

# Behavioural Digest

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## An Arms Race for Mental Space By Dr Richard Kazbour

At its core, our attention (how we choose to focus our energy), derives from our five senses: Sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. We process these things in what can be described as a neurological miracle. Our brains fire off messages and release hormones in milliseconds as part of an organic ballet with body, permitting the reliable biological responses that mold our day-to-day actions: Responses shaped over time by the natural environment and so reliable that they helped our ancestors overcome the obstacles necessary for our collective existence.

It's quite comforting to know our biology has stood that test of time. That is, our attention today is just as reliably drawn to the same stimuli that promoted survival for our ancestors. However, our senses don't inhabit the same space. We are clearly living our lives in an exponential explosion of technology and opportunity. As we take in the wonders of this new environment it is imperative that we not only follow our senses, but fully understand the modes directing them. Our mental health is relying on it.

Please email Dr Kazbour at [richard@harkera.com](mailto:richard@harkera.com) to share how this piece resonates (or doesn't at all) with your own perceptions, thoughts, and experiences.

## Psychological Safety or Sky The Oars By Howard Lees

Some workplace environments make it easy for people to speak up, others not so much. If knowledge workers are concerned about what they might say, it's safe to say that they will err on the side of caution. This doubt creates an environment where people hold back on saying things and in the extreme might hold off pointing out a crucial piece of information. Leaders that foster psychological safety create a safe place for their people to speak up. Leaders that jump in and interrupt or disagree or look the other way when we're talking will likely engender a culture of 'don't rock the boat' which will inevitably morph into 'don't row the boat'.

To quote a couple of giants: Professor Amy Edmondson said "Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes." The other behavioural consequence (to punishment) is reinforcement which can lead to a sensation of either pleasure (R+) or relief (R-). Dr Aubrey Daniels said that "Discretionary effort is the level of effort people could give if they wanted to, but above and beyond the minimum required." I would associate Aubrey's definition to be closely linked with R+. It is perhaps a matter for leaders to understand what these two giants are saying in order to keep all the oars in the water. In these especially difficult times, the best leaders will most likely prevail.

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# Too Much Enthusiasm

By David Lees

Most people have probably seen them, if they haven't worked for them - the supercharged, enthusiastic, dynamo boss who moves at a million miles an hour and propels the organisation almost by themselves. They care about their staff, the work, the company, it's faultless in terms of ethics and intent. The downside of this kind of activity is that it takes impetus away from the staff. If the boss comes up with all the action, all the ideas, all the decisions, then there is no room for action, ideas, and decisions from staff, ultimately diluting productivity overall.

If you think this could be you - It's a tough one to redirect, but you've done the hard part!

Regardless of what causes the behaviour, whether it be impatience or lack of trust in your staff, or you just love fixing and deciding things etc, coming up with pre-potted responses to interactions where it could happen is helpful. Pre-loading better responses means that your brain has already walked the alternative path, you now have a mental map of how to avoid taking over situations where you want responsibility and action to sit with others.

# Blue Monday Highlights Need For New Order

By Garry Sanderson

The third Monday of January has been described in a very non-scientific way as the most depressing day of the year. There's little daylight and the weather is dreadful. The fun of the holiday season is a distant memory, yet it's still a few weeks till this month's payday. Of course, all of this is in a normal year. Add the ravages of Covid-19, Brexit, climate change and global political turbulence and a case could perhaps be made that Monday 17th January was the most depressing workday ever.

On this inauspicious day I had a discussion with a close contact who is battling to stay effective (and sane) in a dysfunctional corporate environment. For him, all of the wider Blue Monday dynamics were dwarfed by the much greater impact that poor leadership was having on his outlook and wellbeing. This highlighted to me (again) the scale and relative impact of the leader's footprint on peoples' work lives. This is even more pronounced at a time when rather than 'working from home', many feel they are actually 'living at work'. Roll on the new order of leadership that recognises this!

# Shades of BMT

- You can keep yourself very happy with a boatload of denial.
- A journey of improvement will encounter crazy stuff along the way. For the good of everyone, just go around it and keep focused on your main goal.
- People that focus on loss aversion end up with no wealth.
- You say you are cautious because you are worried about losing stuff out of your net when there isn't anything in your net now.

# Be Careful What You Ask For

By Bruce Faulkner

The route to more effective behaviours is through the use of feedback. It is readily available and provides immediate social consequences. It is the point of leverage for behavioural change. High performance is impossible without feedback. When we ask for feedback and receive comments that are vague or general we might feel that there is nothing new to discover. It may feel like those around us aren't making enough effort to help us and this lack of meaningful help can feel isolating.

Feedback has a long history of being paired with formal evaluation. The dominant feedback at work is mostly subjective and evaluative. Both of these are likely to be received emotionally. If we hear criticism then that brings with it the possibility of confrontation. A focus on the positive avoids offence, it also risks receiving a bland comment that might feel somewhat patronising.

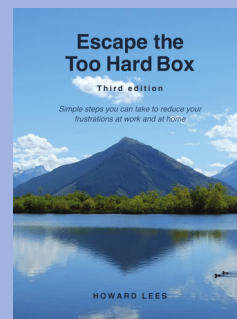
If asking for feedback triggers evaluative thoughts and a focus on past performance, one way of avoiding feeling patronised is to ask for advice instead. One person seeking advice prompts the other person to think about how to improve future performance. The comments become more specific and actionable. So, the magic bullet here is to seek feedback, yes, but ask for it in the form of advice.

# Two Little Words

By Paul Sellars

I find it intriguing that, in this ever more complicated world we live in, we can still make such a huge difference with just two little words: Thank you.

'I can live for two months on a good compliment' – Mark Twain.



The new book by Howard Lees is out now. [Click here to read a sample](#), and to order your copy.