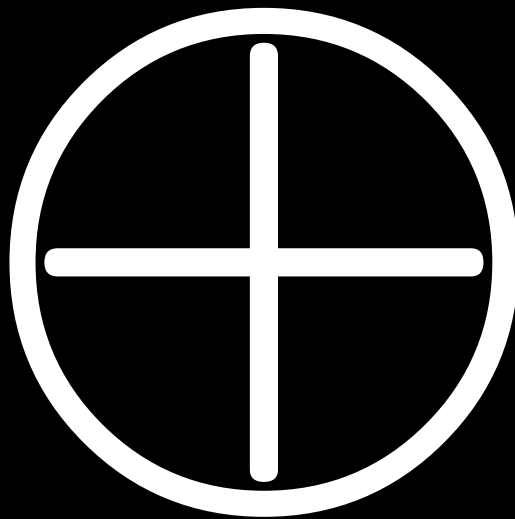


# Improvements

focus on the positive

a OnePageBook™



Geir Isene & Brendan Martin

*”Thank you for excellent service. You are a truly empathetic, service minded person. You listen carefully, you understand my needs and you reply simply and effectively with a great deal of personal warmth“.*

Blushing. *”Sir, you have to be service minded in my job“.*

*”No, actually. You don’t. I have encountered plenty that are rather bad at servicing clients in your job. And a rare few are at your level.“*

*”Uh. Hum. Hem. Ehh...“*

*”Let’s try this again: Thank you for excellent service. You are a truly empathetic, service minded person.“*

*”Thank you.“*

*”There you go :-)”*

This a common exchange when I compliment someone in the service industry – or indeed any industry.

Most people are doing north of 90% good results. Still, more than 90% of the feedback they get is usually criticism. That is not only unfair, it’s unhealthy and unproductive.

The tendency to focus on the weak points seems inherent in most cultures. *”We should improve our weaknesses“* is often touted as a self evident truth. I would argue that this tendency is one of the few weak traits we actually should improve upon.

People acquire strengths by working hard to improve those traits. Hard work is mostly inspired by inner motivation, a passion. It is far easier for a person to improve in an area where they have an intrinsic motivation to become better. By focusing on improving a person’s strength, you are aligning your efforts with that person’s passion. By insisting they improve their weaknesses, you are working against that person’s motivation. That is much harder and most often a serious waste of time.

That brilliant introvert programmer who is an unstructured mess is approached by the CEO: *”Thomas! Seriously, you need to get your act together. We need you to do a professional, structured presentation of the high level concepts of our new strategic product. Not that freaking mess you just pulled off in that meeting.“*

The girl that outperforms the second best sales guy by more than 50% is approached by the Sales Manager: *”Hey Lisa! Can’t you ever follow our corporate standard for selling our product? Could you please just stick to our standard script. You are terrible at following instructions. You should improve on that.“*

Help the programmer to learn more programming languages and new technology. Help the girl to understand why she is fantastic at sales even though she is not following the script. Maybe that is exactly why? And maybe the script can be improved when you understand *her* better? If you could help Lisa better understand why she is such a marvel at sales, she could increase her sales by 10% – a business case that would outshine any improvement made to her weaker sides.

While I’m not advocating that we should never improve any weak points, the overreaching tendency to focus on lagging traits is damaging for businesses, for relations, for you.

When you really need a person to improve a weakness, you must help the person find an intrinsic motivation to do so. Anything less makes for an uphill battle – against that person’s inner motivation. It’s you against another’s strong passion. By helping the person find a real reason to improve a lagging trait, you can work together to improve a factually damaging weakness.

You can encouraging a person’s strengths simply by acknowledging them. Then give detailed praise to show how those strengths affect you. Rather than just *”Great presentation, Tom“*, you should tell Tom exactly why it was great. *”Great presentation, Tom. You got across your main point by not serving too many additional points. You were clear in your message and the anecdotes you told served to highlight that main point. And you were excellent at responding to the audience’s questions.“* If Tom replies *”Thanks. Anything I could improve?“*, you should give one, and only one point of improvement. And the easier it is for Tom to improve it, the better. *”You’d do even better if you had less text on your presentation slides. That would make it easier for the audience to follow you. With lots of text, the audience must multitask between reading the slides and simultaneously hearing what you say. Most people find that hard.“*

**Scenario 1:** You hire a new team member and are eager to shoot down her motivation. Simply remove any room for creativity by micromanaging and explain in detail how you want everything to be done. Then order lots of improvements at once.

**Scenario 2:** You hire a new team member and are eager to help the person produce value. Get out of her way. Encourage by giving specific praise. Focus on one improvement at a time.

All of this actually boils down to a very simple life principle:

*”Do that which helps and not that which doesn’t help.“*

This OnePageBook™ helps you focus on positive improvements. Build upon a person's inner motivation and passion to bring about the best in that person.

The publisher, "Å" (A-Circle AS, [www.acircle.no](http://www.acircle.no)) carries the slogan, "Boosting performance". The company helps teams and individuals to higher performance, reaching their potential.

The authors can be contacted here:

Geir Isene: [geir@a-circle.no](mailto:geir@a-circle.no)

<http://isene.com>

Brendan Martin: [brendan@a-circle.no](mailto:brendan@a-circle.no)

<http://brendanmartin.com>



"The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement."  
(Helmut Schmidt)

"Nothing is more effective than sincere, accurate praise,  
and nothing is more lame than a cookie-cutter compliment."  
(Bill F. Walsh)

"There are two things people want more than sex and money...  
recognition and praise."  
(Mary Kay Ash)



Oslo, Norway, 2021-06-15