must read for all who report to someone.' to 'Can be seen as very cynical.'

As I tried to convey up front my intent is to give the reader insights into 'tough' management and suggested guidance as an aid. Work is hard – that's why it's called work and not play. It is hard to work for someone else. Not being in control of your destiny and having your fate in the hands of someone else is unsettling. However, being passionate about the career you choose is a great gift and one should not be deterred by concerns raised by what is contained herein. Let this be ammunition for you to leverage your passion in the midst of turmoil in the workplace should it arise. Know this – layoffs (reductions in force – RIFs) do occur. They are a reality. Some may be due to ineptitude at the top by managers who fail to meet goals; others may be due to eco-political realities that were not planned for. I believe that this read can help you be positioned to deal with them if and when they happen.

Please know this as well. Being in charge is also hard. Management is hard. Whether managing in a corporate environment or as an owner of one's business, being responsible for keeping a business viable is the task of management. So yes, managers reap the rewards of big salaries and incentive compensation for being successful in their role. Only they too work for someone else and they are all vulnerable to being fired (leaving to pursue other interests) when goals are not met. Managers are

responsible to see to it that all those who report to them do their jobs. How good they are at this determines their fate. Managers are in effect at the mercy of their employees. It's one big two way street. I've seen employees spend all day on the phone with their outside interests and obviously failing to do their job while still getting paid by their employer. So the toughness of management has a basis in their experience in that (cynically – yes) 'No good deed goes un-punished.'

So my advice should you choose to take it is 'Live your dream'. I did and the insights I learned and am sharing helped me keep my passion throughout a fair amount of turbulence in my career. It has been said that if you love what you've chosen as a career you'll never feel like you are working. Although it may be harder than you think or would like it to be, nothing feels as good as achieving something that was hard to accomplish.

Forgiveness is asked – Although I reference managers in the rules that follow as a he, I assure you that the managers in question are equally capable of being a she. It just simplified my not having to write he/she throughout the document.

1 - Business is about Making Money

However - Senior Management is mostly about big salaries, large amounts of incentive compensation, wielding power, and sometimes it's also about sex

Those who realize early on in their careers that there is a lot of money to be made in salary, incentive compensation, stock options etc. at the executive level and that there are only a few executive positions relative to the whole employee base have as their only objective - become an executive and stay there. While most folk were taught to believe that it is about doing a good job, doing what is right for the business, and being a decent person in the process, the would be or the existing executive is getting very good at how to rise in the organization, assessing his competitors, and learning to be as manipulative as need be by figuring out how to place blame if things go wrong and how to assure personal gain if things go well. Their actions are based on what is best for them. It is incidental if their decisions align with what is best for the company. They are not to be underestimated. They are intelligent. Moreover they are smart (there is a difference). They know how to survive and they know how to protect their turf, ruthlessly if necessary, and as an aside, often because money and power are seductive, they also may have a girlfriend who they will help rise within the corporation.

2 - Stay clear of the executive's girlfriend if she exists

She may be in some other facility. Those in the know keep their distance from her - they don't dance with her at the Christmas party. When the boss moves up or out she either goes with him or is let go shortly thereafter.

3 - Executives will not be truthful when it suits their purpose

I don't mean this in a bad way. It's the nature of what it took for them to get to where they are. The more an executive protests something is not true particularly if it impacts the employees, the more you can be sure it is true – 'we are not selling the company' – brace yourself for the sale. So don't get too excited if they fail to keep their word when promises are broken and you hear 'Show it to me in writing'.

4 - Companies are run first and foremost for the senior executives

Most executives say that their employees are their most valued asset and that satisfying their customers is their most important goal to return shareholder value. They never even mention themselves. So invert their statement to see the truth. A company is run first and foremost for the senior executives of the company to get their incentive compensation (IC), second for the stockholders, third for the customers, and last for the employees. Executives will manipulate objectives and flow down stress to meet their numbers. Your job is to help assure that the senior executives get their IC. Learn to see your role in this light and you may become a chosen one.

5 - Employees are just commodities to the leadership

Notwithstanding employee awards programs and the like, understand that employees are merely commodities to be hired or fired - bought or sold as needed. Anyone who has experienced a reduction in force (RIF) can attest to this truth. At the end of each day be sure you don't feel someone owes you anything. Any investment in time etc. that you make is just that, an investment with no guarantee of reward. See yourself as a business and as a businessperson and the interrelationship between you and the company will make more sense.

6 - Know your limits Attitude, Ability, and Who You Know determine how far you will rise

In addition to being intelligent and smart, being an executive requires at times what seems like a Machiavellian ruthlessness to reach and remain in power. If you aspire to be in a lead position be sure you know your limits regarding these qualities. Watch the nature channel. The dominant male lion will kill the young of prior leaders so be aware of your alliances. If you are not skilled enough to unseat the leader learn fast to be submissive and assure you are not seen as a threat but rather assure you are seen as an advocate because the dominant executive will remove competitors if need be to quell all contenders.

Generally you need to be 2 for 2 - Good Attitude and Good Ability - to rise up - but not necessarily to the top.

Poor attitude and limited ability - you'll be gone soon

Good attitude and limited ability - they'll find a place for you

Poor attitude and good ability - you'll be too much trouble eventually and will be let go

Lots of 'attitude' and lots of ability and you are 'in the inner circle' - you can rise to the top

7 - There are those who can do no wrong; those who can do no right; and everyone else

Everyone fits into one of these 3 categories.

Those who can do no wrong are the lead person's friends and will rise in the organization on the coat tails of the lead manager. It may feel bad if you are not in this category and are not 'a high potential candidate' but get over it. If you want that category you best move on.

Then there are those who can do no right. If that is your assessment you have to move on and better look for a transfer or a new job. No matter how you achieve results you will never be credited with them. You're most likely a threat to someone in power, or you ticked someone off in power, or you are in a position destined for the lead person's choice of a friend to replace you.

Then there is the general population, those in the middle who if they are capable will be allowed to continue to do their job and although they will never get a seat at the big boys table, they will be OK at least until the next reduction in force (RIF). To succeed here understand your role. If you are a square peg then don't think anything but square thoughts. Do the best "square" job possible and don't stray into "round" areas. Remember management has all the thoughts worth having. If you had a thought that they didn't have it wasn't worth having.

8 - Nepotism and cronyism reign supreme

Fair impartial assessments of internal candidates for internal promotions or selection for filling postings of key positions are anything but fair and impartial. It is not always the selection of the best of the best. If you are not specifically 'reminded' to apply for the position by the person the position will report to, you are not going to be the chosen one. Deal with it. Discrimination exists. It sucks. Get a lawyer or move on.

9 - Human Resources (HR) is an arm of the Company not an arm of the Employees

If you want your boss (and his boss) to get a message, simply approach the head of HR and say 'In confidence please don't pass this on.' and then say what you have to say. Within minutes of your leaving his office the info will be passed to your boss and possibly further up the chain. So, don't complain to HR unless you are sure you don't mind your boss knowing your complaint.

10 - Managers will use Fear, Intimidation and Abuse Don't take it personally

Many managers are not so nice in the work place. Some try to pretend that they are good guys but the really honest ones are proud of instilling fear. Those who manage by fear, intimidation and abuse do so because it has worked for them all their careers. Many years of rewarded behavior will not change. It may be disguised temporarily but under stress it kicks in big time. Personally, I prefer the executive that is up front about being tough rather than the friendly guy that is a back stabber. Of course the really nice guy is preferred. However, he may never become the top dog and therefore is limited in his ability to help you. He can only help to a point because he has to be careful not to jeopardize his own position.

So, don't take management by abuse personally. You are one of dozens that receive the same treatment. Moreover, when your boss goes home at night you are the last person on his mind; so don't assume that you are in trouble and have him on your mind.

11 - Executives engage in Managed Paranoia

Executives fire people periodically just to stay sharp and send the message that they have that power and are ever vigilant and are willing to exercise their power to remain in power.

Remember your only job is to help assure that the senior executives get their annual bonuses and their next level up the ladder. So get good at seeing your role in this light.

12 - Don't become the ball in a game of executive tennis

Executives looking toward the next promotion treat their executive peers as adversaries. At times they'll play the game called "I'm the bigger Kahuna and let me prove it to you". Everything in their path is fair game to use to smash each other. That includes you. It may seem like a friendly game of tennis but be alert that you don't become the ball. Understand it and stay away from them when you see it happening as best you can. It doesn't matter whom you work for. Your own boss will use you with equal indifference to any impact on you as will his adversarial peer in their quest to obtain the next step up the ladder.

13 - Don't look for the company to motivate you

You best be able to be self-motivated because every day 'they' can poke you in the eye and still want you to run that race for them. OK, you're ready to run that race anyway. But then they tell you they will be tying your shoelaces together. "No problem" you say, "I'm your guy". 'You realize we'll be blind folding you'. "Not an issue". 'We'll be putting hurdles on the track as well.' "I can do it". 'Oh, and we'll be dropping you off somewhere but won't be telling you where or where the track is located or what day or time the race starts.' "Better".

14 - You are not among friends
The subject is never what the conversation is about
Everyone has an agenda

When you go into meetings, (business social or otherwise), remember - pretend if you wish but don't ever truly believe that you are among friends. Therefore, watch what you say. Saying nothing is always a good idea depending on the attendees. Even if the mood is stated to be light don't believe it. Don't make jokes. Be serious and if necessary pretend to be at ease but don't drop your guard. The interchange is never really just about the topic – it is a contest of agendas.

15 - No one likes surprises
particularly bad ones and particularly in public

Any lead manager worth anything will know the important issues you are confronting because you were smart enough to brief him privately before a public review and he in turn will have briefed his boss before the review as well. So public meetings are mostly for show.

16 - The purpose of the meeting is to get out of the meeting

Go through the motions to treat executive meetings as info share but your purpose is to get out of the meeting as quick as possible with your liver intact. So in the ‘public’ review, control your own charts in a presentation to the boss. Remember – your boss is the smartest man in the world – even smarter than his boss. So if you are on chart 3 and he asks a question that is addressed on chart 10, skip to chart 10 and your next chart is chart 11, not chart 4. He’ll direct you to go back if he wants to see prior data. Your goal is to get out of the meeting as fast as you can. Don’t feel obligated to tell all your wonderful info. The probability of hearing ‘Wow you are really smart’ is as low as you winning the lottery without buying a ticket especially if you are in a crowd.

17 - Never throw your boss under the bus

If you have to, you take the bullet. If a higher up executive questions you and reprimands you - even if you are following your immediate supervisor's directives - you can't give him up.

18 - Don't answer statements!

Learn to only answer questions and not statements and keep your responses simple. Don't offer more than necessary when responding to questions particularly when others are present. Even though the tone may be such to put you on the defensive, most questions should be responded to with the minimum possible such as "Yes", "No", or "I don't know and I'll get back to you". Your boss is smart. He'll ask more if he wants to know more. So for example, the answer to "Did you just get here?" is yes, or no. Not, "The cat was sick and the car hit a tree and my tummy hurts but I came here anyway because I'm a trooper". Most likely the question is not detrimental and it is just sport to ask in a way to generate fear. After all, the management style that works is management by fear, abuse and intimidation. 'So you didn't get to see the memo that you are being promoted. Congratulations and good luck.'

If yes, no, or I don't know but I'll get back to you later today suffices, say no more. Statements from an executive such as: 'That is the dumbest thing I ever heard' or 'That is never going to solve the problem' are designed to bait you. You'll have an urge to correct the erroneous impression that the boss has. You'll want to explain how you really have considered all possible alternatives and are doing the intelligent thing. Trust me. You will never hear 'Oh, I'm sorry. I guess I was wrong and you are right.' So don't respond to statements and don't react to statements. Keep cool. Keep a look about you that is like the Mona Lisa and ask yourself if that was a question. If not simply move on. You are smart. Know your job well. If statements are rephrased as questions then you own the reply and can nail

it when a more comprehensive discussion is called for if yes or no is not possible.

Also, brief your team to respond in the same way if it is a team presentation. Be sure to advise the functional members of the team to only respond to questions directed to them that are in their areas of expertise. Even if they (and you) know an answer in some other area, the 1st responder is the person responsible for that area. As team lead you should defer the response to the correct responder.

19 - Humor can help or it can hurt

Sometimes humor can help diffuse obnoxious treatment. You say “Don’t hold back. Tell me what you really think.” or “I’m glad you’re a type B”. But it could back fire with ‘You don’t think this is serious?’ or ‘You think this is funny?’ So be very sure of the situation before engaging in humor.

20 - Do not be late for meetings

Some managers will lock the door after a meeting is scheduled to start. If you are late you will experience the pain of knocking and the verbal abuse of not being on time – reasons notwithstanding. Oftentimes you will actually be better off not going into the meeting at all if you are late rather than being late. Forgiveness is easier to get than permission.

21 - Know what is important

If you think some company initiative is the biggest crock that you have ever encountered, you must immediately treat it as the most important thing you have to support. The more you are able to minimize the mental time between transitioning from “This is a Crock” to “Very Important” the better off you will be. You are probably missing information if you don’t agree with decisions being made by your boss, and remember it’s not about what is right for the company. It’s what is right for your boss that drives his decisions.

If your boss says it’s important to get the newspaper then drop everything and get the newspaper, nothing else matters. Of course, if you are doing something you believe is important – e.g. on the phone with General XYZ for example - let him know. He’ll defer to certain conflicts. But mostly, drop what you are doing.

If your boss is too busy to sign off on something that requires his ‘sign-off’ before you can proceed, then paper the trail (e.g. send an email explaining your readiness for his sign-off, need for a meeting, and send him the document, etc.) but do not proceed. If he is too busy, then it is not as important as you think even if you think it is time sensitive. If you have given your opinion on an issue and you feel that the boss is ignoring a significant issue that needs resolution to proceed, having said it once, drop it forever more!

22 - Knowing when to say “I can’t”

Don’t bother saying “No”, or “I can’t” immediately after being given an assignment that conflicts with your ability to comply - especially if there are other people present. Come back later privately and explain the circumstance and you may be successful. Managers are extremely skillful at deflecting any and all criticism, implied or overt. Consequently, their directives reflect upon their own importance and if their directives are questioned or delayed they will exert all measures to enforce the importance of the directive – particularly in public. Your vacation will be cancelled on the spot if necessary to make the point. Whereas, in private, rational resolution has a higher probability of success. There will be a strong urge to speak out immediately about the impossibility to comply particularly as the circumstances are becoming more complex involving many other people and commitments. Nonetheless, be circumspect in your reaction. Avoid even subtle laying of pipe regarding your situation. Wait it out. Then think of a better candidate to take the assignment or other helpful things to reconcile your position.

23 - Impossible assignments

When the assignment is absurd, impossible, or otherwise non-achievable you are still obligated to come up with a plan for achieving the objective even if your plan is equally absurd – “time warp must be invented to go back in time to do this”. Saying that it is not possible is never an acceptable response. You could mouse trap yourself. “This task is like trying to explain the universe in one word.” He’s smart and might respond with ‘Explosive’ and you’ve been had. This is where ability and creativity are required.

Assignments that lack cost and schedule realism or that lack other realisms still mandate a best effort to comply. If the task constraints do not defy the laws of physics, a plan that is totally success oriented with explanations of the risks and possible impacts is an acceptable response.

Tasks that seem to have no relationship to reality require a different level of response. ‘Have a baby in 1 month’ for example. A response could be to suggest adoption and show that you rejected kidnapping. Thinking of a solution even if it deviates from the initial intent is better than admitting defeat. Your boss will know his assignment was not possible. He is looking for a graceful way out as well. You’re smart too. Provide it!

24 - Be a Team Player

You'll hear from the senior staff that it is 'We' and not 'Them and Us' when there are disparate units comprising an organization. Unfortunately when screw-ups occur, most often, one of the elements of the organization is usually responsible. Be sure to think and say "We" but be equally sure to avoid experiencing that "We" are Screwing Me!

25 - Be a Stand-up guy

‘Who did this!?’ It is executive sport to screw with you. The question – ‘Who did this!?’ is often asked in a tone that could be interpreted as you’re in trouble. It is intended to see if you stand-up or let someone else take the hit. The truth will set you free. Most likely the answer “I did”, will elicit the response ‘Very good’. Remember – complements can occur but only after you’ve been messed with.

26 - Provide guidance

Learn to guide folks toward your position. If you feel an impulse to express your real thoughts about another team member's view - "You dumb etc." remember that is the style of leadership that you abhor. Listen and be patient. Then see their real concern and address it professionally and with an easiness that enables them to feel free to express their views. Your job is to be sure that the job of all members of a team is to keep the team leader (you) from erring in their respective disciplines. Unless you are a skilled would be executive with significant Machiavellian abilities, you want their expertise and their views not only on a specific response to your needs but on the intent of your of needs as well.

27 - Are you finished?

When obtaining info from folk working on your project relative to an interim task being complete or not, be sure you understand the job of being in charge. It takes more than just telling people to do something to get it done. It takes follow up. Assuming something is done because someone says so will cause you to fail. “Are you finished?” ‘Yes’. Follow up: “So you have nothing left to do?” ‘No, I still have to’ “Are you done now?” ‘Yes’ “So you have nothing left to do?” ‘No, I still have to’ “Is the task completed?” ‘Yes’ “So you have nothing left to do?” ‘No, I still have to’ “So the task is finished, done, complete, accomplished, concluded, over, but you still have something to do?” ‘Well yes’.

28 - Getting cooperation in a dysfunctional environment

Try this to get cooperation from senior people who are not cooperating: “If you don’t cooperate with me, I’ll tell the executive staff how cooperative and helpful you are. That will ruin your career. But if you help me I’ll let them know what a tough SOB you are. That will put you high up on their good list.”

29 - Ethics

Take Ethics training very seriously and do not ever screw with things like time charging - you will be walked out the door. It doesn't matter that others in high positions may have done bad things to get their bonuses and now every one else has to get trained. It is drop dead serious stuff.

30 - The integral of life is a constant and the only thing that is constant is change

Everyone has a different constant. So, figure out your place, accept it and don't get too excited about the ups or too depressed about the downs. They'll average out. Wait out the bad rather than fight it. People move up or out. Things always change and there may be opportunity in change.

You're intelligent so when in doubt work smarter, harder, and longer. A job is what you make of it. Business is about making money. If you want love get a puppy.

Choices are simple: Stay or Leave; Accept or Change; Be Happy or Be Unhappy.

Part 2 – Key Leadership People Skills for Better & More Effective Relationships at Home & at Work

An easy guide of 20 leadership behavioral competencies worth embracing for better and more effective relationships at home and at work
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Forward

There are relationships that are unhealthy and not meant to be, often due to the indifference of or intransigent nature of one of the participants. When engaged in such a situation where the other person has no interest in committing to make a relationship work or worse makes it clear that in all things it is their way or the highway, then unfortunately the highway may be the only rational option. The alternative might be the possibility of being a willing subjugate in potentially a controlling, manipulative or even an abusive relationship. However, where it is clear that all are committed to wanting a good relationship, there is much that is actionable to make it a success.

It is encouraging to know that one can achieve personal insight and understanding of the drivers that instill gut reactions to situations. Professional counseling and through experiencing the impact of training led by preeminent scholars in the field of behavioral psychology are but two impactful ways to become aware. It is also encouraging to know that once becoming aware of one’s drivers that trigger gut reactions, one can override these reactions that tend to be harmful and allow what I call

‘Rational Decency’ to prevail as an effective behavioral alternative.

It is not realistic to believe that volumes of material on this and related topics written and taught by numerous academicians and other professionals in the field of behavioral psychology can be boiled down to a few Do’s and Don’ts as the path to better relationships. The following is simply my summary of my take-aways from much of what I have been exposed to and have learned and wish I had known earlier in my life. It took me too long to gain these insights that are making my life better and I want to share them to help impart some of this knowledge and wisdom as I see it to help others enjoy better relationships.

Accordingly, compiled herein are my top 20 key behavioral competencies that I find are worth embracing for better relationships. As said above, I call it ‘Rational Decency’ and if the ‘Rules’ that follow seems simplistic I hope that is seen as a good thing, since simple things are easy to embrace. What I can attest to is the fact that I have found these insights to be a very effective guide for success in relating to others. Ultimately it is up to you the reader to decide if they resonate and are worth embracing.

I suggest taking time to think about each ‘Rule’ before moving on to the next one. Thinking of situations that relate to each is a more powerful way to get benefit from this read rather than reading the entire list quickly.

1 - Your life is what you make of it – use your brain and heart to override your gut

Challenging yourself to become aware of your life, of your values, attitudes, beliefs and the experiences that forged them gives you the power to own the insight that they are the drivers of your gut reactions to inputs you receive from others. By using your intellect and compassion to override your gut, you stop attributing ill intent to others to affect you poorly. With understanding comes accountability and responsibility and there is no need for excuses, no blaming of others for poor behavior and failing to display inherent decency toward others particularly under duress. You retain the power.

2 - You find what you look for – it is a choice

How you see things is a choice. Learn to see that most people are well intentioned and refrain from attribution of ill intent when issues arise. If you chose to look for their inherent decency you will find it. Of course we are also all fallible and if you chose to look for failings you will find them as well. Consider your purpose and intent and the traits of others that will enable you to be effective. What you look for is a choice. Understand that we all have our own set of values, attitudes, beliefs and experiences that can drive our actions. Although we may have values that align with each other they rarely are identical and the ability to relate to the other's drivers is key to understanding what their reaction will be to a style and content of communication. Choose to see your experiences (good and bad) as positives to make you both stronger in adversity as well as empathetic when relating to others.

3 - We define ourselves by our actions

We are not defined by the things that we do that are inappropriate or hurtful, but rather we define ourselves by what we do once we are made aware or realize that what we have done is hurtful and alien to who we want to be. No one is perfect. We all can fail and be hurtful. What we do after defines us. Being accountable and available to see the harm while being empathetic and apologetic eases the pain as opposed to ducking and hiding. Moreover, making amends by doing positive things adds emphasis to expressions of regret and helps further to undo the hurt.

4 - Apologize and Forgive

Apologizing and forgiving are two sides of the same coin and both parties benefit. The person apologizing makes the other feel relief and as a result feels better also. The person forgiving makes the other feel relief and by letting go of feeling injured feels better also. Both acts enhance character and 'ease the pain'.

5 - You come last not first when leading

Seeing your role as assuring that everyone else is having a good time, is comfortable, is happy, is getting the best of everything is effective leadership. You offer to help before being asked and if asked to help no matter how comfortable you are you move out of your comfort zone and help. You come last not first when helping to lead a family, (both core family and extended family). You give it up for them and don't expect it to be the other way around.

6 - Get over yourself

To be effective in helping to lead (particularly in leading a family), get over yourself - meaning don't expect to be listened to as though your edicts are to be followed without question. Value contrarian views. Encourage dissent. Be a good listener. Saying I understand is more effective than saying I hear you. Guiding decisions using the Socratic approach can be very effective to help develop a consensus and the wisdom of the outcome to become apparent. Be accepting of the way others approach issues rather than only valuing your way.

7 - Know you can come across other than intended

Arrogance can destroy the ability to be effective. Know you can come across other than intended and saying so helps those you wish to influence relax in your presence. When interacting to influence others it is not about whose facts and data and reasons are right and whose are wrong. Facts and data and reasons are always in dispute. A person's 'drivers' can be so strong that they will never be convinced by any method of exhorting them to change or act as you wish. It is about being their ally and aligning yourself with their objectives so they can feel comfortable to respond in kind. Displaying some humility, doubt and equivocation when communicating helps build bridges of common ground rather than arguing differences. "I'm not totally sure and you have a point....". Assuring your commitment to win-win solutions and not solutions that are at someone's expense helps the situation to be seen as people on the same side of the table problem solving together and not on opposite sides in an adversarial position.

8 - Make those around you feel safe in your presence

Know you can be a force to reckon with and be conscious that you don't overwhelm others. You don't want them to shut down and you don't want to win at their expense. Learn to display a respect for the other person, a respect for their perspective and values. Value their inherent decency as a person and the inherent goodness of their intent. Understand what drives them and make them see you as their ally. Make them feel safe in your presence. The 1st verbal assault or criticism tends to raise one's defenses. It may cause one to respond in kind, or one may simply begin to tune out the person seen as engaged in verbal abuse. The goal is to gain and maintain their respect and for them to understand and value your intent and decency so you enhance your ability to be effective. Phrasing your desire as a request as in asking for a favor or asking for help is often the simplest way to be effective.

9 - Make those around you feel good about themselves in your presence

Saying things that show you value those you are trying to influence and making it clear that you are appreciative of them and that they should be proud of themselves helps make those around you feel good about themselves in your presence and will tend to make them supportive of your desires. Avoiding any attribution of ill intent or any negative attribution of qualities is key to being effective when attempting to influence change or actions that you wish to take hold. The Golden Rule ‘Treat others as you would have them treat you’ is as a minimum a good test of one’s reaction. Better still is the Platinum Rule: ‘Treat others as they would have you treat them!’

10 - Be receptive to criticism and say thank you for telling me

Know you are human and are capable of doing inappropriate things. Be receptive to criticism and complaints. Learn to say 'thank you for telling me' as opposed to a debate proving how right you are.

If you are on the receiving end of a complaint and you begin to experience discomfort and perceive the communication as a verbal assault try to communicate your desire to be 'enabled' 'because you want to be responsive to the complaint' if some of the attribution of ill intent could be dropped. Then get right back to the complainer's issue and avoid deflection. Relate to their pain and frustration and be empathetic.

Behave appropriately independent of the other's behavior. It will help quell the potential combativeness of the interaction. Be conscious of your own drivers when being complained to and you'll be better able to deal with complaints, which are always received as criticism - and no one likes criticism.

11 - Avoid displaying negative feelings

Only display positive feelings – love, happiness – avoid displaying negative feelings - anger etc. - those require delicate discussion if at all particularly when you feel the need to complain. The past cannot be undone and a dumping session usually falls on deaf ears or instigates fruitless confrontation. The goal of a complaint should be to influence future behavior – avoidance of actions or acting differently. Remember that there are always two sides to differences so create a solution to your complaint in a win-win environment.

Controlling the externalization of one's behavior so as not to display via body language, tone and volume of voice, or the verbalization (written or spoken) of negative feelings such as anger or disappointment in an attributive way is key to influencing others. Avoid being patronizing and avoid sarcasm. Perception is reality so be perceived as the reality of whom you aspire to be.

It is a constant challenge to avoid the pitfalls of poor behavior. Being tired, frustrated, or angry, or being unable to feel in control of those things that are crucial to ones values cannot be allowed to cause one to lose sight of how to behave to be effective. For example, you can be angry, you can feel angry, however you should not display anger. Deal with it dispassionately. To fail will be to fail to be effective on one's own behalf and may also wind up harming those cared for most.

12 - Never give up on your family

You may chose to remain silent because you don't want the backlash when observing situations outside your inner circle that you believe need intervention. But for your family, you put yourself out there even if it requires tough love that may cause you to be disliked for your actions. You never give up on your family no matter how difficult. Ultimately you will be seen as their advocate.

13 - Commit to Rational Decency by assuring outcomes are not at the others expense

Commit to find win-win solutions and there will never be a reason to ever 'fight'. Assure outcomes are not at the others expense as you assure they are not at yours. Work as hard as need be to make this a truism. Being rational and being decent when attempting to resolve potentially contentious issues should be key behavioral competencies that everyone should embrace. Bullying or being controlling or manipulative by anyone to get one's way is anathema. Even compromise implies that both parties lose something in the exchange. Whereas, if both parties work hard, both can be 'influenced' to a new definition of an agreement where both feel it's a win.

14 - 'Never lose it'

Lead by example. You can never lose your composure or self-control. Period. No one wants to see the person they depend on to ever 'lose it'. Falling apart emotionally, acting out, yelling, making threats, displaying any negativity, and failing to adhere to the appropriate behaviors is not acceptable. Learn to manage your stress. Get therapy if need be. In front of those you are leading your issues cannot be seen – it is just too scary. You may be tested by how the others treat you. Nonetheless, to lead and be effective it is essential to always assure their safety. Confidence in you is often just a measure of how you conduct yourself in the midst of turmoil.

15 - When worrying works then worry

Much of life is about managing stress and there is a logic to effective stress management. By assessing the likelihood of occurrence and degree of impact of issues on your mind you can decide which issues should be dismissed and which are actionable. Logically dismiss the low probability of occurrence issues since most likely they simply will not happen. Similarly dismiss the low impact issues – so what if they happen; and in general dismiss anything you have no control over. For those issues that remain and that you can do something about, create actionable tasks to manage them and then take action. Try not to just worry. Logically, live by the edict that ‘When worrying works then I’ll worry’.

Please note: The above is not intended to appear arrogant about managing extreme stress due to serious life issues such as concern for loved ones, health issues, job loss, marriage issues, child issues, and so on. Reliance on self-awareness and following the thoughts articulated above may not be sufficient to alleviate stress under such extremes and in such instances, it may be beneficial to seek professional help when dealing with such extreme stress - which is in effect 'taking action'.

16 - Ten hot topics to handle with care

In life there are only a few “Hot Buttons” but they are beauties. My top 10: Money, Family, Raising Children, Job Pressures, Friends, Sex, Health Issues, Safety Concerns, Religion, and Politics. People can get very passionate about these. Tread softly when engaged in discussions on these issues. A warning flag should go up in your mind when any of these topics arise. They are infinitely more dangerous than dealing with what movies or restaurants you like or dislike. In a relationship, having shared values on these 10 topics is key. Be willing to agree that you disagree with acceptance of the differences where alignment is not possible. However, it really is a must to find win-win solutions here.

17 - Never say 'But' when relating to others

Eliminate the word "But" from your speak when interacting to influence others. It negates all that preceded it. 'I love you but...' or 'Great idea but' Translation on part of recipient 'you do not love me' or 'it is not a great idea' and the person probably will tune out all that follows. Try replacing 'but' with 'and': 'Great idea and if we can etc. etc. etc...we can really make it work'.

Similarly, using 'What' instead of 'Why' is more of an enabler. For example, replacing 'Why are you angry?' with 'What is causing you to feel angry?' will elicit a more productive response. 'Why are you angry?' can come across as being critical of the person whereas 'What is causing you to feel angry?' focuses on the issue not the person.

18 - Express only what you feel and not attribution of the other's intent

Using the phrase 'I feel' or 'It feels' when expressing yourself about an issue avoids attribution of ill intent on the part of the recipient: 'I know you do not realize that it feels like you are not concerned when you do that' as opposed to 'You are not concerned'... Statements that presuppose the other's position are not fair. Let them express themselves as to their intent. All you can do that is legitimate is say what they are doing or saying feels like to you. The phrase 'I feel' or 'it feels like' diminishes the attribution of deliberate intent on the part of the other and enables the person to receive your issue as a request for help so you can 'feel' better. It helps the person being complained to say 'If I came across that way, that was not my intent' which is an easier response than feeling pressure to admit any wrongdoing. It reaches out to the best in the other and aids your goal, which is to be effective and not to just have a dumping session.

19 - The only person you can control is yourself

You cannot control others. When things do not go as wished try to look inward and challenge yourself as to how you could behave differently to be more effective rather than engage in blaming others. Sure there are thresholds when crossed that can break anyone's determination to act appropriately. Still that is what it is all about isn't it - Not acting inappropriately no matter what. So remember, the only person you can control is yourself; don't give others the power to affect you poorly.

20 - Avoid catastrophizing

When things go awry don't blow them out of proportion. The desire for an immediate fix may be strong yet immediacy is generally unreasonable. Know it is not the end of the world. Things will get better eventually because ultimately, everyone wants a good relationship.