

Behavioural Digest

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On Sale Now:
The Adaptive Strategy

By Howard Lees
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Setting Up A Dysfunctional Environment

By Lynn Dunlop

The recent HBO miniseries *Chernobyl* is a dramatization of the events surrounding the explosion in reactor 4 of the nuclear power plant in 1986. It shows us individual sacrifices and heroism against a backdrop of a catastrophic failure that was entirely of human making.

The opening scenes show an Orwellian dystopia - a group of men whose leader refuses to believe them. But the whole series shows that this is just a fractal view: That man is a product of a wider environment which was set up very effectively to discourage truth-telling. It was so effective that when one party apparatchik believes the evidence of his own eyes it is genuinely surprising.

These events showed such a concentrated version of the results of a dysfunctional environment that this show served as a powerful reminder of the importance of setting up an environment where people at all levels feel psychologically safe. In short, make sure that you are always, *always* a source of reassurance when someone gives you bad news.

Good Leadership

By Howard Lees

Some leaders are very good at demonstrating the right leadership. They brief well, they set clear expectations, they honour their obligations, they preside over short and effective meetings, they manage their email artfully, they recognise and reward appropriately and they set good examples regarding their own day to day behaviours.

Unfortunately, setting good examples like this will not always mean that their direct reports will automatically follow the lead. It may still be necessary to make sure that there is nothing going unsaid. It may be wise to ask direct reports if they are setting good examples of leadership to their own people. It may require specific one to one coaching, it may even require the leader to say, "For the avoidance of doubt, this was a coaching session. I really do want you to think about your leadership behaviours." Good leadership does not spread by osmosis, it needs a little help along the way.

Lapses In Leadership

By Howard Lees

It is becoming tiresome to see organisations describe their company behaviours with words out of the dictionary that are not behaviours. The only way someone could carry out the behaviour of 'going the extra mile' would be to set off to run 3 miles and run 4. The only way someone could carry out the behaviour of 'looking for improvements' would be to walk around housing estates and observe garage extensions!

For a described behaviour to be useful it must be pinpointed, this is how these organisations could actually use the science for the benefit of all.



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Tendering Woes

By Jane Watson

I've been doing a lot of work supporting bids and tenders for large engineering projects recently. One thing I've noticed is people's understandable reluctance to try and change a client's mind. Large client firms have moved to a strict policy of communicating via electronic portals, implemented to keep competition fair. This has had the unintended consequence that clients have made it difficult for them to hear the truth from their contractors during the bidding process.

Examples of dysfunctional client behaviours abound. With no seeming irony, written submissions which include detailed plans on wellbeing policies are submitted on January 7th, implying that clients are happy for contractors to work through holiday seasons. Deadlines slip at the client end, but with limited information for the multiple contractors and their bid teams, costing goodness knows how much in time, money and goodwill.

Yet the clients hold the trump card. The contractors need them, and so they can act with impunity. Contractors in the middle of a bid have every incentive to hold their peace, and it has been made physically difficult for them to do otherwise. The electronic portals mean no one can have a quiet word - every suggestion to do something differently has the potential to look like a complaint, and who wants to employ a firm with a reputation for complaining... No; mid-bid, the wise thing to do is grin and bear it.

What about when you win? Well, the chances are high that you no longer focus on the bid experience because mobilisation is underway; you've got bigger fish to fry. And the ones who didn't win? Any feedback to the client has the potential to look like sour grapes and not be taken seriously accordingly.

So what to do? The only people who can solve this problem - as with so much in the engineering world - are the clients themselves. Contractors can only do so much, push so far. Clients have to start asking for the feedback, and acting on it.

Three Simple Truths

By Dr Richard Kazbour

We live in a world that shapes our behaviors and for better or worse, our behaviors are responsible for our outcomes (truth #1). We tend to blame our failures on factors outside of our control yet deliver personal credit when we succeed. This is an attractive proposition. Random events do exist which can influence our lives.

Our world doesn't randomly shape our behaviors. Rather, the environment that we live in does (truth #2). This fact isn't magical or even elusive; it's scientific. There is a finite amount of processing that our brains can handle on a given day and well, time never stops (truth #3). By eliminating the energy that goes into justifying our failures we might find the time needed to consider improving upon them.

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The Obtruding Visitor

By Elisabeth Warner

Natural consequences are pretty efficient, it's raining, put up your umbrella or get wet. Insert your user name and password or else you cannot go further. The bank computer has decided that you haven't used your credit card much for a month so it halves your credit limit, the day before you do want to use it. The inkjet printer will not accept your old cartridges even though they have the same logo as the printer. My car wants to stay in the lane I am in, it whines when I lose 0.2 lb of tyre pressure.

We are being squeezed into what big brother has decided we need next, we are being constrained by the A.I. machine. It will not let us proceed without us fulfilling its will, no matter how irritating it is. It has no feelings, no empathy, no understanding of this unique situation, it has corralled us all in the same pen. It's not personal, it's now the way of the world. Not wishing to pile on, but I suspect its going to get worse, much worse!

Shades of BMT

- The kid that practised the piano got good at playing the piano. The kid that went out running every night got good at athletics. Leadership practise is actually easier than those strenuous activities. The budding leader just has to remember to use every opportunity they get to practise demonstrating good leadership – simple!
- When the bully repents, they can discover the warm new reinforcement associated with modesty, integrity and above all, humility.
- You can walk into a classroom and detect if there is a good vibe. You can walk on to a site and detect if it feels safe. What does 'happy and productive' look like to you?
- For coaching to be effective the coach must get the coachee to do something between every session, start small, get big over time. If they turn up next time having done nothing since the last time you talked then you are failing.