The Need For Power
By Howard Lees

For leaders to be effective, they must have power. Charles Handy talked about the concept of negative power – leaders and managers in organisations that have no authority to say 'yes' to proposals or spend significant money but do have the authority to say 'no'. In his book *Myself and Other More Important Matters*, Handy talks about putting a proposal for a new refinery in the waste bin because he personally disapproved of its location. On reflection, he said that he was actually exercising his negative power because it was the only way he could demonstrate to himself and others that he mattered.

I know many people in charge of businesses and projects that do not have the delegated authority to spend £1000, but could bring down a multi-million-pound operation. This withholding of delegated power from people good enough to hold important jobs renders them powerless in many situations. I have often advised people going for interviews to ask at the interview, 'how much company money will I be able to spend without asking someone else's permission'? One candidate was told £50,000 off the bat. This was a one-off; all the other people I know who have asked this question at interview have been met with stuttering obfuscation from the interviewers!

Listen
By Lynn Dunlop

When we run workshops and ask people what 'good communication' looks like, a common suggestion is active listening. When asking people to pinpoint what that is, descriptions include nodding, making eye contact and summarising what people have just said. As a behavioural science consultant, I tend to prefer to ask people to focus on these kinds of pinpointed behaviours which are objective, unambiguous and as a result, measurable.

However, there are other key listening skills which aren't so easily measured, and one of them is: Listening to what people are communicating - not just the words they are using. It's perfectly possible to transcribe exactly what someone is saying but still miss what they are communicating. Sometimes a person doesn't feel comfortable saying exactly what they are thinking. Sometimes the person might not even realise they are communicating something different to what they are saying.

Listening to what people are communicating involves processing what they are talking about as well as listening to it, watching and listening for emotions on their face and in their voice and paying attention to patterns in what they are saying over time. To take a domestic example, if your partner is continually complaining about the kitchen not being clean, they're often not just complaining about the cleanliness of the kitchen. They could also be trying to communicate that they feel their wishes and needs are being undervalued. In this case, frustration about a dirty kitchen is only the symptom; the conversation is about much more than that.

Two Distinctly Different Workplace Environments
By Susan Prebble

Environment One
The environment in a room with other people: All our senses are working normally, we can feel the atmosphere, we can tell if it's fun and free and we can tell if there is a tyrant in the room spoiling it for everyone else and all points in between. All of Mehrabian's personal communications are working perfectly. One slight change in mood and I can observe it. If I am teaching, I have control of the room, I can detect if people are tired, unhappy, bored, having fun etc.

This room is interactive, it has energy, it's possible to induce excellent creative ideas, discretionary team performance is possible, learning is made easy. Break times are social. Teaching skills is possible, education is possible, room discipline is easy. Stand up and sit down is possible, social at flip charts etc. Everyone is in the same environment – environment drives behaviour – QED.

Environment Two
The environment on Zoom/Teams: I am on my own in my environment here. I am looking at a screen, some people have video on, some are looking at a camera, I can see the bald pates, mouth and below only. The sound is dubious, it's full of glitches, stops and starts. If it isn't masterfully MC'd then it's very long and tiring.

Only the words come through (7% of communication); you can't see body language. What body language you can see, you can't interpret. There's no ambience, there's no mood detection. It's diffucult to control the room, difficult to see if you are going at the right speed. Breaks are lonely, people do their other work in the breaks. There's little energy; discretionary performance is impossible. These events tend to be survived rather than enjoyed. Distractions abound – cats, dogs, kids, partners, the bin man etc. Everyone is in a different environment - QED.

Unlocking Your Team
By David Lees

The counterproductive natural laws of hierarchy need to be overcome before high performance and creativity can happen in teams.

Most places we work, leaders and bosses say that they're convinced people feel free to speak up, and when asked how much people actually do, it's not much. When faced with this it's easy to start getting defensive, as if the fault lies somewhere, but it's not a fault thing. It is just the way people are - some people will speak up to the boss, some won't. The point is, that means you only get the ideas and dissenting opinions from some of the people in your team, not all of them.

If we're going to unlock the diverse abilities and perspectives in our workplaces, this is a great place to find some gold. So set clear expectations that input is not just welcomed, but expected, and deliberately set about creating an environment of things going well for people when they contribute - shape from small safe beginnings.

The (Mostly) Positively Reinforcing Workplace
By Howard Lees

I don't know what you want, but I want to work in a place where my time is respected. I want to be able to do my job properly. I want to work with people that I can bounce ideas off. I want to work in a place where people take the trouble to read the things that I take the trouble to write. I want that feeling of belonging to something good. I want to work for a successful organisation. In my conference talk this May I will attempt to describe in simple terms how this basic ambition can be realised without too much blood sweat and tears!

The Rat Is Never Wrong
By Lynn Dunlop

There is a phrase in behavioural science - 'the rat is never wrong'. It refers to experiments in the lab with rats where they do something other than the thing the scientist expects them to do. "They're doing the maze wrong!!" is a tempting conclusion, but the rat is simply reacting to their environment and doing the most reinforcing thing to them at the time. The rat is never 'wrong'; the scientists might have had a faulty hypothesis or made a mistake in maze design, but the rat's behaviours are the feedback that tells them something isn't right in the environment and must be changed if the scientist wants a different result.

Shades of BMT

- It is possible to deliver constructive feedback without being rude; it's a learned skill. Some people call it tact.
- I am ignoring the well-meant and necessary feedback because, right now, it's just too much to bear.
- An awful lot of people that have the potential to be exceptional don't register as exceptional on most organisations' talent radars.