iconda
Engineering Team Performance

Titan's Tale

Full Example Script & Learning Points

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Synopsis

Maxillion, a global technology supplier headquartered in the USA and boasting over 50k employees, has a European Business Unit (BU) of about 40 people responsible for Global Positioning System (GPS) software components. These are supplied to a variety of other departments that make, for example, navigation software, vehicle tracking systems and smartphone-based applications. The European BU is known as **Titan**.

Titan used to be an independent company and was acquired by Maxillion a few years ago. It has adapted quite well to the new situation and the number of staff has grown by about 30% under the new regime.

The Titan flagship product is **SwiftFix**, a sophisticated software component that must be configured by experts in order to integrate it into finished, merchandisable products.

To support Maxillion's global product strategy, Titan has recently produced a similar software component, **AutoFix**, which, thanks to automated configuration code, is easier to setup. It hopes to get the new component deployed in the Smartphone and Navigation BUs soon. Both these BUs are based in the USA.

Cast of characters

(names below are unisex)

1. Alfie : A Titan Team Leader

   If you take this role, play it as yourself

2. Brennan : A Titan Snr Engineer

   If you take this role, play it as yourself

3. Chris : A Titan Jnr Engineer

   Curious and knowledgeable. Takes on too much work and is therefore constantly overloaded.

4. Drew : A Maxillion exec (oversees multiple BUs)

   Results-oriented. Charming and persuasive. Has a tendency to push people into competitive positions (i.e. slightly manipulative).

5. Erin : A Smartphone BU manager (reports to Drew)

   Conscientious. Holds strong views on *how* things should be done but is more flexible on *what* should be done.

6. Francis : A Smartphone BU Technical Lead (reports to Erin)

   Technocratic, logical, organized. Can be impatient with others who do not see things as clearly.

7. Glen : A Smartphone BU Engineer (reports to Francis)

   Friendly. Creative. Tends to avoid taking responsibility for things.

8. Haven : A Maxillion IT Manager (not in Drew's organisation)

   Technically masterful. Tormented by conflicting desires for speed and perfection.

PLEASE NOTE: The list of scenes and the characters that play in them is given on the last page.

Scene 1: A fleeting chance to make a mark

Setting

The quarterly inter-BU operations review, chaired in a robust fashion by Drew.

One and a half hours into the 2-hour meeting and Alfie has not yet had a chance to say anything about the (good) progress that Titan has been making on the AutoFix component. This is frustrating, since other BUs seem to have written off Titan as a poor acquisition, largely because of the problems seen when SwiftFix was integrated into one of the Smartphone BU's products.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Drew and Erin

Passive: Other BU heads and senior staff

Dialog

… the meeting is already underway as we join it …

Drew

Moving on then, I'd like to hear from Navigation about the update of Poseiden. Nolan, what do you have for us please?

Alfie

Drew, could I just interrupt for a moment to talk about our agenda today?

Drew

Sure, but please keep it quick as we only have half an hour left.

Alfie

Yes, of course. You see, Gpos has a slot at the very end of this meeting and, since we are behind schedule, we're not going to be able to contribute if we continue with the original agenda.

But we've important news about AutoFix. Please can we juggle things around so that we get our slot?

Drew

But there's no business action coming out of this, is there? Smartphone is committed to SwiftFix for the moment, isn't it Erin?

Erin *(cynical)*

Yes, and we are already suffering from the delays when integrating that.

Drew

With all due respect Alfie, Navigation has a much bigger revenue footprint than you guys and we need to hear from them.

Alfie

I appreciate that, and I promise to keep it short. Three minutes.

Drew

Two

Alfie

Thanks.

AutoFix development is a month ahead of schedule – 'internal beta' testing is complete and so, to avoid wasting this head-start, we need to start 'customer beta' deployment asap.

We know that we caused Smartphone some pain last year, but we've learnt from that. I'm asking for a meeting where we can show you in detail what we've achieved and decide together whether a 'customer beta' makes sense.

Erin

How can Gpos possibly support a new 'customer beta' when we are still sorting out the mess of the last one? Also, we'd need to understand the new features and benefits of AutoFix.

Alfie

Agreed, and that is why I'm asking for a meeting.

Drew

It sounds reasonable Erin.

Erin

Ok, why not.

… the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point:

Make the request as concise as possible using the absolute minimum information at first.

In this script, Alfie did not reply to the remarks made by Erin, he simply used them to reinforce his request for a meeting.

Scene 2a: Resistance

Setting

The operations meeting (scene 1) resulted in another meeting being scheduled to decide whether deployment of AutoFix to SmartPhone is really feasible and desirable.

The meeting gets off to a difficult start. The Smartphone guys are uncooperative.

Alfie's objectives are to understand fully Smartphone's position and, if possible, get them to agree to a 'customer beta' integration of AutoFix. If not, then at least avoid a definitive 'no'.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Erin and Francis

Passive: Other Titan and Smartphone BU people

Dialog

… the meeting is already underway as we join it …

Erin *(somewhat strained)*

Alfie, I can understand that you want to get AutoFix deployed, but we're short of resources right now.

Integrating new components takes time – there are processes to follow …

Francis *(a bit impatient)*

And I'd add, Erin, that AutoFix seems to be a simple replacement for SwiftFix, which we now have integrated and working.

It seems to me that changing to AutoFix would not really enhance our products in any way.

Erin

Furthermore, Alfie, we're all still reeling from the problems we had integrating SwiftFix. You guys didn't do yourselves any favours there!

Alfie

So, if I understand correctly, you are unusually short of resources, a bit sore from our last adventure together ☺ and, most important, can't see any advantage in switching to AutoFix, even if the first two points could be addressed. It that it?

Francis

Correct

Alfie

Ok. And is there anything else that we should deal with, in addition to these three points?

Francis

Nothing springs to mind

Alfie

In that case, could I start by talking about the reasons why we think you'd benefit from doing a 'customer beta' with AutoFix? I promise that we'll deal with resources and track record after.

Francis

Sure

Alfie

Thanks.

We believe that AutoFix a number of advantages, for you and for the company in general.

The key one for Smartphone is the speed with which you will be able to make future product enhancements. You're in the consumer market, after all.

AutoFix will integrate easily and will not cause short-term disruption to your product line, but it will put you in a position to innovate *extremely rapidly* in the future.

… the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point:

Fully understand and acknowledge people's concerns before attempting to put your arguments.

Scene 2b: Too problem-oriented

Setting

Later in the meeting to decide whether deployment of AutoFix to SmartPhone is really feasible and desirable.

The Smartphone BU people are now engaged in the discussion, but they are tenaciously seeing more obstacles than opportunities.

Alfie's objectives are to understand fully Smartphone's position and, if possible, get them to agree to a 'customer beta' integration of AutoFix. If not, then at least avoid a definitive 'no'.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Francis and Glen

Passive: Other Titan and Smartphone BU people

Dialog

… we rejoin the meeting later on …

Glen

If we start working with AutoFix, we're going to have to update all our IT packages.

Francis *(worried tone)*

That would be a pain. We all know how long IT changes take ;-)

Glen

And our main problem is simply keeping track of Android and iOS changes. The only way to do that is dedicated resources. I'm not sure we've got time for anything else!

Brennan

When you say 'keeping track', I guess you mean finding out about changes and then updating your software to follow them?

Glen

Right

Brennan

And so a significant amount of time goes into software updates?

Glen

Of course

Brennan

Could we look at that issue then?

I think that it's something we could help with, at least for your navigation software.

Glen

I don't know …

Francis

I think that it's worth discussing, Glen. Go ahead Alfie.

… the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point:

When all you are hearing is problems, try to identify needs and guide people towards discussing solutions.

Alfie picks up on something that Glen says (and was able to do so because of listening carefully) and then links that to a need (faster software updates) in order to suggest looking at possible solutions.

Scene 3a: Getting down to work

Setting

Alfie finally persuaded the Smartphone BU to undertake a 'customer beta' integration of AutoFix.

This meeting takes place a week later in order to discuss how to do it.

The objectives of the Titan team are to establish the main points of the integration plan and to obtain some significant commitments from Smartphone. In doing so, Titan wants to simplify/lighten the normal product release procedures, in order to go faster, and to have face-to-face contact with the client, in order to get unfiltered feedback.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Francis and Glen

Passive: Other Titan and Smartphone BU people

Dialog

… the meeting is already underway as we join it …

Glen

Francis, do you know if Haven is going to be able to support us for the IT update?

Francis

I think so, but he was very cagey about when he could start.

'Only saw him for a couple of minutes, at the coffee station, and he was with Indigo.

Glen

The infamous Indago. Well I just hope that Indago doesn't get put on the job!

Francis

Never mind that. What IT version are we running at the moment?

Glen

21.3f

Francis

F??

Glen

Yes. We were on C for a while but there were big issues with the new Python libraries.

Francis

Ok. So be it.

In any case, Brennan, which IT release will we need for the AutoFix work?

Brennan

Woha! I'm not sure that I can answer that off of the top of my head.

Can we take a step back? I believe that we're here to plan for the customer beta integration and that we have about 2 hours to get the first ideas and actions together.

Is that right – is everyone Ok until 11 o'clock?

Everyone

General assent

Brennan

Great. Then I suggest we start by identifying the main phases of the work – they'll be more or less the same as they were for SmartFix - then take them one by one. And we'll need 10-15 minutes at the end to agree on next steps. Ok?

Glen

But what about IT? ☹

Brennan

Well, let's list the actions needed on that when we talk about next steps.

Glen

Ok, I guess so. What are the phases then?

Brennan

Hold on; I'll share my screen …

… the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point:

Even if Is not really your job to chair a meeting, don't let your time be wasted by poor or non-existent meeting structure. Politely step in and establish an adequate PAGE.

Scene3b: Reaching an agreement

Setting

We are now in the heart of the meeting, looking for agreement on how to go forward. Haven, the IT manager is brought in, since his services are going to be key.

The objectives of the Titan team are to establish the main points of the integration plan and to obtain some significant commitments from Smartphone. In doing so, Titan wants to simplify/lighten the normal product release procedures, in order to go faster, and to have face-to-face contact with the client, in order to get unfiltered feedback.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Francis and Haven (Haven has been called in half way through the meeting)

Passive: Other Titan and Smartphone BU people

Dialog

… we rejoin the meeting later on …

Francis

Haven, thanks for joining us on the call. I hope that we're not interrupting anything?

Haven

No problem Francis. How can I help?

Francis

Well, we're here with the Titan folk to plan the integration of their AutoFix component into future product releases.

The last time we tried something like this, there were a lot of configuration issues, many of them related to the tool chain and incompatible IT releases in the two BUs.

And so I think that it's important to get you involved in the action planning.

The project starts asap.

Haven

Ok. Well, first off, we need Titan to port its development flow to the latest IT release. Then it would be best, to minimize disruption, to stick to the same release for the whole project.

Francis

And we'd have to switch to that release too?

Haven

Yes, at least for this project. We could set up dedicated servers for you, if needs be.

Alfie

Haven, this is Alfie speaking. I hear what you're saying, but the release we use depends mainly on what Smartphone need, from the technical and project schedule points of view.

Francis: what would you say are your main requirements?

Francis

Well, we're going to need on-site support, reporting to local management, and the use of our standard product release procedures.

Alfie

Let's start with the on-site thing. Why are you asking for that?

Francis

Because we need to be sure of when stuff is going to get done. Emails and weekly calls are not good enough when there are customers involved. We need one of your guys HERE.

Alfie

Ok. On our side, it's very important to get some face-to-face customer feedback, so if we send someone to you, at least for most of the project, can you ensure that they get as much customer contact as possible?

Francis

So long as they don't bite them ☺

Alfie

Ok, then I'll try to sort something out. One muzzled engineer, coming up.

Now, on the release procedures. If they've got to be ported to the latest IT release, isn't that going to be an issue?

… negotiations continue …

Suggested learning point:

Look out for other people's short circuits.

Both Haven and Francis advocate their favoured solutions as soon as they get a chance ('… we need Gpos to port its development flow to the latest IT release…', and 'we're going to need on-site support, reporting to local management, and the use of our standard product release procedures').

Note that they both use the word 'need', even though they are really describing candidate solutions. Alfie patiently tries to understand what's behind these demands ('Why are you asking for that?'), and it is clearly going to take some time, first, to work that out then, secondly, to look for solutions that everyone can agree on.

Note also that, in conceding to the request for an on-site presence, Alfie made a request for face-to-face customer contact. When making concessions, consider whether they could be associated with a request!

Scene 4a: Heating up

Setting

The project is underway and, inevitably, there are problems.

This is a weekly meeting. It's routine, but Glen seems to be upset about something.

The Titan team's objectives are simply to report progress and sync up with the Smartphone BU.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Chris and Glen

Passive: Alfie, Haven

Dialog

Brennan

Hi Chris. Hi Glen. Sorry that I'm a bit late.

Glen *(taciturn)*

Hi Brennan. Glad that you've turned up.

You're late, for sure, but it's not just a couple of minutes that I'm worried about. Where's this release that you promised me? That's over a week now!

Brennan

There's no update since yesterday, and I think that you were copied on the mail?

Our best guess is the 17th.

Glen

BEST GUESS??! I've just about had enough of best guesses! Can't you guys do better than that?

This is a customer-facing project, I'd like to remind you. And it's our BU that's in the firing line!

Chris

Glen, that's not fair! We've been keeping you up to date. Like Brennan says, the expected date is the 17th.

Glen *(angry!)*

BUT IT'S NOT FRIGGING GOOD ENOUGH!

Brennan

Ok, I'm listening.

Glen *(slightly calmer)*

This is crazy, I can't keep going to my management and announcing new delays.

Brennan

Francis is giving you a hard time?

Glen

And Erin is giving him one. They're all getting jumpy about the customer seeing our dirty washing ☹

Brennan

Dirty washing?

Glen

Well, I think Erin promised some kind of fancy project tracking, which we haven't got ;-)

Francis then put together an Excel sheet and he's pushing me for data to fill it ☹ ☹

Brennan

Ouch! That must be uncomfortable.

Glen

Too bloody right it is. I hate this stuff.

… the conversation continues with Glen in a calmer mood …

Suggested learning point:

Sometimes, there's nothing to do but listen and wait.

When there's a chance, you can find out something ('Francis is giving you a hard time?')

Until the client calms down, so that you can resume a normal, professional conversation, all other objectives must be put on hold.

Of course, this example is short. Real cases can take much, much longer.

Scene 4b: Standing up for yourself

Setting

The meeting continues, with Glen in a calmer mood, but it gets difficult again towards the close, when actions are discussed. Glen has clearly come to the meeting with some pre-conceived ideas and demands.

The Titan team's objectives are simply to report progress and sync up with the Smartphone BU.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Glen, Haven

Passive: Chris

Dialog

… we rejoin the meeting later on …

Glen

I'm afraid that, from now on, we're going to need daily updates and, once the next release is made, it's got to be the final one. No more until after the first product launch.

Haven

It would certainly be a good thing to reduce the number of releases. Fewer surprises that way!

Brennan

So far in the project, we've used two different IT releases and delivered five toolchain updates. We're planning another update for the 17th and expect to need at least one more, maybe two, before we're through. Unless something breaks badly, we won't need to change IT releases.

All these plans are on record, in the weekly minutes.

I'm comfortable with what we've done so far – not too many or too few toolchain updates, not too much hurry or too much delay. This is the first time that we've had a significant delay, isn't it?

Glen

I guess so.

Brennan

Ok, well I'm glad that you agree.

We like doing the job well and this means being as agile and flexible as possible.

So we'd be happy if we could improve our reporting and do a better job on toolchain updates. At the same time, I don't want to commit to actions that will reduce agility and slow us all down.

Do you see what I mean?

… the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point: This scene play our the four-step SUBROUTINE/NVC protocol in classic style:

- *Situation/observations: 'So far in the project, …, in the weekly minutes'*
- *Problems/feelings: 'I'm comfortable with …'*
- *Needs: 'We like doing the job well …'*
- *Solution/request: 'Do you see what I mean?'*

Notice that the request is extremely simple, the aim being to trigger a search for a solution that suits everyone (rather than to impose my own solution).

Scene 5: Corrective feedback

Setting

Chris is working hard and fulfilling an important role in the project. However, there are still things to learn and his brief intervention in the meeting with Glen earlier today ('Glen, that's not fair! ') triggered an emotional reaction.

Alfie's objectives are to see if Chris was aware of the mistake and to discuss better ways of dealing with customer irritation and anger, to help avoid this sort of mistake in future.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Chris

Passive: none

Dialog

Alfie

Hi Chris, I'd like to discuss the 'Glen situation' with you quickly.

Chris

Sure. The guy was way out of order in that meeting earlier. We've been bending over backwards for them recently – that rant was completely uncalled for!

Alfie

And did you notice what happened when you pointed that out? I think you said that it wasn't fair?

Chris

Yeah ! It got even worse! 'Not frigging good enough' indeed.

Alfie

Yes, that was it. Then Brennan stepped in and things calmed down.

That's what I wanted to talk to you about: I'd like you to be able to handle that sort of situation in a way that calms the customer as quickly as possible, so that they don't do or say anything we'd all regret and so that we get back to a normal, productive discussion as quickly as possible.

Chris

Okay ...

Alfie

In retrospect, do you think that it was a good idea to point out that they weren't being fair?

Chris

Well, they weren't!

Alfie

Agreed ☺ But that wasn't my question.

Chris

It did produce a pretty hostile reaction, I guess.

… the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point:

This confrontation follows SUBROUTINE/NVC guidelines (below), though the 4-step protocol is not executed in a simple 1-2-3-4 manner.

Notice that Alfie's first objective is to understand if Chris was aware of the mistake made, and this is done with simple Learning Discovery.

The Learning Discovery flows into the first SUBROUTINE/NVC step: establishing the facts.

From there, Alfie goes straight to step 3: needs. 'That's what I wanted to talk to you about …'.

Steps 2 and 4 are hardly necessary after that, and they get down to working on the issue.

- *Reminder of key NVC guidelines: no suppositions, judgements or subjective rules; use of empathy to understand the other person's situation/perspective, problems/feelings and needs; endeavor to express one's own situation/perspective, problems/feelings and needs as accurately/truthfully as possible.*

Scene 6: Delegation

Setting

Chris is spending a lot of time on site, in the USA, but that is not keeping him fully occupied. So Brennan has a call with him to discuss some additional work.

Brennan's objectives are to enable and inspire Chris to sort out any and all issues that come up with the IT releases, in so far as they affect the Titan toolchain.

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Chris

Passive: none

Dialog

Brennan

Hi Chris, how are you doing?

Chris

Fine thanks. What's up?

Brennan

I want to talk to you about a new assignment. You know how the Titan toolchain depends on IT releases?

Chris

Sure. The ball and chain.

Brennan

Right. Well, I would like you to manage the ball and chain for us.

Chris

How so?

Brennan

It's up to you how you do it, but I'd like you to sort out the following somehow:

- Anticipate IT releases and their impact on the toolchain
- Verify that impact and identify necessary corrective action
- Keep IT sweet and everyone informed

The main beneficiaries are, of course, Alfie and the team. Also, indirectly, Smartphone and IT itself.

Chris

Okay…

Brennan

Cool. Now, you'll need access to people and data that you may not have used before.

Chris

I guess so. I have no idea how to get IT releases in advance, for example. I guess that Haven has got a lot of the key information?

Brennan

For sure. You'll need to talk to him about how they manage the IT releases. I can set up a meeting for you if you like?

Chris

That would be good.

Brennan

Ok, I'll do that. Other potentially useful people and things that come to mind are …

… the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point:

This scene illustrates the essential difference between planning something that I will do myself and delegating a task to someone else.

This becomes extremely clear when I contrast the MAP and OAR tools: My objectives, Audience and Plan versus Our objectives, Audience and Resources. When it's for me to do, I surely need a plan. When I delegate, imposing a plan – telling someone HOW to do the task – is usually a bad idea. People prefer to devise their own plans. However, helping them to identify useful resources for the work is generally welcomed, as shown above.

Scene 7: A time-wasting meeting

Setting

A weekly videoconference to review common tool infrastructure.

Since Titan is supplying AutoFix to the SmartPhone BU, it is important that their development toolchains stay aligned. Following a couple of mess-ups, Erin insisted that weekly meetings be held to check that actions were properly identified, executed and closed.

Brennan checked with Haven that everything was aligned only yesterday, by email, and really has better things to do …

Characters present

Active: Brennan, Erin and Haven

Passive: none

Dialog

Erin

Thanks both of you for turning up promptly today. How are you?

Brennan

Fine thanks!

Haven

A bit busy, but you know how it goes ☺

Erin

Great! Well let's get straight down to it then.

The Purpose of the meeting is, of course, to review the common tool infrastructure that's been setup for Smartphone and Titan.

I suggest that we follow the usual Agenda, using our master spreadsheet to go through each open item and review the associated actions.

By the end of the call, I would like to have a shiny new updated Excel that we can circulate to everyone.

Ok for you both?

Haven

I guess

Brennan

I'm afraid not, Erin.

I understand and agree with the *purpose* of the meeting. However, Haven and I checked that everything was aligned only yesterday and we keep task records for all to see.

I regularly have to tell people that I don't have time to do things, at work and at home. I feel bad about this, of course, but it's even worse when I think of the time that I spend in these meetings, repeating work that's already been done.

Rather than go through the spreadsheet, could we use the meeting to work out a system that we're all comfortable with please?

Erin

I'm sorry that you feel that way Brennan, but there's no alternative I'm afraid.

Brennan

Haven, what do you think?

Haven

Er, well, Erin's the boss. On the other hand, I agree that we can't do much here that hasn't already been done. Maybe we could just concentrate on the actions bit?

Erin

But I need to be clear on the status!

Brennan

Ok, then we can *clarify* the status before *reviewing* the actions – that would be quicker than going through everything again, wouldn't it?

Haven

Good idea.

Erin

I don't see the difference to what I originally proposed.

Brennan

It's that we only look at things that are not clear in the reports or which are missing. So, if we do a good job of reporting, then this meeting will be quick and simple.

Erin

Ok, that sounds reasonable. I agree.

However, for this week, I admit that I've not been following your reports and so we'll still have to do a more-or-less complete review. But I take you point and we can do something briefer next week.

Ok for you?

Brennan

That's fine – thanks.

.. the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point:

Notice that Brennan, in his NVC bit, goes rather fast to a suggested solution. It all works out fine, but Erin's initial reaction was one of resistance.

We could also imagine …

Brennan

I'm afraid not, Erin.

I understand and agree with the *purpose* of the meeting. However, Haven and I checked that everything was aligned only yesterday and we keep records on all necessary tasks and their status online, for all to see.

I regularly have to tell people that I don't have time to do things, at work and at home. I feel bad about this, of course, but it's even worse when I think of the time that I spend in these meetings, repeating work that's already been done.

'You see what I mean?

Erin

Well, yes, I'm busy too. If we can achieve the same result in less time, I'd be as happy as you.

What do you suggest?

Haven

Maybe we could just concentrate on the actions bit?

Erin

But I need to be clear on the status!

Brennan

Ok, then we can *clarify* the status before *reviewing* the actions – that would be quicker than going through everything again, wouldn't it?

Haven

Good idea.

Erin

Ok, that sounds reasonable. I agree.

However, for this week, I admit that I've not been following your reports and so we'll still have to do a more-or-less complete review. But I take you point and we can do something briefer next week.

Ok for you?

Brennan

That's fine – thanks.

.. the conversation continues …

Suggested learning point:

As noted previously, the solutions/request part of the 4-step SUBROUTINE/NVC protocol should not be too heavy. The more it's loaded with demands and requirements, the more likely it will generate resistance.

This example also illustrates that the 4-step protocol often fails to produce the desired reaction immediately. People don't always react as we would wish. When they don't, the idea is to keep trying, using NVC principles to guide what you say: no suppositions, judgements or subjective rules; use of empathy to understand the other person's situation/perspective, problems/feelings and needs; endeavor to express one's own situation/perspective, problems/feelings and needs as accurately/truthfully as possible.

Scene 8: Receiving positive feedback

Setting

A chance meeting in the Maxillion cantine.

The customer beta project has turned out well for the Smartphone BU and Maxillion in general, and Drew takes the opportunity to let Alfie know it.

Characters present

Active: Alfie and Drew

Passive: none

Dialog

Drew *(cheery)*

Alfie! I'm glad I've bumped into you.

Alfie

Hello Drew, it's good to see you.

Drew

I've been meaning to call to congratulate you on the Smartphone project. You guys did a great, great job!

Alfie

Well, thanks. It wasn't perfect, of course, but what did you appreciate the most?

Drew

Good question. For a start, I guess I was impressed by the confidence that your team had in its abilities, from the very beginning. I don't know how you convinced us to go ahead with the thing in the first place! ☺

Then the way that you looked after Smartphone and their customer – you guys are great with your clients!

Alfie

You mean that we keep them smiling? ☺

Drew

Not just that. You get them to work with you. You're nice to them, but you don't seem to put up with any bullshit either.

Alfie

Thanks. I'm reassured by that. You're describing the client culture that we are trying to create.

Any thoughts on things that we could do better the next time around.

Drew

Jeepers! That's too hard for me at lunchtime.

I'll have a think about it and let you know if I come up with anything.

Alfie

That would be good. And thanks again for the feedback. I'll pass it on to everyone.

Drew

You do that! Cheers.

Suggested learning point:

'You guys did a great, great job' is positive feedback, but unhelpful in a couple of ways:

- *It can be difficult to receive. Embarrassed, mumbled acknowledgements are the norm.*
- *It is uninformative.*

Alfie's response is polite, shows gratitude and, most important, opens up the conversation by asking for a bit more information. This is a done a second time when Drew says, 'you guys are great with your clients!'.

Alfie also illustrates skill in giving thanks: 'I'm reassured by that. You're describing the client culture that we are trying to create.' explains WHY Drew's comments are appreciated. This is a significant step forward when compared to simply, 'thanks'.

Scene 9: Giving thanks

Setting

Alfie is back from the USA and has arranged a celebration party for the team. Before it starts, he takes Chris aside.

Alfie wishes to thank Chris for the longs hours put in, the sacrifices associated with multiple trips to the USA and his willingness to learn, both from experience and from his colleagues.

Characters present

Active: Alfie, Chris

Passive: none

Dialog

Alfie

Chris, As you know, Smartphone's customers are now running with the AutoFix software, which we delivered to them almost exactly according to schedule.

Smartphone are very happy and Drew went out of his way – when I met him last week – to say how appreciative he was.

I'd like to thank you for a couple of things in particular.

First, for travelling so often to the USA, in spite of the personal difficulties that I know this caused. I love working with people that go out of their way, without complaining, for their colleagues and for a project, and so your effort had a motivating effect on me!

The other biggie for me was your capacity and willingness to learn (I'm sure that these two things go together). For example, after our chat about Glen's tirade – you remember? – I've noticed that your contributions to 'tricky' conversations are significantly more measured and effective. Which is great, because I feel that it was well worth discussing the point with you – I got a huge ROI ! ☺

So, thanks again for these things and for your contribution to the project in general.

Chris

Well, thanks to you. I've enjoyed it – everything except the airport queues that is ;-)☺

Thanks for the feedback, and for explaining it.

Alfie

You're welcome.

Now, let's go and get a drink! …

Suggested learning point:

Alfie is using the SUBROUTINE/NVC upside-down, a technique that works well for giving positive feedback: starting with the 'actions' part (what was done), then linking these with needs and finally with feelings.

That is: travelling (action); working with uncomplaining people (needs); my motivation (feelings).

And: learning quickly with enthusiasm (action); more effective conversations (need); decision to talk about the point was worthwhile (feeling).

What was done; why I am pleased about it; what it made me feel.

Not only is this sequence a logical one, the overall effect is to create feedback that is easy to receive.