

Behavioural Digest

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Behavioural Leadership
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Ray Dalio Book Principles By Howard Lees

Ray Dalio's book 'Principles' is packed with nuggets about how feedback is invaluable, and, in his company, they go to the most amazing lengths to frequently collect feedback. They continually analyse their feedback to make sure they are getting the best value from their people. It works: They have been successful for a long time in a market - dealing in hedge funds - where long-term success is difficult.

He makes some reassuring points about hiring talent, mostly around how difficult it is to do it successfully. "Introducing new people to an environment they have no previous experience of is a crap shoot", he says, "why expect anything else?" It seems to work best when new people dive in and give it a go for 3 months, and this is followed by a review. But the subject up for review is not the new hire but the organisation itself! Did we as a team perform well for this new starter?

A major tenet of his book follows the 'what do you want', 'what is true' and 'what are you going to do about it' paradigm. I am again impressed by the stress he puts on finding out exactly what's happening right now prior to making decisions about the future. I frequently ask people, "Are you sure you have a good read on exactly what's happening at your workplace now?" Thanks Ray!

Coaching a Person That Exhibits Eminently Predictable Behaviours By Various Contributors

Choices involve trade-offs. This is true both in life and business. I chose to agree to coach this person, I don't want to give up on them, except, right now, I want to walk away. I am utterly offended at the crass and idiotic things he says. You can probably tell that I am experiencing frustration: He won't try any tasks that I suggest, won't even read a short article. He clearly has no intention of attempting anything new. I am experiencing an emerging feeling of regret regarding the choice I made to coach him. My words and actions have yet to produce any change in style or content of response from him. I haven't identified any point of interest for him. Please, free me from this mortal coil.

My internal dialogue says he's not going to change, he's wasting my time, he's cynical, he is a bad person. I have quickly set up a bias about this person and now I am layering on. I am deriving reinforcement from a negative narrative in a desperate attempt to eke some morsels of reinforcement from this debacle. I am frustrated and distracted. I was hired to coach and fix this person with his obvious disfunctions, and I am now frustrated by those very same disfunctions. He has won, he is getting coached. It's a perfect storm. What's the way out? Am I smarter than him? If I am then what's the problem, I just need to figure out what to do to make this pantomime more entertaining for me and if he's lucky, him too. Of course, that's the solution, "Get thinking then, there is a solution, go and find it"!

As Jackson Browne said, "Caught between the longing for love and the struggle for the legal tender."

Stop Overworking Yourself to Cover the Risk of Other People's Decisions

By Bruce Faulkner

In all businesses there are natural sets of day-to-day conflicts that commonly exist. Ones that cannot be eliminated - for example, if you want fast response then you may have to have low utilisation. Some leaders refuse to accept this reality. Their approach can sometimes be to maximise utilisation and also demand instant responses. This is what I call the maximum stress scenario. The downstream effects of ignoring reality is a constant shifting of priorities. Problems accumulate and issues escalate. This causes leaders to intervene and redirect the staff. Everyone ends up stuck in the operational details, playing whack-a-mole.

Choosing to insist on high utilisation for staff is an economic choice. One that is very appealing when fiddling around with numbers on a spreadsheet to maximise bonuses. The risks associated high utilisation belong to the leaders. This risk can be passed off to the workforce. People complain about problems of understaffing only to be told, "Do the best you can." That is the moment the risk gets transferred. How? Professional people with integrity know that more time is required to complete the work to an 'acceptable' standard. And they freely put in that time, in a professional manner.

There is a false logic at play in the utilisation game. Consistently working longer hours doesn't increase productivity. Neuroscience also states that when the human brain is held in this state, it leads to a lowering of fluid intelligence. This means that more mistakes are made and not picked up. These are mistakes that a professional wouldn't miss, if they weren't overworked.

If you find yourself in a working environment where leaders ignore the reality of these trade-offs. If you hear the voice in your head or feel social pressure to put in the extra effort. Pause, take a breath, and save your energy because this situation will never get better. Instead, leave work on time and spend that extra effort towards finding an organisation that has a sustainable working environment.

Easy? No. Possible? Yes!

By Rachel Edwards

"Commit to your goals" is written on the wall in my local gym. I find it mildly irritating in a faux motivational way; a trite saying to try and manufacture some inspiration. Ironically, I have found myself thinking of it and trying to understand what it would look like in the real world, and how to create the conditions for it to be possible. Goals aren't usually that hard to articulate, or even the path to get there. What is difficult is maintaining consistency in staying the path; repeating the daily behaviours that deliver the result. This is often because achieving the goal, or the thought of it feels great, but the daily behaviours don't, because they don't deliver sufficient positive reinforcement to repeat day in, day out. So, committing to goals really means figuring out how to be consistent, how to avoid distraction, how to stay the course when other more tempting avenues appear. Easy? No. Possible? Yes; with a beady eye scanning for the nearby temptations likely to weaken one's resolve.

Danger, Wellbeing Initiative Ahead

By Dave Lees

Wellbeing initiatives are a subject that requires an amount of what Keats called a negative capability. Clearly the idea that companies should spend time talking about worker wellbeing is not a bad one; on the contrary, it's a good one. However, there's often a huge elephant in the room when it comes to these initiatives. The danger comes from the fact that many leaders are promoting wellness initiatives whilst presiding over the workplace repertoire that is causing the wellbeing problems in the first place and ignoring that fact completely. All over the world there are time-consuming, energy-sapping, and most infuriatingly, patronising initiatives being delivered to people whose choice seems to be 'endure or leave', but if you choose to endure we're going to give you a "happiness calendar" (yes that is a real thing provided on a real major project) where we will give you some suggestions like "enjoy photos from a happy time" which will offset the torpor of the current environment.

There is plenty of scientific support for most of the solid suggestions put forward in the wellbeing initiatives, and there is great work being done by great people in that space. The big BUT here, is that if the current culture/environment is causing the problems, concentrating on wellness schemes is putting a tissue on a gaping wound.

Shades of BMT

- Trust is an emotional by product of behavioural interactions.
- Being able to spot the good guys is like spotting people who can sing in tune. You won't get any clues unless they are singing.
- Sheep dip courses are as effective as real sheep dip; it's not long before the old ticks come back.
- People may entice you into the weeds, but you don't have to follow them there.