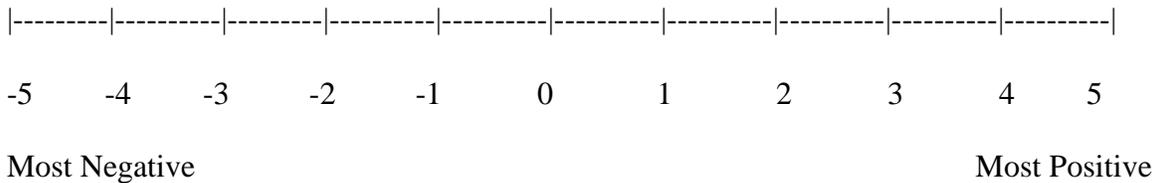


The Relationship Scale

The quality of the relationships and the level of your conflict with co-workers have wide ranging impacts on your own life and the rest of the workplace. However, improving relationships and communication is difficult to measure and talk about. It is hard to quantify what is wrong or right in a relationship. Once trust slides beneath a certain level, relationships just feel bad and it is tough to see how they might be made better.

Here is a scale that shows levels of the quality of the relationship. Keep in mind that it is the quality of the relationship, not the quality of the other person.



+5 is the positive ideal and -5 is the most negative possibility. A -2 is very negative but is usually a level that people can tolerate, even though it consumes much of their attention and makes their experience of life feel bad. A -3 is even more negative and feels intolerable to most people. Usually, people are either off on stress leave or taking more extreme actions to “deal” with the stress. We call the -2 to -3 transition the “stress line”. Applying the 10 point scale to each of your relationships within your workplace, assess as honestly as possible where each relationship is at. Consider how that number has changed over time. No doubt, you will score some of your relationships high. Be careful to look honestly at the differences you feel, even among the people with whom you relate easily. Note to yourself what makes those relationships different. Then focus on your more negative individual relationships. Again, ask yourself what makes the subtle differences in your ranking. Include a wide variety of people in your work life.

What changes (benchmarks) would be observable if someone was to move over the stress line? (from a -3 to a -2). What would be different in their actions? What would be different in the way you felt/reacted? What would be present in your interaction that was not there before? What would no longer be present?

Remember, you can have a significant impact (maybe up to 1 or 2 whole points) by simply focusing on improving your own role in the relationship. That fact gives you an enormous amount of power to improve your circumstances. Also, don't worry too much about leaping from -3.5 to +2. This goal is unrealistic. You would be doing well and significantly improve both your lives and the lives of coworkers around you if you moved one point toward the positive end.

Kim Miller/Tim Nickel, The Dispute Resolution Office