

# THE FEEDBACK POCKETBOOK

By Mike Pezet

*Drawings by Phil Hailstone*

"A straight-talking guide to creating a better understanding of the feedback process. Advocating awareness of the beliefs and values that underpin the joint feedback relationship, the critical skill of feedback is presented here with clarity, offering powerful, simple and effective tips."

**David Harrison, Director, Kendal Specsavers**

"Gives clear guidance on how to give feedback that improves performance, and provides an invaluable addition to any manager's toolkit. The book demonstrates how structured feedback significantly improves employee motivation and uses robust academic research to guide professional practice in a way that is stimulating and accessible."

**Sue Gill, Lecturer in Business Management, Salford Business School**

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## PERCEPTION

### OVERVIEW



People won't accept feedback if they don't believe it to be credible or accurate. If they won't accept it, to what degree, if any, has it been effective?

It's important to appreciate that the foundations of good feedback are the **judgements** you form as a consequence of what you observe, ie your perception. Misunderstandings largely result from differences in perception between the parties involved.

Most people don't give their perception or its influence much thought. Indeed studies demonstrate that the majority of people assume everyone's perception is similar to their own.



## PERCEPTION

### OVERVIEW



Your perception is shaped by your unique experiences, needs, values and expectations. These influence and distort not only what you pay attention to, but also the stories you subliminally develop to form your judgements. Because of those unique distortions we all see the world differently. Yet many of us still feel perplexed when our colleagues see situations differently from ourselves!

By understanding some of those distortions, and learning to use some simple techniques, you will be able to reduce perceptual differences and consequently make your feedback more effective. To help you, this chapter will look at:

- The magnifying glass effect on your perception
- Inferences you use to add detail
- Attributions you make to explain why something happened
- Horns or halo
- Observer – Actor effect

## PERCEPTION

### THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



The first step for managing your perception is to acknowledge that it is inevitable you will distort not only what you see going on around you, but also the stories you'll develop to explain events.

One such distortion influences what captures your attention. It acts like a magnifying glass, concentrating your attention on distinctive features within a situation, namely people and their behaviour, while blurring your awareness of the impact of environmental influences.

The magnifying glass distortion means that people, and their actions, become the most prominent feature that you'll recall in your explanatory stories. The implication for feedback is that your judgement may be unbalanced, because in your recollection behaviour will be more important than environmental factors.



## PERCEPTION

### THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



Take this example.

Derek, a very competent manager, developed a directive style that captured people's attention. When his project fell behind on time and profit people perceived that it was caused by the effect of his management style. He was moved sideways and eventually left the company.

A later investigation found, however, that the conditions for failure were in place long before Derek joined the project. The initial negotiations to establish the terms of the contract were complex and had been inadequate.

But in reviewing the situation at the time, everybody had underestimated the effect of the environmental factors and focused their gossip and feedback on his personality and behaviour.

## PERCEPTION

### OTHER DISTORTIONS



Distortion of your perception also occurs through the explanations you make to account for situations. Like a detective, you'll piece together bits of information to build stories that explain what you see. The trouble is you're more akin to the amateur detective whose equipment is a bit skewed!

The equipment is skewed by manageable distortions such as inferences. **Inference** is the process of selectively filtering what you perceive in a situation in order to support the conclusions you have already formed.



## PERCEPTION

### INFERENCE – I KNOW I’M RIGHT!



Stories need detail to make them plausible and support your beliefs. One way you’ll add detail to what you perceive is through making inferences. The main information you’ll use for this is that vast collection of trusted knowledge and experience you have.

Consider your mind as a well-used computer hard drive; it’s fast-ish and full of all sorts of essential software. Software such as experience, beliefs, values, needs, expectations, etc. So you look at a situation and add detail to build a story that fits your view of the world. The process is somewhat like a wonky calculator:



You gather information from your senses

You add your inbuilt beliefs, assumptions, etc

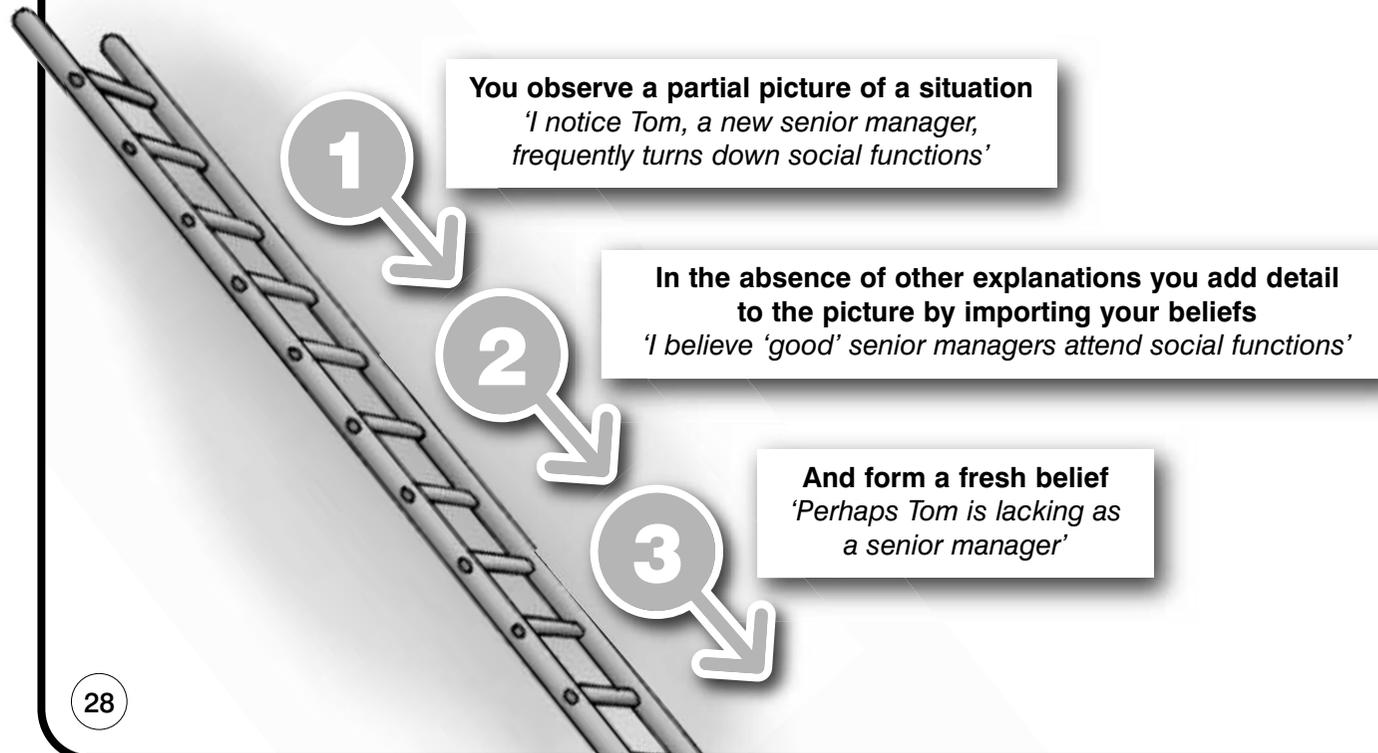
**RESULT!**  
It doesn’t quite reflect reality but it will certainly do for an explanation!

The trouble is that when unrestrained inferences become ‘facts’ or ‘the truth’ you undermine someone’s perception of the accuracy of your feedback.

## PERCEPTION

# LADDER OF INFERENCE

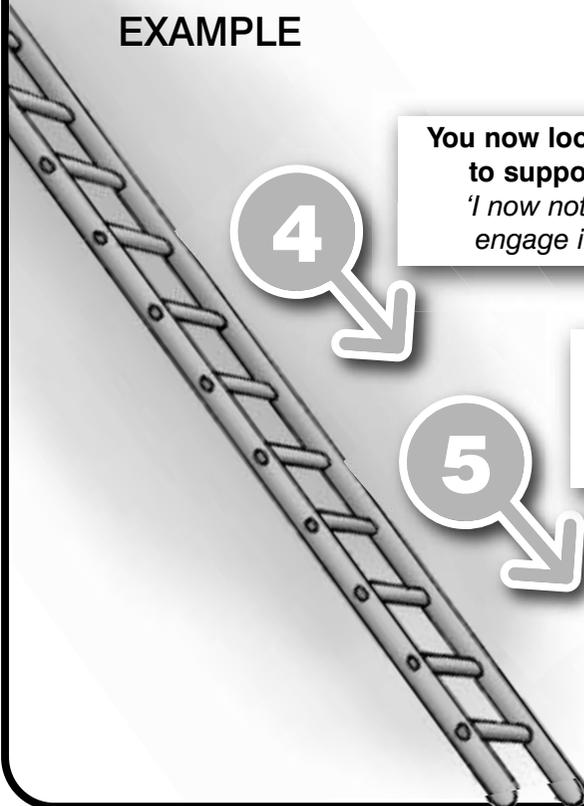
## EXAMPLE



## PERCEPTION

# LADDER OF INFERENCE

## EXAMPLE



4

**You now look for further evidence to support your new beliefs**  
*'I now notice that Tom doesn't engage in much social chat'*

5

**And so your new beliefs become the 'truth'**  
*'Tom doesn't have social skills and is definitely lacking as a senior manager'*



## PERCEPTION

# LADDER OF INFERENCE

## EXAMPLE



The gossip led to people questioning Tom's suitability. His inability to attend social functions was a genuine problem for the company because senior managers were ambassadors for the organisation. However, those unchecked inferences became 'fact' and Tom received ambiguous and confusing feedback.

The situation changed when one manager decided to check the accuracy of the inferences. The manager became aware of two issues affecting Tom's performance. Firstly, he was providing intense personal care to his critically ill partner. Secondly, Tom believed that senior managers should not discuss their private lives. That belief prevented him from allowing people to appreciate his situation and give him support.

Once the actual, rather than inferred, problem was clarified and understood, a combination of feedback, constructive dialogue and problem solving enabled the company to work at a solution that suited both them and Tom.

## PERCEPTION

## ATTRIBUTIONS



Along with unrestrained inferences, your **attributions** also distort your perception. Attributions are the explanations you develop to account for what caused things to happen. When you make an attribution you'll blame the cause of events, or someone's behaviour, on either the person or the environment.

Like inferences, attributions are semi-conscious habits that everyone takes for granted. However, knowingly or not, your attributions can contain the seeds of blame and make people feel defensive in feedback situations.

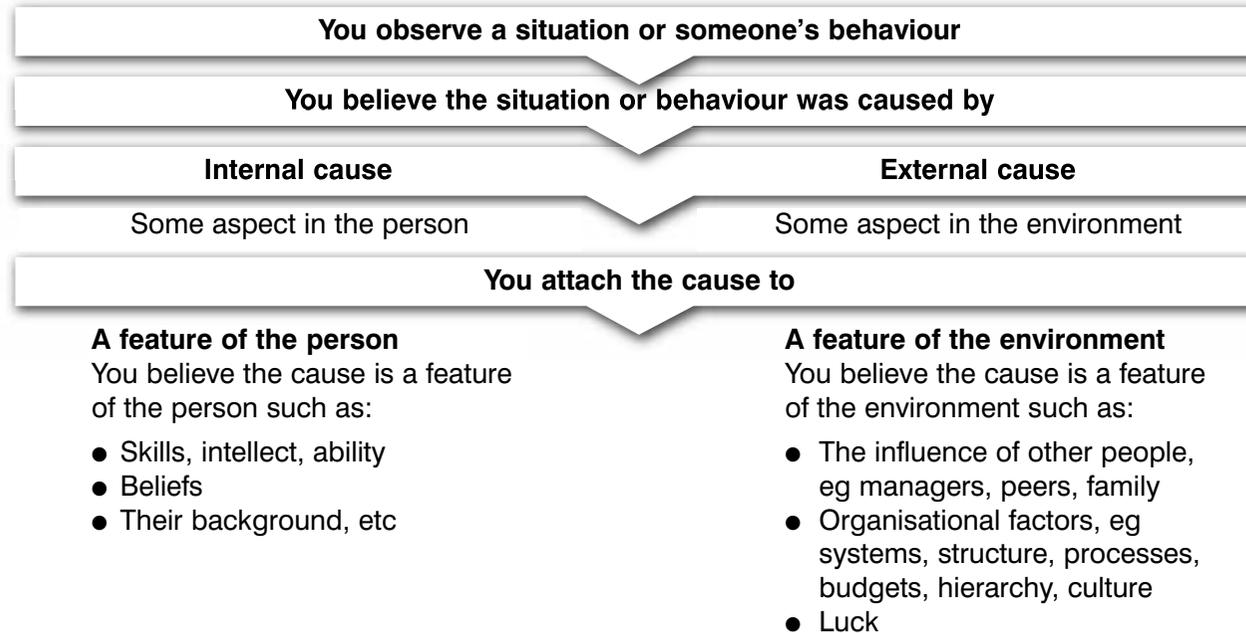
One of the most beneficial actions you can take to increase the acceptance of your feedback, therefore, is to master the attributions you make. See the diagram on the next page.

## PERCEPTION

# ATTRIBUTION – HOW WE DO IT!



The diagram gives an idea of how you explain why a situation occurred.



## PERCEPTION

# ATTRIBUTION – HOW WE DO IT!



### You consider the cause was

Generally controllable by the person

Generally not controllable by the person

### The blame for causing the situation or behaviour is

#### On the person

They are largely to blame for what happened

#### On external factors

The person is largely blameless for what happened

## PERCEPTION



## EXAMPLES OF ATTRIBUTION

Here are some attributions you'll hear every day at work. See if any sound familiar:

- She succeeded because she thought ahead and anticipated what was required
- She succeeded because she had a lot of support
- He must be late for the meeting because of traffic problems
- He is always late for meetings because he's so disorganised
- He should have known better than to order those goods
- He had no choice; the department head told him to go ahead
- Who can blame her for being negative; the culture in that whole department is negative
- She should change her attitude and stop being so negative, it's bringing everyone else down
- Lucky he was in the right place at the right time
- He worked hard to get that promotion

What causes are being blamed? Where does control of the cause lie in each example?  
How do you think a recipient might react if these were feedback statements?

## About the Author

**Mike Pezet, BA Hons, MSc (Personal and Organisational Development).**

Mike has been helping organisations and people develop their confidence and their ability to use feedback more effectively for over 15 years. For the last eight years he has worked extensively with leading UK and international companies, designing and delivering leadership programmes that are measured by bottom line results.

Mike is a trained coach, mediator and facilitator. He is interested in and welcomes feedback from those of you who wish to share any insights or stories from your use of this book, or your own feedback experiences.

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