

Workplace  
Wisdom  
For  
9 To Thrive

*Proven tactics and hacks  
to get ahead in today's workplace*

*Nina Sunday*

First published in Australia in 2018 by:

Brainpower Training Pty Ltd, Brisbane, Australia. [www.brainpowertraining.com.au](http://www.brainpowertraining.com.au)

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The National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Sunday, Nina

Workplace Wisdom for 9 to Thrive: Proven tactics and hacks to get ahead in today's workplace  
ISBN-13: 978-0-9942353-2-9

1. Personal management. 2. General Management. 1. Title 658.3

Edited by Helena Bond

Internal layout by Elizabeth Beeton

Cover design by Elizabeth Beeton

Cover artwork by Praylin Paulraj Shinijah

Cover Image, 'Abstract Hallway with Many Doors', Stock illustration ID: 27559354, Shutterstock.

This book is dedicated to all my friends and fellow authors at  
Professional Speakers Australia who inspire me to write.

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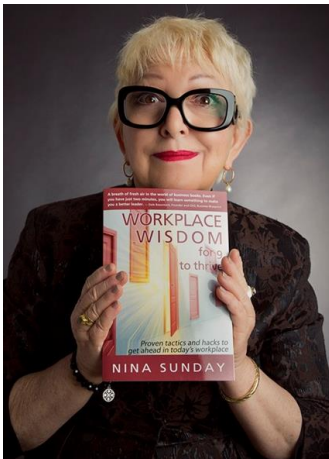
### Brainpower Smart Study:

How To Study Effectively	Book	ISBN 978 0 9751941 5 7
Time Management	eBook	ASIN B00DE2X34Q
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# INTRODUCTION

Predictions around disruption to the world of work declare there is a new work order. Young people today may have 17 jobs in five different careers. Portfolio careers are on the rise i.e. not one job, one employer, but multiple jobs and employers, perhaps over more than one profession.

In a tech world, it's high social skills that help you stand out and get ahead. The best managers are outstanding communicators who know how to lead a team, collaborate with a diverse range of people and able to influence peers and customers to take action. They know it's not what you say but how you say it that makes the difference. Word choice and how we use language impacts the way we persuade others. In the age of disruption, being adept at human interaction is rewarded with higher wages.

Being average at your job is over. Not being interdisciplinary can harm your career. To thrive in a rapidly changing world, managers and teams need to continuously improve all aspects of their workplace know-how: the art of communication and influence, productivity, sales and service, leading people and creating a conscious and transparent workplace culture.

To future-proof your employability in a VUCA world, (short for volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous), constant reinvention is the key to keeping up, evolving and staying relevant. Your job IS change. It's up to you to stay change agile and continuously grow and reboot your brain. I trust this book will help you achieve the getting of workplace wisdom.

## *How to use this book*

### *For managers*

Each chapter is a stand-alone piece of micro-learning. Copy a chapter to distribute to your team and invite them to read before the next team meeting. You'll find a list of trigger questions in the article *How to Brainstorm* within the *Stay Curious* section, such as:

- What can we **start** doing?

- What can we **stop** doing?
- What can we do **more of**?
- What can we do **less of**?
- What can we **improve**?

And when you've captured in writing a wish-list of next actions, then rate each suggestion as an A, B, C or D according to its priority, for example:

- A. low effort, high payoff – do first
- B. low effort, low payoff – do next
- C. high effort, high payoff – just get started with the first action-step
- D. high effort, low payoff – don't bother

### *For individual contributors*

Show this book to your manager and volunteer to copy a chapter to send around, with your manager's blessing, to team members with the invitation to read then participate in an ideas discussion at the next team meeting.

You might like to suggest your manager leads that discussion, or if they decline, offer to do so yourself. At the meeting, use the trigger questions and record each suggestion in writing as they come up. Allocate a specific time. After idea generation, go back to quickly rate each suggestion as an A, B, C or D priority.

By you taking the initiative this way, (where there's a positive workplace culture), it will likely identify you as a high-potential team member destined for leadership. (However, if this suggestion is not well-received, ask yourself what can be done to make the culture more conducive to growth and learning; or was it perhaps the manner in which you suggested you take the initiative?)

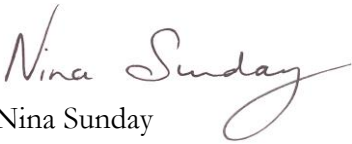
### *Always be reading*

To grow your workplace wisdom read a non-fiction book (digital or print or listen to an audiobook) at least 10 minutes a day. Read at least one book a month, 12 books a year. See the article *Read Your Way to the Top* in the

Gather Wisdom section of this book for reasons to read every day. Leaders are readers. Be a reader.

Feel free to stay in touch by visiting the contact page at [www.brainpowertraining.com.au](http://www.brainpowertraining.com.au) and sharing your thoughts.

The way we did business five years ago can't be the way we do business in the next five. Constant reinvention is the key.

  
Nina Sunday



Influence



# PRIMACY AND RECENCY: GIVE INSTRUCTIONS SO PEOPLE REMEMBER

If first impressions are memorable, how can we take advantage of our brain's automatic ability to remember first and last impressions?

## *In This Article, We:*

- play a memory game
- note the results and how it illustrates how our brains remember
- discuss what this means for learning and for life.

## *Memory Game*

To illustrate how your memory works, would you be willing to play a simple memory game? At the end of this article is a list of words. Before turning to the list, first read the instructions that follow.

## *Instructions*

1. There are 29 words in a list at the end of this article. Read each word, one word at a time. Do not memorise. Simply read each word one at a time at a moderate pace. (We are testing natural memory, not your ability to memorise or use a memory strategy.)
2. When finished, and without referring to the list, write down as many words as you can recall. Resist the temptation to look back at the original list.

## **Memory Game**

Now turn to the list of words at the end of this article, follow the instructions, then come back to here to read about the results.

## **Results**

To retrieve five to seven words is a typical result. More than 11 words recalled is much better than average.

### Which Words

But rather than focus on how many words you remember, let's ask instead, which words are better remembered? And by observing which words are better remembered, does that tell us how our brains operate?

### *Primacy Effect<sup>(1)</sup>*

In your written list of recalled words, does *water* or *life* appear? Notice the position of those two words — they start the list.

Most people better remember the beginning of any list. So there's a high probability you accurately brought to mind *water* or *life*, or perhaps the next two words at the start, *ball* and *river*. This is called the Primacy Effect.

### *Recency Effect*

Next, did you recall *rock* or *tree* which end the list? There's a good chance you correctly retrieved the last two words in the list, or the two before that, *dog* and *star*. That's what's called the Recency Effect.

You may retrieve some of the words in the middle of the list, but research shows most people cannot call to mind most of the middle words, except for . . .

### *Difference*

There's a high probability you recalled the word *hippopotamus*. Why? Because it's so different to other words in the list, which makes it stand out. That's another effect of memory, the Von Restorff Effect — anything unusual is better remembered.

## *Ways To Apply Primacy And Recency*

### *1. Meetings*

Start a team meeting with what you want people to recall or action. Do all the scheduling, organising and decision-making in the middle. Then summarise everything to be remembered at end before closing the meeting.



For longer meetings, make sure you schedule a five or ten minute break every 50-55 minutes so people's brains have a chance to refresh before starting a fresh round of information input.

## 2. Recruitment

Make sure you rate people as you go as your memory may recall only those candidates you met first and last at beginning and end of day or just before or after a lunch break. You may otherwise overlook a seriously good person for the role if they were interviewed in the middle of the day.

### *Play The Memory Game. Here's The List:*

(ACTION: Read it once, then look away and write down words you can remember.)

water, life, ball, river, apple, sheep, week,  
 rabbit, home, fur, wind, arrow, boat, stone,  
 flower, hippopotamus, cat, door, cow, hat, pen,  
 horse, sun, fish, feather, dog, star, rock, tree.

## WHAT WORD SHOULD YOU AVOID WHEN GIVING INSTRUCTIONS?

Whenever we ask anybody to do anything, we are influencing them. We cannot not influence. Nuances of your word choice can have a profound effect on outcomes.

If I say to you, *'Don't think of a blue hippopotamus'*, what's the first thing that pops into your mind . . . ? A blue hippo, correct?

Whatever follows the words 'do not' or 'don't' becomes dominant in your mind.

Neurolinguistics suggests the word ‘don’t’ is ignored by the sub-conscious mind; it’s an abstract device of language. What the brain thinks about or remembers are the words immediately following the word ‘don’t’. Curiously, *‘Don’t forget to return the keys’* is sub-consciously heard as *‘Forget to return the keys’*; (‘don’t’ is invisible). If you tell a child, *‘Don’t slam the door’*, it registers as *‘Slam the door’*.

## ***Don’t Forget vs Remember To***

Why is it more common for people to say, *‘Don’t forget to . . . ’* when what they really mean is, *‘Remember to . . . ’*?

Instead of telling people in an emergency, *‘Don’t panic!’*, (the idea of panic is now planted in people’s brains), the instruction should be, *‘Stay calm.’*

## ***Procedures***

Knowing this has implications for written procedures.

A sign in a warehouse reads, *‘Do not double-stack thin-grade cardboard boxes or they’ll collapse.’* But if double-stacking is what they DON’T want them to do, what DO they want them to do? The positive version of the instruction becomes either, *‘Please single-stack all thin-grade cardboard boxes’* or *‘Thin-grade cardboard boxes can only be single-stacked’*.

The way we use language impacts the way we influence others and their ability to remember important to-dos.

## ***Action***

1. Observe with your clients, colleagues and family whether using *‘Remember to . . . ’* provides a better outcome than *‘Don’t forget to . . . ’*
2. Avoid negation in statements. Phrase things in the positive, describing what you want someone to do, not what you want them to avoid. *‘Don’t slam the door’* becomes *‘Close the door quietly please’*; *‘Don’t forget to return the keys’* becomes *‘Please remember to return the keys’*.
3. And don’t say *‘don’t’*.

# HOW TO CHANGE PERCEPTION BY FRAMING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

How you frame an instruction or question can prime the brain to think a certain way. If one is primed to find flaws, that is what you'll find.

If someone considering surgery was told, either:

‘After surgery, survival rate is 90%’

or:

‘After surgery, mortality rate in the first month is 10%’

which statement might more influence their decision?

Answer: people are more likely to accept surgery after hearing of a 90% survival rate, rather than a 10% mortality rate.<sup>(2)</sup>

## *Why Is This So?*

Each sentence ‘framed’ the choice differently. The second sentence refers to death after surgery, despite the small percentage.

## *‘Away-from’ / ‘Towards’ Motivations*

More people avoid loss, (move away from pain) than seek to gain (move towards pleasure).

## *Action*

To positively influence people, consider how you ‘frame’ your question with your choice of words.

## *Quiz*

Imagine you are selling meat cold-cuts; which food label will attract the most buyers?

‘10% fat’

or

‘90% fat-free?’

Because of the different psychological impact, legislators in the USA considered making it mandatory that if a food label reads ‘90% fat free’, it should also read, ‘10% fat’.

Framing is about how your choice of words sets up sub-conscious associations that may or may influence the outcome.<sup>(3)</sup>

## HOW TO MOTIVATE WITH TOWARDS VS AWAY-FROM LANGUAGE

‘Away-from’ people are motivated to move away from what they DON’T want. ‘Towards’ people are motivated to move towards what they DO want. All human behaviour is driven by moving towards pleasure or away from pain.

In biology, the process of cells moving towards or away from favourable or unfavourable environments is called ‘taxis’ (*pronounced tak-sis*). In psychology, this is known as the pain or pleasure motivation. It is also called the ‘direction filter’, and is part of a person’s personality.

### *How To Spot*

When someone states, ‘*What I don’t want is . . .*’, it indicates an ‘away-from’ preference. If they say, ‘*What I want is . . .*’ they are expressing a ‘towards’ motivation. ‘*I’ll never do that again*’ is another ‘away-from’ indicator.

Both ‘towards’ and ‘away-from’ individuals may seek the same goal, they are just motivated differently.

For example, to encourage your child to brush their teeth properly you might use a moving away motivator such as, to avoid a trip to the dentist;

whereas a moving toward motivator is to have healthy, well-maintained teeth.

### *When Communicating*

It's natural for a person who is themselves 'away' motivated to use only 'away-from' language in their communication. But this may not inspire a 'towards' motivated individual, and vice versa.

If you are not aware of this underpinning principle, and are a 'towards' personality, you may in fact de-motivate 'away-from' people when describing 'towards' style goals. Conversely, when communicating with a 'towards person' make sure you give them a positive reason why they should do something, (rather than a reason to avoid doing it.)

It's hard to achieve a goal when your thoughts frame it as moving away from what you want to avoid, rather than towards what you do want to achieve.

Leaders with the power to influence communicate with their team using both 'away-from' and 'towards' language, to capture the attention of both styles of people.

### *Action*

1. Improve your understanding of communicating using 'away-from' and 'towards' motivations by noticing which is being used in a TV commercial, magazine ad or even politicians.
2. Next time you:
  - give feedback
  - give instructions
  - write an email

remember to express yourself in both 'away-from' and 'towards' terms.
3. State personal goals in positive, 'towards' language; what you want rather than what you don't want.

*Here's A Short Quiz.*

Of the outdoor billboard slogans listed below, which appeal to an 'away-from' motivation, and which appeal to a 'towards'?

Don't leave home without it.

1. Eat more chicken. (Billboard suggests message written by a cow.)
2. Stop destroying our planet.
3. Be a hero. Contribute.
4. Just don't smoke.

(Answers)

Away-from

Towards

Away-from

Towards

Away-from

## **HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK USING A 5-STEP VERBAL TEMPLATE**

Have you ever given feedback at work only to find it created friction? Or do you sometimes find yourself holding back what you'd really like to say for fear it won't be well-received?

When you notice unacceptable behaviour it can be tricky finding just the right words to comment on that behaviour without making it too personal or criticising the person. Don't just blurt out the first words that come to mind. Plan the best words to use.

Here's a 5-step verbal template to help you communicate feedback in a positive and assertive manner which is neither aggressive nor too passive. An easy way to remember the steps is **B-F-I-R**.

### ***B – Behaviour***

1. Describe the facts of the situation by starting with:  
*When you . . .* ' [describe the observable behaviour].

### ***F – Feeling***

2. Express how you feel about it with:  
*I feel / I felt . . .* ' [express a specific feeling e.g. frustrated, disappointed].

### ***I – Impact***

3. Explain its impact:  
*Because what happens is, . . .* ' [explain the specific impact e.g. 'we lost time'].

### ***R – Request***

4. Then ask for a new behaviour:  
*And what I'd like to see in future is . . .* ' [ask for the new behaviour].
5. Finish by asking a question, 'What are your thoughts about this?', or 'Would you be willing to do this?'

By phrasing your communication in this 5-step manner, you will achieve better outcomes. Here's an example of how it could go:

*When you . . .* [came late to the meeting]

*I felt . . .* [annoyed]

*Because . . .* [we spent time repeating information the rest of us had already heard]

*And what I'd like to see in future is . . .* [you arriving on time in future].

*What are your thoughts?*

This template is just as effective to give positive feedback. Turn it around by changing step 4 to reinforcing the current desirable behaviour, rather than suggesting a preferred new behaviour.

For example:

***When you*** . . . [did such a thorough job in preparing for the meeting]

***I felt*** . . . [proud of your efforts]

***And the effect is*** . . . [the client quickly agreed to our proposal].

***I look forward to seeing*** . . . [more work like this from you in other situations].

This is a Leadership tactic used universally by mentors and coaches. You might like to use it not only with co-workers, but also with family and friends.

## ***Action***

1. Rehearse giving feedback using this verbal template so you are fluent and natural before using it in real situations.
2. Give frequent daily feedback using this template til it's second nature. Consider the benefit of frequent, useful feedback on your business culture. Use this template not only with co-workers but also with your spouse, your children and your friends.
3. Avoid using universal terms such as '*You always*' or '*You never*'. Keep the example to one specific event. Read the next chapter for more details on that.
4. Start Step 2 with '*I felt*' or '*I feel*', not '*you made me feel*'. This is standard practice in counselling and coaching.
5. Don't assign a motivation behind their behaviour. '*I felt disrespected*' *speaks* your truth and describes your reaction, your feeling. Contrast that with '*You were disrespecting me*' which assigns a motivation to the behaviour that may or may not be true. It opens up an opportunity for them to argue that it was not their intention. But how you felt is authentic feedback.



## FEEDBACK HACK: WHAT TWO WORDS SHOULD YOU AVOID WHEN GIVING FEEDBACK?

There's an art to giving feedback and here are tips on both what to say and what not to say.

### *Never Say Never*

When giving feedback never say '*never*', never say '*always*'. Avoid using absolutes — they're annoying and often inaccurate.

For example, if you say, '*You never arrive on time*' or '*You're always late for meetings*,' you will probably elicit a response along the lines of, '*What about the time when . . . ?*' But that's not the point you're trying to make, is it?

It is extremely rare to have 100% never/always events. Feedback should be accurate and balanced. Using 'always' or 'never' indicates a 'catastrophising' thinking style where events are over-dramatised. It switches your listener off.

Stop using unhelpful catastrophising language and use more calming language instead.

### *Use First Person Statements*

It's common to use second-person statements. First person is using 'I' and second person is using 'you'. For example, in popular song lyrics you'll often hear, '*You make me feel like dancing*', or '*You make me feel brand new*'.

But when giving feedback, avoid second person statements, and particularly the phrase, '*You make me feel . . .* (annoyed, angry, whatever)'.

How you feel in response to the information you receive is your choice (even though it doesn't always feel like it). Take ownership of how you feel and avoid blaming by saying 'I feel' rather than 'You made me feel'.

## 10 PHRASES TO MAKE YOUR WRITING MORE PERSUASIVE

Ever composed an email to persuade your reader to take action or agree to something? And did you ever wonder . . . is there a secret language of influence?

Here are suggestions re language that has proven effective to achieve a desired outcome. Instead of a commanding tone, use a tone of possibility. Avoid words like:

- you must
- you should
- you ought to
- you have to
- you need to

They come across as ‘bossy’. They force the reader to obey.

Humans respond more positively when given the perception of choice. These phrases work better:

- I suggest . . .
- I recommend . . .
- You might like to . . .
- Please . . .
- This language makes you appear a trusted advisor, (not a police officer.)

### *Persuasive Sentence Starters*

Do these sentence starters create an influencing effect?

- If you do decide to . . .
- Would you be willing to . . .
- Are you open to . . .
- I’m wondering if . . .
- I don’t know if . . .
- If you can . . . (describe the action) . . . please, I’d appreciate it.

You might like to test how using these sentence starters result in a better response in your recipients.

# REFERENCES

The quotes, anecdotes and ideas described in this book were accumulated from a variety of sources over a number of years. While we've made every attempt to fully attribute the origin of each of these items, the author may have been unable to list some sources in the detail preferred.

## 4. INFLUENCE

1. Ebbinghaus, Hermann,(1885), *Memory: A contribution to experimental psychology*. New York: Dover. Hermann Ebbinghaus, (1850 — 1909) was a German psychologist who pioneered the experimental study of memory and discovered the Serial Position Effect. In remembering lists, he observed that people are more likely to remember items at start and end of lists. These effects are also called Primacy and Recency Effects.
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# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks and appreciation to everyone who contributed their talents to this project in one way or another. Russell Perks, Helena Bond, Elizabeth Beeton, Mandy McLean, Libby McArdle, Imogen McDonald, Tim Vetter, Lily Sumner, Pip Savaris, Paula Smith.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nina Sunday is an international speaker, educator and author. Professional Speakers Australia awarded her CSP designation (Certified Speaking Professional), held by only 12% of professional speakers worldwide.

After working in education, the performing arts, sales and television, Nina founded Australian training company, Brainpower Training, and over two decades grew a network of Facilitators delivering business skills to Top 500 companies, SMEs (small-medium enterprises) and government.

After a decade niching in Speed Reading and Memory, she spent the next 17 years developing and delivering programs in Productivity, Communication, Presentation Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Change and Sales. Nina Sunday is the Workplace Maven, empowering managers and teams sharpen their workplace know-how for different thinking, better results.

Qualifications include a Bachelor of Arts and Diploma in Education, plus graduating in Direction and Production Management from the three-year program of the Australian Film, TV and Radio School.

After more than three decades based in Sydney, Nina recently relocated to discover a new-found love of her hometown of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia.