

Behavioural Digest

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Leadership 101

By Howard Lees

There is a breed of enlightened leader that runs monthly opinion surveys on the whole of their organisation, it's not that difficult to do. Other leaders resist carrying out opinion surveys, with excuses like 'it's way too much hassle' or 'corporate won't allow it'. The enlightened leaders use the feedback from the surveys as the basis for their own meeting agendas, bringing the concerns of the workforce directly into the board room in real time.

This means that that their operational decisions are also based on up-to-date organisational feedback. The initial horror of doing monthly surveys eventually becomes a desired practise for everyone, and the quality and usefulness of the feedback can increase dramatically over time. As in many cases can the performance results of the organisation.

This use of opinion surveys as a leadership tool also creates a constraint within the whole organisation, top to bottom, that any attempt at PR bullshit will be detected quickly. These leaders telegraph their integrity to their whole organisation using these surveys as the primary vehicle.

Task Switching

By Lynn Dunlop

If you're asking someone who is already occupied on one thing to do something else, take into consideration the time and effort it takes for them to task-switch. Some of us are better than others at it. There's really no such thing as multitasking; people who appear very good at multi-tasking are generally just very fluent at task-switching. An aspect of thinking about the time it takes to task-switch is something called latency. If you've an IT background, you'll know the term from the amount of time it takes for a signal to leave its origin to the time it takes to arrive and initiate whatever command it's sending. In behavioural science it's the time between the primary antecedent/prompt and the behaviour. If you're frustrated at the time it takes for someone to do what you're asking, take a step back and consider: Is this a latency problem? The responsibility here is on you - as both the requestor and the frustrated person - to ask: "What could I do to reduce the latency here?"

The Paranoid Optimist

Better safe than sorry (folk wisdom). Nothing ventured, nothing gained (more folk wisdom) These two wisdoms seem contradictory. The first urges caution, whereas the second reminds us that we have nothing to lose and should throw caution to the wind. Yet both seem to capture aspects of human psychology. A person following both maxims would be a paranoid optimist!

(From The Paranoid Optimist by Martie Haselton and Daniel Nettle)



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The Power of NO

By Dave Lees

There's a great picture of the writer Oliver Sachs in his office, he's talking on an old landline with crazy beard intact. Behind him, in big letters, is the word NO writ large and stuck on the wall. The reason was so that he could always have the reminder to say no to things. It's in this idea that the route to your salvation may lie. In our businesses, our lives in general, there is an epidemic of 'too busy', too much, unbridled rushing from one thing to another. It's like there's a tax on being successful and it's that you no longer have control of your life.

Now there will be an element of this which is caused by a lack of resourcing to complete the task, of course. Sometimes you need more people in order to do all the work. However, there is almost always another side to that coin, which is that people are saying yes when they're already full up. Also, the mere idea of saying no to certain people causes enough anxiety that they say yes even when they know they have no chance of being successful.

So, what's happening in these interactions which makes the idea of putting some boundaries in place so undesirable. Firstly, it's easier to say yes. If you want to know what makes behaviour happen most successfully, it's ease. Secondly, saying yes now is reinforcing right now, you get a hit of satisfaction and the pain of not delivering is delayed, and you might avoid it completely because that person might forget they asked you for it in the first place (really?!).

Thirdly, having to stop what you're doing and actually put boundaries around things, say no to things, is usually punishing right now. Sadly, the road to sorting this out is paved in a positive outcome that might happen in the future, some time, but it's not definite, and it's not going to happen right now. It's inherently weak in terms of a behavioural incentive, unless you hack the system yourself.

Here's another quote which should help, call it instant perspective. "If you say yes to something, you are saying no to something else."

Noticing

By Lynn Dunlop

It's useful to pay attention to what happens to a person as a result of doing the thing we are asking of them. Everyone is different, and we can't say that any particular consequence is meaningful to everyone. Some people are motivated by praise, others not. Some people are motivated by money, and some by feeling they've done a good job. Lots - maybe even most people - appreciate their work being acknowledged by someone they respect. Watching out for those things that mean something to people help us to be more purposeful about the consequences we provide as a leader. Sometimes it's just about noticing something that someone has done and saying so.

More on Leadership

By Howard Lees

There's a big difference between a leadership rich environment and a management rich environment, the first one can be very inspirational and the other can involve a lot of nagging and headaches. Many 'manager' leaders fall for the 'too busy trap' and forget that they're responsible for creating and maintaining all the workplaces under their purview.

The leaders that resist the 'too busy' trap tend to focus mostly on the creation of productive and happy workplaces, here are some examples of the things they do:-

1. They observe the daily behaviours of their people, send up regular test balloons to see who is engaged.
2. They train everyone in basic leadership skills.
3. They choose some liberating constraints, keep the popular ones, fail fast on the rest. Things like 50-minute max meetings, banning back-to-back meetings, leadership book club etc.
4. They solicit regular feedback to find out what's really happening out there, this also directs the leaders as to which of their liberating constraints are working.

These are the leaders that I think people want to work for.

Shades of BMT

- Gardeners plant and harvest, but more than anything, they tend.
- Many organisational leaders fail to realise their human potential, they don't realise it's there, and if they do, they still don't realise it.
- If people do not want to understand what you are saying, then they are probably going to realise that goal.
- Unless you have data to the contrary, I would suggest the only modest position you can possibly take is to assume you are a nightmare to work for.