

# Behavioural Digest

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## Withholding Empathy By Bruce Faulkner

There is a tinge of regret when the effort of helping another person is met by the sound of tumbleweeds. Annoyance and maybe a bit of self-doubt often follow. You get left with the uncertainty of not knowing if your contribution was useful. The frustration and pain is more acute the closer the relationship. The lack of response makes them seem uncaring or worse. But the most likely explanation for their behaviour is in their environment, not in a defective character trait.

They have busied themselves in an agenda devoid of time and space. At the moment of receiving the help there might be a smiley emoji but not the deeper acknowledgement of your effort. They may intend to craft a more considered response, but the endless demand for their attention pushes responding out into the future. Eventually this gets forgotten.

Clicking send creates a sense of accomplishment, it delivers a dopamine hit regardless of the effort put into crafting the message. This hit doesn't distinguish between types of relationships, it is only about responding. It is easy to fill up a day with dopamine hits while inadvertently putting your most important relationships on extinction. The responder doesn't feel what is missing; care, compassion or connection. The recipient won't forget the insult, for sure. If the relationship matters to you, let the offender know they are withholding feedback and in turn empathy.

## “I Love This Company” By Howard Lees

It could just be me, but I have been observing a notable increase in the application of an 'authoritarian' management style in organisations. It may be world politics, it might be fallout from the global financial meltdown; whatever the reason, I can see it's alive and well and emerging in many large organisations. I am not sure what these organisations are assuming will happen as they hire these expensive and noisy micromanaging aggressors but it's out there and in increasing numbers (in the UK). The scientifically proved winning formula with knowledge workers is creating a workplace environment littered with 'discretionary effort' i.e. people doing the right things every day because they want to contribute more. The creation of these environments is worth the effort for sure, for everyone involved, the organisation, the customers, the workforce.

A number of organisations have 'values' to set the tone for organisational behaviour. Most of these values are clearly honourable and well intended. However I have seen some misreading of one value in particular, and it is 'passion'. I suspect this is being seen by some aggressor leaders as a free pass to be aversive to others in the name of "I love this company". I hear rationalisations along the lines of "I may have been a bit overly emotional but it's because I really care about this organisation". The victims of this aggression are inadvertently reinforcing these unwanted behaviours by saying nothing when they appear in their environment. People need to get a hold of these loose horses and cut these destructive behaviours off at the pass before the world of these knowledge workers drops into dystopia. Where's the happy ending on this subject? The happy ending is when the victims of bullying get together and start working on a plan for change. After all, what could the bully do if the rest in the room just walked out at the first sign of aggression, all you need is a trigger word and the confidence that everyone will act as agreed. Good luck!



# A Nod To the Present and A Wish For The Future

By Dr Richard Kazbour

Historically, behavioral scientists have tackled behavior from a broadly consistent perspective of educating folks on how to get better at achieving the behaviors we want more of. For decades this effort has produced positive gains for humanity in education, autism, safety and leadership. As I sit here in the year 2020, with all that my day to day activities bring with them I can't help but wonder whether it's time for a retrofit of how we as behavioral scientists coach the leaders of tomorrow.

Although early adopters of the science may not have predicted it 80 years ago, the environmental landscape of today has become a bittersweet reality of sorts. Some call our technological age the catalyst of human efficiency, yet to the trained eye it's hard to miss the glaringly obvious dilemma: The time we have available to spend in strategic thought on a given day is being hijacked by inescapable yet subtle distractions specifically programmed to occupy our attention in many cases for the profit of others.

Screen time related to emails, calendar reminders, social media notifications, exaggerated news stories, and the latest app fads we downloaded. On their own each can be dismissed as harmless yet entertaining fodder. Yet collectively they literally have the power to alter our neurological make up. I can hear the eternal optimists acknowledge that technology brings with it a world of hope, no doubt. My optimism lies in the hope that behavioral practitioners of the 21st century will soon recognize the importance of educating a generation of people to not only understand the behavioral dynamics of increasing behavior for the better, but also recognize how to manage the distracting day to day behaviors that fundamentally get in the way of human progression. My two daughters have a future ahead of them that I have no understanding of. Let's seek to focus on the strength derived from thriving human relationships, while using technology with wisdom and restraint.

## Shades of BMT

- Constructive tension between departments? The military don't pit the army against the air force to make each group fight harder.
- It is possible to deliver constructive feedback without being rude, and it's a learned skill worth mastering.
- People that work to realistic timescales and budgets can deliver discretionary effort. People that work to unrealistic targets can't.
- Feedback can be one simple return message, however it can also become a conversation and ultimately turn into a robust and thriving relationship.
- Sometimes people have to have the strength to start focusing on the important and resist the temptations of the faux urgent.

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Editing by Nicola Griffiths and Lynn Dunlop. Photo by Nicola Griffiths.

## 'Safety Leadership' on Kindle

Howard Lees' popular book *Safety Leadership* is now available on Amazon Kindle as an e-book. Search for 'Safety Leadership Howard Lees' or [click here](#).

Here is an extract from the book:

A scientific approach to safety involves data. Lagging measures such as injury numbers are thankfully now scarce, so the numbers are too low to help most organisations with injury prevention. Many organisations now use close call (near miss) data, but this approach has its flaws, which are explored later. Gathering the right sort of data on the right things is vital. Many safety initiatives are expensive and time-consuming, but their efficacy is not measured rigorously. Their success is judged by a lack of injuries (see chapter 9) and by gut feel. Loss aversion and confirmation bias combine to make it unlikely that a programme, once adopted, will be dropped, regardless of how well (or not) it helps people work safely. A more rigorous approach is better: Effective leaders do not just do things and hope they work; they do things and find out if they worked and adjust as necessary.

The key to sustainable safe working is to focus on the creation of a safe working environment. This environment is primarily created by both executive and local leaders. Everything that succeeds in a workplace environment does so because of people. Everything that fails in a workplace environment does so because of people. If a behaviour is not happening, e.g. the reporting of an injury, it indicates that the consequences to the performer for the desired behaviour of 'reporting' must be perceived by them as potentially punishing. The responsibility for changing that perception falls on the leader, not the performer.

