

Behavioural Digest

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Truth to Power By Elizabeth Warner

The phrase 'truth to power' can generate inspiration or fear. The prospect of saying what's been stewing around in your mind to your nemesis, boss, partner, parent or child can get increasingly stressful if you leave it over a long period of time. It can get to the stage where the delay has now added the dimension of potential embarrassment that you left it so long – you risk responses like “Why didn't you tell me you loved me three years ago?” or perhaps, “I had no idea you didn't like my pasta.”

Of course 'truth to power' can be a massive release; take a deep breath, say what you must say, remove the shackles and get on with your life in a much happier way. Some folks have the courage to speak truth to power and also the necessary capacity to deal with whatever comes back in return, with whatever levels of venom. Some folks don't have that capacity and that's where 'truth to power' turns into the Dead Poets Society. This is not a courage thing, it's a capacity thing and that is a much harder competence to judge. Perhaps try out some different lines on your own and see what feels the most comfortable to you?

Appetite for Feedback By Rachel Edwards

Feedback is the catalyst for behaviour change; it's the information that sets us up to do something different in the future. It's often easier to see the downstream impact of our behaviours when it comes to ourselves - we know that during a nice holiday we tend to eat and drink more than usual and come back a little heavier than we left, for example. But what about the sometimes less obvious impact of how our behaviours impact on others?

By definition we all have a limited view of the downstream impact we have on others. After all, the only perspective we're really sure of is our own, and with some people even that is debatable! It's probably good for us to all seek out feedback that we're blind to (on the proviso we actually want to know). Depending on your appetite, asking a few people that you trust to tell you any feedback they've been holding back, or weren't sure if you wanted might be a useful exercise. It's likely that your real friends will tell you the truth if they know that's what you want.

Upcoming UK Events

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BMT for Leaders Conference, Manchester: **15th May 2019**

BMT for Leaders Workshop, Manchester: **16th May 2019**

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Why Doesn't It Stick?

By Lynn Dunlop

There's this person, right? They might be an employee, a colleague, a child, a spouse, even your dog. And they will not do this one thing you're asking them to do. You've taught them it - showed them it more than once - but they won't do it. It's driving you to distraction. Even worse, for a little while, they *did* do the thing. Whatever it was - they did it. So you know that they can, it's just that now they won't. What gives?

Well, the person's current environment (what's going on around them and inside their head) is completely out-weighting any prompts from you for doing whatever thing it is you want them to do. Generally speaking, people aren't great at changing their habits, especially when their environment is the same as it was before you asked them to do the thing.

So what now? Well, you've a couple of choices. The first is to decide if it's worth it. If the getting the person to change isn't worth the hassle, then just stop trying and learn to live with your frustration. If the change is worth the effort, then your next task is to figure out how to make it more likely that you will consistently get the person to do that behaviour, bearing in mind all those competing environmental factors. This means finding a careful balance between two things:

1. Making it difficult for the person to avoid your request (becoming a pain in their neck, in other words); and
2. Building a strong relationship with the person so that when you get the behaviour you want to see, your happy response will consistently be reinforcing.

Some weeks or months down the line, you'll be able to ask them to do the thing less frequently, and respond less frequently until eventually (after months or years in some cases) the behaviour will continue without you doing anything. This process of reinforcing small steps toward a larger goal is called 'shaping'.

Sometimes it happens quickly, but sometimes changing behaviours takes a long time. Which is why your first choice is deciding if it's worth the effort. Because the person who wants the change is you. And if you want someone else to change, but not to have to change yourself at all... Well, that's just not likely to happen. If you are working to change someone you can't spend much time with, consider who and what *is* in their environment. Who else can provide that reinforcement for the new behaviour? Consider all of your options - you don't have to work alone on this. Good luck.

Shades of BMT

- The leader sets the tone - the number of times the leader turns up on time will be reflected all the way down the organisation. If it's 100% then everyone else will very likely turn up on time 100% of the time.
- If some people understood that there was a better way for them to behave in public they would behave that way. It's just a lack of feedback that's holding them back.
- A purely financial decision can be a fatal one-dimensional act in a three-dimensional world.

Never Let An Impending Crisis Go To Waste

By Bruce Faulkner

I was recently thinking back on projects I was on that came under real pressure. Reflecting, I can see when we didn't come up with any new ideas. The times we did come up with really good ideas was when the project leader gave us the space and time to really think.

Some environments place endless demands on everyone's attention. Every day is filled with distractions. Emergent problems are recognised but they are very difficult to address; just stopping to think is very difficult. Gathering up a coalition of leaders either doesn't happen or isn't effective and the status quo contains enormous inertia that accumulates problems. Sometimes this situation sinks an organisation's performance and also a few careers.

When a crisis does occur, there is an immediate sense of time pressure. Under these conditions the team will tunnel to resolve the problem. Neuroscience research shows that under those conditions thinking becomes inhibited, constrained. The brain seeks relief from the ambiguity and uncertainty. The actions the team takes will be based on the ideas that are already lying around, or will be driven by the various prejudices that inevitably have emerged.

Many people in these environments can sense changes and see storms forming. The problem is that grabbing the attention of the distracted leaders just isn't going to happen. Under these circumstances the inevitable crisis shouldn't be wasted. Start work on the new ideas now. These ideas should be the ones that aren't currently politically acceptable. When the crisis arrives, these ideas will become politically inevitable, but only once people are ready to listen.