

Behavioural Digest

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Behavioural Leadership
Conference and Workshop
May 15th & 16th 2024
Manchester, UK



It's All About Engagement

By Howard Lees

Without engagement, you can't: Develop a relationship, build a team, build a high-performing team, rely on stimulus control, build pots of trust, create serendipity, feel that 'I want to do this' feeling, produce great things, share success with others, enjoy that amazing feeling while creating something that's not quite there yet, look back on great things, or enjoy the passage of time.

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"Even when folks are hitting you over the head, you can't stop marching. Even when they're turning the hose on you, you can't stop."

- Barack Obama

To The Generation That Got Us This Close To Annihilation

By David Lees

In response to Howard's article in the March edition of the Digest, I've met plenty of young people with gumption, lots without. I can't imagine humans are any different now than previously, but their environment is massively different. For one, it's a seller's market for the talented young people, which means that when they come across crappy leadership (which seems to be the default) they just up and leave or prioritise weekends in Barcelona. What I've noticed the most is the erosion of the effectiveness of "Do it because I'm the boss," and "You should listen to me because I'm older." We're at the height of needing good leaders to create context around the work people are doing. A lot of leaders came up at a time where their elders just had to ask for things to be done and they'd get done. That's no longer enough and it's taking people by surprise.

My take on the current leaders is that most are just looking after themselves, climbing the greasy pole, and are caught between negative reinforcement of working with their bosses and the positive reinforcement of perpetual meetings and top loop. Getting the best out of their teams is a consequence that is both Later and Unsure, therefore it's more likely to get ignored in favour of consequences that occur Now and other ego-driven activities. I've watched a thousand times as a leader has a chance to do the right thing and doesn't. I would say that "old" people complaining about "young" people will instantly get eyes rolling. It misses the point. Instead, changing the target to describe how to unlock the potential in the upcoming generations is much more interesting.

Yin, Yang

By Howard Lees

The organised workplace is productive. Workers understand the principle of the critical path (things happening in a timely fashion and they occur in the right order). The days feel certain and decisive, feedback is honest and robust. This workplace breeds competent and skilful workers who are adept at their jobs, willing to learn new skills and will be flexible in terms of their work. The people in this workplace will be comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, they will be calm (well, mostly). This culture has been created by a person or persons setting out to deliberately create a feedback-rich workplace environment.

The disorganised workplace lacks coherence. Daily activities are haphazard and random. For the workers in this place, their day feels disordered and confused, and most of all, uncertainty reigns. This workplace is littered with avoidance behaviours. These are inexplicable, sometimes irrational events that fuel the confusion as people scan for perceived threats and act in a way that will minimise the threat towards them, deflecting in all directions. I have witnessed this workplace environment many times, it is very difficult to stop and start again fresh. All the responses are in deep ruts, people will defend their position no matter how irrational. In this world, everyone's past experiences are in front of them!

Death by a Thousand Cuts

By Rachel Edwards

Trying to talk to someone who isn't listening is a painful experience: One I am familiar with – my kids are experts at it! Being ignored lights an emotional touchpaper; frustration, anger, overreaction, despair, self-doubt, helplessness... what seems like a passive response (doing nothing) has the capacity to provoke an incredibly strong reaction.

Behavioural science has a name for the experience of eventually stopping doing a behaviour because efforts are ignored: It's called 'extinction'. The emotional wave that characterises the process is 'an extinction burst'. In a purely behavioural science sense it's an effective method for reducing unwanted behaviour, but the relationship cost is high. My kids are experts at dishing out extinction, but it's not personal; they're too little to understand the impact. Working with someone who deals out extinction is different. It's death by a thousand cuts; it says 'this relationship is not important enough for me to care'. Which, coincidentally, is exactly what my son would say if the choice is between keeping me happy or putting his toys away.



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Photograph by Jean Lees. Editing by Bryony Sherry.

Lead by Example

By Bryony Sherry

A senior leadership team is a microcosm of the whole organisation. This means that they represent the wider culture, priorities and behaviours of the wider business. This is great news if the SLT are responding to phone calls, setting expectations with emails, upholding commitments, and managing their time and tasks sufficiently enough to allow themselves to lead strategically.

Without pinpointing what 'leading' looks like, the performance of the whole team is in jeopardy. To 'lead by example' the leadership team need to consistently demonstrate their ability to plan, communicate and follow through on what they said they would do. If senior leaders take three weeks to phone anyone back, what hope do mere mortals have?

Behavioural Leadership Conference & Workshop 2024

Our two-day event comprises the Conference (15th May) and the Workshop (16th May). To celebrate the 20th year of Hollin, the theme will be longevity; speakers will share how they've created long-term success across different areas of business.

Visit www.hollin.co.uk to book tickets.

Shades of BMT

- If you don't deal with disrupters, it makes it hard to recognise the good people. If the disrupters are still alive in the pool with the other workers, the good guys are still getting splashed by the bullies.
- Projects can very easily kick off with a septic focus rather than a balanced focus; it's all down to the leader staying focused on the important stuff.
- If you keep storing stuff away for a rainy day, when you finally get to it, it may be mouldy.
- If you are not part of the workplace environment, you can't control anything, let alone everything.