

Behavioural Digest

No. 116 - April 2020

RESCHEDULED:

Behavioural Leadership
Conference and Workshop

4th & 5th November 2020

Manchester

www.hollin.co.uk



Leadership During A Crisis

By Martin Laycock

In late January my world rapidly changed as we had to deal with a new reality here in China. Our plans, routines and habits changed in a very short time frame. There are two aspects of working through the crisis I would like to share:

1. Staying connected: Many of my team were working from home for the first time in their careers. I had a conversation with my direct reports everyday, held multiple virtual meetings and this helped us stay connected and enabled us to engage in working in this new reality.

2. Adjusting our operating plan: We had a plan for the year, but had to make changes to this in light of the crisis. As an example, we simplified our safety focus to just "mind on task" and had conversations with employees at work in the offices and in the field.

The recovery phase has started in China, and whilst life is certainly not as it was, we are able to socialize and connect more than in February and March. This time will pass, but until then stay vigilant and healthy.

Do Not Pass Go...

By David Lees

As a behavioural consultant, when I'm called into a new company, it's common for me to be engaged initially to find out what's happening now. Initial meeting attendance and interviews will usually flush out the issues and problems at play with remarkable ease and speed - the issues hampering performance are already known by most of the people in the group concerned.

What makes the job of improving environment or performance difficult can be generalised as two things: getting the people concerned to listen to (hear) the advice in the first place, and getting them to believe that those suggestions will result in the improvement predicted. For example, plenty of people will react to the proposition that they stop micro-managing with, "Yeah I don't do that very often, it's really not a problem" - months later we continue to observe the next staff-tier down stagnant and in a perpetual state of "waiting for permission" while the sinner continues to be reinforced by their daily activity and position of power.

A key issue in this situation is that people believe that small behavioural quirks, such as interrupting others, don't impact overall performance. The truth is, any pinpointed description of behaviours that lead to successful performance is nothing more than a collection of aggregated small behaviours.

Typically, if someone is to satisfy both of the two points above - taking the feedback in, and accepting that fixing it will make a difference - the rest is actually relatively easy.



[Click here](#) to join the BMT group on LinkedIn.

Read '*Safety Leadership*' by Howard Lees - now available as an e-book on Amazon by [clicking here](#).

Wealth Creators and Politicians

By Bruce Faulkner

Organisations suffer when two distinct elements within the hierarchy compete. They are:

- 1 Teams of wealth creators.
- 2 Senior people playing politics.

Workers in teams try to deliver. Politicians try to acquire power and retain perks. Delivery and perks don't always make for good travelling companions. They only get so far before an issue arises and the workers ask the politicians to make a decision. The need for power and perks activates a strong desire to control. Politicians view any perceived threat as a personal loss. This means they will probably rebuff suggestions for improvement from the workers.

Few workplaces tolerate outward aggression, so the politicians adopt a suite of simplistic passive-aggressive responses. Their first ploy is usually to ignore the request and keep delaying until workers just give up.

The second ploy is a little more complex - when workers propose something new in a more strident way, the politicians will avoid sounding cynical and respond in a way that may, on the face of it, appear reasonable. They endorse the idea, and then sophistry emerges. The politicians will say, "This proposal is more complicated than it looks. While the idea is good, implementing it will produce a series of unintended consequences." That's their get out of jail card, right there.

Albert Hirschman described this process as 'a rhetoric of reaction'. He noted it falls into three categories:

- The Perverse effect - attempts at progress often leads to regression. This argues, "You can't see what I can see."
- The Futile effect - attempts at change are superficial and won't get traction. This argues "Other people won't accept this."
- The Jeopardy effect - we need to protect the plans we already have in place. This argues, "The timing isn't right."

Yes, it's like being trapped in a never ending episode of 'Yes Prime Minister'!

Shades of BMT

Many knowledge workers have now adjusted their work environment. Here are a few things that have emerged during the baby-step phase of making remote working effective:

1. Are you lit well enough to be seen?
2. Is your head positioned well within the screen space?
3. Can everyone hear you when you are talking?
4. Have you mastered 'muting' when you're not talking?
5. Do you have any distracting things going on behind you?
6. Do you realise that online meetings are often recorded?

The Brain's Response To Threat

By Dr Bill Redmon

For all our sophistication in thinking, our brains are still primitive in many ways. It helps to think of the brain in terms of layers that have developed over time. The most recent is the neocortex where we do our most sophisticated thinking, analysis, creativity, problem solving etc. In the middle is the limbic brain which developed as we began living in clans and collaborating to survive. This part helps us relate to others in groups and socially. The most primitive level involves the brainstem, which regulates us biologically. This primitive level also has one other job: It "monitors" our environment for any sign of threat or strong emotion and takes over to protect us as needed by triggering a flight or fight response. The processing at this level is very reactive and unconscious with little or no thinking between input and output. In fact, when the primitive brain activates, most normal thinking is shut down to avoid over-analysing a dangerous situation which could prevent us from reacting quickly.

The parts of the brain work together in a default system to process incoming data. Information does not come in the top and get allocated based on logic. All information comes bottom up and the primitive brain gets first shot at everything. If input contains a threat or strong emotions, the primitive brain will hijack the information and react before it gets to the thinking brain. If we are calm and not under threat, information flows upward and is processed in the thinking brain.

The bottom line: Our emotional state determines which part of the brain is operating and how much thinking versus reacting will occur. So, by learning to notice and regulate our emotions, we can influence which part of the brain is engaged, our reactivity level, and even our working IQ. When under stress, our IQ may drop by a third or more relative to when we are calm.