

Gender communication has reached the workplace. Women need to speak up, while men need to control outbursts of anger. Murray Johnson reports

Mars, Venus shake hands

Darren Stephens and Jackie Talentyre have built a business around improving communication between men and women.

The idea for their business began when Mr Stephens read *Women are from Venus, Men are from Mars*.

US author Dr John Gray's book about gender communication has sold more than 17 million copies around the world — second only to the Bible.

Mr Stephens, 36, was running a successful Melbourne signage business with 70 staff.

A female friend who had read the book asked: "Do men really think this way?"

Mr Stephens said: "Yes. Don't you?"

"I read the book myself and could really relate to the men's sections, but the women's sections were so different to me at the time.

"I started to apply 'Venus and Mars' in the workplace with some dramatic results, and ended up buying 30 or 40 copies to give away. "My relationships both personal and in business blossomed."

On a trip to Hawaii, he attended a lecture by Dr John Gray and asked him about teaching Venus-and-Mars skills in Australia.

Dr Gray agreed to train Mr Stephens and Ms Talentyre for two years at his San Francisco base, then they set up the Venus and Mars Institute in Melbourne.

"We changed some of the material to suit Australians, who see some things a bit differently than Americans," Mr Stephens said.

Since opening in 1998, more than 10,000 Australians have completed their relationship courses.



Peace: Jackie Talentyre and Darren Stephens are changing the way Australians work. Picture: TIM CARRAFA

"We have thousands of people who say it has changed their lives," Mr Stephens said.

Australians have bought more copies per capita of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* than any other country.

Dr Gray has applied his ideas to children, divorcees and others in a dozen Venus-and-Mars sequels.

His next book, due out early this year, applies the Venus-and-Mars philosophy to the workplace.

The Venus and Mars Institute's top strategies for women when dealing with men in business are: Promote yourself, speak up, be direct, tell it how it is, stop saying 'I'm sorry', do not take male comments too personally, be concise,

acknowledge men for their abilities, make acknowledgments direct and simple.

Men are encouraged to: Build rapport, be polite when making requests, avoid monopolising conversations, don't call women "cute" names, control outbursts of anger, respect women's abilities, encourage conciseness by bringing women back to the point, do not lecture, encourage women's growth, be specific with praise.

Mr Stephens said people were taught practical skills they could take away with them and put in place at home and work.

"If people are happy at work and at home, it affects productivity and the bottom line," he said.

Steve Browney of the Sportspak Sign Group said a Venus-and-Mars course sparked animated conversation and some big changes at his Knoxfield headquarters.

"They are much more productive, and I'm not spending so much time on 'staff problems'," Mr Browney wrote after the seminar.

The Venus and Mars Institute runs two-day personal relationship seminars at weekends and tailored workplace programs.

There is also a Venus-and-Mars live-in personal success course, run at a resort over three days.

Dr John Gray will speak at the Rod Laver Tennis Centre in Melbourne on April 30. Tickets from \$95. Bookings: 9532 7011.