



Source: Transactional Analysis - Eric Berne

Introduction

- Man is by nature a social animal...
- ...Who is essentially seeking affective satisfactions that will enable him to develop as harmoniously as possible.
- Human beings have a fundamental VITAL need: to be recognized and accepted by others as a specific individual.

Signs of recognition, or "Strokes"

Any act that involves recognition of the presence, the existence of another person.

A stroke can be either:

- verbal or non-verbal:** e.g. "Hello" or a wink
- positive or negative:** a compliment or a criticism
- conditional or unconditional:** the former is factual, precise and detailed, it is concerned with "what we do", e.g. *"your report is excellent"* or *"your cake is nothing special"*. The latter is more personal, it is related to "who we are" in an overall sense: e.g. *"I love you"*, or *"I can't stand the sight of you"*,
- obtained by a direct request** (e.g. *"what do you think of...?"*) **or an indirect request** (e.g. a mind game).

Strokes comply with a fundamental human rule: it is better to receive a negative stroke than no stroke at all, or in other words: *anything beats indifference*. The hunger for recognition is a vital need; for example, children will not hesitate to do something naughty even if it means getting told off by their parents if they have the feeling that the latter are not paying them enough attention.

In the same way, an adult who is feeling sidelined during a working meeting may consciously or unconsciously implement strategies to get noticed, such as tapping a pen on the table or knocking over a glass.

Strokes	Positive	Negative
Conditional	+25	-50
Unconditional	+100	Absolutely forbidden!

Positive conditional: these strokes are aimed at fostering success and are necessary in any education, training or management process.

Positive unconditional: these are used to further personal development, providing positive stimulation, urging stroke receivers onwards to achieve real goals, to take initiatives, and to react in an empowered way making good use of all one's capacities.

Negative conditional: these are intended to dissuade someone from going in the opposite direction to the one that has been given to them. They are essential for pointing people in the right direction (for an activity, at work, in a relationship) but they are not directly productive. They provide a necessary complement to indications provided by a positive conditional stroke. However, if they are used too frequently, to the detriment of positive strokes, they will perform a function of control and establishing standards rather than fostering creativity and autonomy.

Negative unconditional: these inform the receiver of the actions or behaviour that they are being criticized for. Unfortunately they tend to freeze difficult situations that might otherwise have evolved in a positive way.

Learning to say "NO", respecting oneself and the other person, is one possible way of avoiding negative unconditional strokes.

Using strokes

A certain amount of practice can enable someone to discover where there "stroke economy" has become frozen... for example, some managers know all too well how to give negative strokes but are not so prolific when it comes to positive ones.

To be a proficient "stroke practitioner", it is essential to know how to:

- Receive strokes
- Give strokes
- Request strokes
- Refuse strokes

The question to ask oneself: "What levers can I pull to change the way that my team members interact with one another?"