

Behavioural Digest

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Behavioural Leadership
Online Course - Winter 22-23
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When Faced with Incivility - Follow GUAWO

By Howard Lees

This last couple of months there has been an upward trend in stories about senior people delivering abuse to staff and suppliers etc. Some major project client people and some medium size business leaders are up to no good and are effing and blinding at people that are probably trying their best with the cards they have been dealt. This highlights two major problems. The first is that abuse can be received as punishment, which means there is a good chance that some revenge will be returned under the cover of darkness at some point in the future. The second major problem is that if it's senior suppliers' people receiving abuse from senior client people, then they risk the less senior client people doing the same to the less senior folks within the business/project.

Yes, suppliers' directors are smiling and taking the money without thinking about the downstream impact of this trend to their own people. This is either cowardice or greed in the face of abuse. Someone needs to do something; I suggest that the suppliers directors follow the rules baked in GUAWO – Get up and walk out!

Stimulus Control By Lynn Dunlop

Stimulus control exists if 'when I ask for something, I get it'. It requires the asker to build and maintain a relationship so that when they make a request, the other party responds within the timeframe required and to the expected standard. Stimulus control is vital for leadership, and testing it frequently allows leaders to determine whether they have set up stimulus control with their selected individuals.

Stimulus control should be a mutual endeavour. The asker makes a request, and the social contract is that when the provider fulfils that request, they receive acknowledgement for having done so. The onus is on the requestor to consistently appreciate that their request has been respected and delivered.

Taking power dynamics into account: There is usually strong stimulus control between a line manager and their direct report, or a client and a supplier. This can be as a result of the natural consequences inherent in this power dynamic. However, there are other elements that affect stimulus control, and these are built into relationships. There is usually excellent stimulus control between best friends, trusted colleagues, romantic partners etc. Some clients and line managers, for example, are always responsive to requests. This builds even stronger mutual stimulus control due to people's natural tendency towards collaboration and reciprocity.

Building and maintaining good stimulus control is a virtuous cycle worth investing in. It requires relentlessness, thoughtfulness, and care. Where natural power dynamics are insufficient to prompt it, developing better relationships is the route best taken.



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You May be Experiencing Revenge for Another Person's Misdeeds

By Bruce Faulkner

Sometimes bosses try to fix a problem in their current role that they avoided fixing in their previous role. These leaders get a new job, and during the transition, they reflect on their previous role. That is when they admit to themselves that there was a person whose toxic behaviour they didn't deal with. They were unwilling to confront that person and they now regret their lack of courage. Feeling a bit humiliated, they vow to never let that happen again.

As these leaders settle into their new job, a member of this new team annoys them. This event reminds them of the one who got away with it. Now, their resolve hardens into revenge. When they are in the presence of this person, it triggers memories of their past failing. The leader becomes hypersensitive to any perceived fault and is excessively critical. This poor soul now experiences bias revenge for the past failings of this guilty boss.

If you are at the receiving end of this leader's behaviour, there's a chance it really isn't about you. They are taking out revenge on you because you happen to be like the other person in some way. It's not me really, I just got wrongly snared in the police line-up. My suggestion if you have been snared in this way, get yourself a transfer or just leave, because they're unlikely to remove this bias against you.

Taking No for an Answer

By Joanne Benjamin

Sometimes we're asked a question and it's made clear that "no" is simply not going to be an acceptable response. The asker could consider how a negative response may feel for the recipient and next time adjust their personal style so that they don't put people in that awkward position. If something is non-negotiable, there's no need to give someone a pointless choice. If something is negotiable, refusal should be a viable option, so perhaps make that option clear? Otherwise, the relationship risks an undercurrent of coercion, at least in that moment. Be careful, sure, and specific when making requests from people. They either have a choice or they don't.

Shades of BMT

- An awful lot of people that have the potential to be exceptional don't look exceptional on most organisations' chosen radar screens.
- Two key qualities in great people are 'disclosure' and 'enquiry'.
- Robust and trusting relationships breed all kinds of wondrous creative possibilities.

Stickability of Training?

By David Lees

Frequently when in a proposal stage of a new engagement the stickability question comes up: "How do you make sure your training lives on in our organisation after you're gone?" The answer is, we design it so that after the course has finished, there are feedback loops and consequences in the work environment for people in the days, weeks and months following the training.

Another answer could be, well we can't really. In actual fact, the structural, process-based attempts made to affect the use of the principles and methods we provide pales in significance in comparison to the boss, the same person asking the stickability question, simply asking people how the new techniques are going on a regular basis. As trainers, we are a temporary anomaly in an otherwise relatively established institutional repertoire, whereas the local boss is a major influencer within the daily work environment. Just by asking, "How is your improvement plan going?" powerfully shows staff that this is important, and as such, you should do something with it.

Is It Valuable?

By Joanne Benjamin

It's polite to find out from people if the emails you are sending are useful. Despite your best intentions, without feedback, you might just be sending things that don't add value for the recipient.

If you are simply making sure that they don't miss out on some piece of information it may still lead to them having a crowded inbox, and they may be deleting things from you after a quick partly attentive triage. Asking them (in person) for feedback on what you send gives you an opportunity to build the relationship further, it demonstrates that you'll react well if they say 'no thanks' and makes it easier for people to know that any emails from you are likely to be really valuable.