

# People skills

*Power is not revealed by striking hard or often, but by striking true.—Honoré de Balzac*

Charles and Carla Coonradt tell the story of an immense, 19,000-pound whale, Shama, that is taught in Sea World, Florida, to jump 22 feet out of the water and perform tricks. How do you suppose they teach the whale to do that?

A typical managerial approach would be to mount a rope at 22 feet high out of the water, and encourage the whale to sail over it. "Jump, whale!" Maybe get a bucket of fish up there, reward the whale when it does the right thing. Set goals! Aim high! And you and I know the whale would stay right where it was.

The Coonradts say, "So how do the trainers at Sea World do it? Their number-one priority is to reinforce the behavior that they want repeated—in this case, to get a whale or porpoise to go over the rope. They influence the environment every way they can so that it supports the principle of making sure that the whale can't fail. They start with the rope below the surface of the water, in a position where the whale can't help but do what's expected of it. Every time the whale goes over the rope, it gets positive reinforcement. It gets fed fish, patted, played with, and most important, it gets that reinforcement.

"But what happens when the whale goes

under the rope? Nothing—no electric shock, no constructive criticism, no developmental feedback, and no warnings in the personnel file. Whales are taught that their negative behavior will not be acknowledged.

Positive reinforcement is the cornerstone of that simple principle that produces such spectacular results. And as the whale begins to go over the rope more often than under, the trainers begin to raise the rope. It must be raised slowly enough so that the whale doesn't starve, either physically or emotionally.

"The simple lesson to be learned from the whale trainers is to over-celebrate. Make a big deal out of the good and little stuff that we want consistently. Secondly, under-criticize. People know when they screw up. What they need is help. If we under-criticize, punish and discipline less than is expected, people will not forget the event and usually will not repeat it."

We need to make it difficult for people to fail, so there can be less criticism and more celebrations.



## Be slow...

Slow to suspect—quick to trust,  
 Slow to condemn—quick to justify,  
 Slow to offend—quick to defend,  
 Slow to expose—quick to shield,  
 Slow to belittle—quick to appreciate,  
 Slow to demand—quick to give,  
 Slow to provoke—quick to help,  
 Slow to resent—quick to forgive.

**...be quick!**

If you want to be successful with people, take them where they are at, and encourage each step in a better direction. Love the people you are around by expressing admiration openly and praying for them privately. Ask God what their needs and dreams and desires are, and then help them fulfill them. Ask God to help you understand them, and to show you what your attitude, approach, and actions toward them should be like. He'll help you, because He loves us all, in spite of our shortcomings. His love can help us all to be what He knows we can be, and your love can do the same for others.

—Chloe West