



UK & US Conference News

the 5th annual BBS conference will be a workshop, interactive style conference and will be held on 18th November at the Park Royal Hotel, Stretton, Warrington.

The BMT Federation are also hosting a BBS and Behavioural Leadership conference in the US on 24th & 26th May 2011.

For more information on these events please visit www.bmtfed.com

Behavioural Management Techniques (BMT) is a science-based approach focused on using behaviour analysis for the improvement of business and safety performance.

Communication Breakdown

By John Austin, Ph.D.

“If you have to ask what’s bothering me, then things are worse than I thought.”

“I thought you were going to handle that one.”

“Why didn’t I know about this sooner?”

Famous last words. Behavioral science and common sense each would suggest that they are usually the result of poor communication. Most organizations go through so much change in a single quarter that you would think they’d be experts at communicating about it and telegraphing it, so people are prepared for what is to come next. However, our experience is quite the opposite. Decisions are often made in isolation, and the people most affected by the change are often the last to know about it. This brews discontent, mistrust, and sometimes, even the perception that things are out of control – which can be devastating to your relationships and to your business.

Yet, still, we use memos to ‘communicate.’ Larkin and Larkin reported that only 4% of employees can understand the average safety memo – and this assumes that they even read it!

And, we use e-mail. Our data suggest that only 25% of e-mails generate a reply from their recipient, suggesting that a sizable proportion of e-mail is not even read.

This article is designed to give a few simple ideas of things you can try out to improve communication.

Keep it simple. Some of our colleagues worked for a man who was well known for greeting new employees with a short meeting. He sat them down in a group, and said, “Don’t ever lie to me, or I’ll fire you. Meeting adjourned.” My guess is that this message was received and remembered by his employees. It doesn’t have to be mean or curt, but there is great beauty in simplicity.

Make it personal. One company we worked with had trouble communicating important messages from the highest levels to the lowest level of the organization. We learned that the executives normally used email instead of more effective modes of communication. We learned that most people preferred face-to-face or phone interaction over email, and they wanted to hear important things straight from their manager, not from their coworkers.

Test the reception. We collected anonymous data at another company, to test a specific message. The leaders created a message they wanted everyone to hear, and then asked their direct reports to communicate it down the chain, and so on. We tested a week later by asking associates who were supposed to get the message if they had heard from their manager on the topic. Only 15% reported having heard the message. It took them four attempts (with the same single message), but after four tries, 80% of the company reported having heard the message. If you don’t test to see if people heard the message, you’ll never know how good (or bad) you are!



Coach's Corner –

by Howard Lees

I have encountered a number of folks lately who have what I would call 'constipated' diaries. Diary appointments for every given hour over some scarily long periods (one was fully booked up for 6 weeks). A key facet of good leadership is good time management. If the diary is completely full then it means there is no way of dealing with any ad hoc demands on time without failing on commitments (bad leaders regularly let people down at the last minute).



This also means that time is not prioritised which is stupid (yes stupid). There are some behavioural explanations to how this may come about. Some people may have simply delegated responsibility for booking time to their personal assistant or worse an Outlook calendar booking process. This avoids the necessity to think through each week ahead and decide on priorities. Anyone can test for how much ad hoc demands are made on their time, it's easy, if it's 10 hrs/week then 10 hrs of nothing has to go in the diary.

Fully booked out diaries are a sign that this leader cannot manage themselves out of a paper bag. It is a signal to everyone else that they are unable to either manage or prioritise their time. This leader is going to be very easy to marginalise, the bad guys are going to have a field day!

Are you feeling guilty? Wake up and fix the diary - NOW!!

Are you creating a stressful work environment for your employees?

by Allison Reynolds

I recently read an article on the relationship between high employee stress levels and the poor organisation skills of their managers. Then, last week I was accosted by a team who were frustrated with their manager's constantly shifting priorities, knee jerk reactions to bad news and last minute requests for ever changing reports. This set me off thinking about the importance of the predictability of management behaviour.

People operate within their environment in such a way to maximise the available reinforcers. When the environment is predictable they are able to maximise reinforcers and avoid punishers. This works perfectly well in the physical world, e.g. pick up a hot baking tray without oven gloves, get burnt and next time you make sure you use the gloves; fill your unleaded car up with diesel, it costs you a fortune to get recovery, next time you make sure you use the right fuel!

However, when other people's behaviour is involved, the world becomes slightly less predictable. Managers are often less consistent in their interactions with others when under pressure or attending to competing priorities: perhaps their organisation of work starts to slide, leading to last minute requests that team members struggle to deliver; their focus may shift quickly from one problem to the next creating conflicting priorities or maybe their response to bad news starts to slip. The downstream impact is a less predictable work environment for the employee. If this scenario is maintained over a long period of time, high levels of frustration reduce attempts to try new things, people give up trying and just put up with it, in an attempt to avoid further punishers. This is the land of keep your head down and don't rock the boat. When the guys were complaining to me about their manager, really they were describing his behaviour as being unpredictable, leaving them unable to avoid sources of punishment. With no intervention from either party, they are most likely heading down the route of keep your head down, so what can you do to change course?

As a guilty manager: If you're in a management position and find yourself constantly shifting priorities, reacting to bad news, making last minute requests for ever changing reports or perhaps you just consider self management just not to be your forte, ask yourself whether this causes problems for others. If it does, then it's a problem for your organisation and it needs addressing. Start by taking a look at how you spend your time, most managers who are guilty of these behaviours have allowed themselves to get too busy, management is not reactive sport, it requires deliberate action, allow yourself to be too busy and you are setting yourself up to be reactive. You can find heaps of ideas on what to do differently in *How to Escape from Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Howard Lees available on bmtfed.com



As the unwilling victim: Don't despair, experiment with something different and see whether you can create a change: make sure you are not unintentionally reinforcing the behaviour by taking on every last minute request with a smiling face. Instead, if you can't do it, say you can't do it, or say you can do it but be explicit in what will not get done instead. Ask your manager for some time to sit down and agree this week's priorities. A five or ten minute conversation may be all that is necessary and will help him to prioritise. Figure out what you could say to give your manager some feedback on his behaviour. Whilst telling him exactly what's on your mind might not be the best place to start, there are a hundred things you could say on the continuum from, "Yes I'll jump right to it" at the bottom end of the scale and, "You *****, you're ruining my life" at the extreme. Remember one thing is for sure, if you currently reinforce all last minute requests by delivering on them, the one thing you can be sure to get more of.....last minute requests!