

Behavioural Digest

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David Marquet at the ICE By Howard Lees

I enjoyed the David Marquet speech at the Costain & ICE event last month. I have been a fan since I saw his now famous YouTube video back in 2013. His latest book focuses on the actual words spoken by leaders to their people and is well worth the read. Of course, his fans don't need persuading regarding the wisdom contained in his books; some others would benefit greatly by watching the video with an open mind. There was a moment of extra gold in the Q&A session in the lecture when he was asked about the allure of power. He said that humans are wired for control, that leaders are made, not born. We are born to identify ourselves in the hierarchy and climb up. We naturally use language that reinforces control; leaders want to feel powerful and this is an issue of ego defence. He said, "It was only when I gave up the need to make all the decisions, that I now had hundreds of people feeling good about their lives. It is an issue of maturity. People with true power don't need to say they have power. The key is to reduce the power gradient; CEOs don't need to demonstrate power, they don't need a 100 foot long office." If I ask a CEO "Do you believe your people have great ideas" and they say "no," I say "goodbye." Successful leaders work to reduce power gradients, if they do that then they are benefitting from everyone and their organisation will succeed.

Pinpointing From Home By The Hollin Team

A reader got in touch to ask our thoughts on the application of Susan Anderson's quote in November's Digest would work for an MS Teams meeting or work from home environment. Susan said: "You can walking a classroom and instinctively detect if there is a good vibe. You can also walk on to a site or factory floor and detect if it feels safe. Stop and take a look at what those people are doing, those are the pinpointed workplace behaviours."

Well, even remotely, plenty of behaviours are still observable. Are people's cameras on/off? If off, we still have verbal behaviours - start by counting them. Pay attention to what topics people are covering and also what they don't talk about. Think about the words they use – are they asking questions or making statements? In the context of that interaction, is the balance appropriate? Some important factors for detecting a vibe are the same regardless of the medium: Do they arrive on time? Have they prepared for the meeting? Have their meeting actions been closed out from the last meeting?

If the cameras are on, we have all of those things along with anything else we can see. Is there a lot going on in the background? If so, this possibly isn't the time/place for an in-depth critical conversation – perhaps have some questions prepared to gently enquire about the context of today. Likewise if there is a phone or email pinging away. If we know someone, it's easy to spot if we have their full attention. The signs are different for each individual, but, as Susan Anderson suggests, you know it when you see it.

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The Importance Of Antecedents

By Susan Prebble

It's started, Christmas has begun; I am getting Christmas cards already. I only ever hear from some of my old friends and relations when I get a pithy message scrawled inside a Christmas card. Of course, reciprocity applies here too and I do the same thing. The antecedents for this act? Well the month of December comes around and we receive some cards in the post. We are not religious, our card-sending activity is not a sacred act on our part: It's more a habit, partly guilt. I can imagine that some people enjoy the act of getting in touch with their past and their heritage during this seasonal period of reflection.

We have a list that comes out each year once the card-writing begins, we do not update our list, I have no idea if some of these people even live where it says they do on our list. Why do we only care about these people at Christmas? If we really wanted to know how they are we could ring them up and have a chat. On second thoughts, let's just send the cards!

Outlook Is Fair, Feels Like SAD

By Garry Sanderson

COVID-19 has transformed the environment in which we live and work. Many knowledge workers that I speak with would say that rather than 'working from home' they are 'living at work'. The working day is a succession of zoom calls, through which we have collectively achieved a significant amount, but that are now I feel taking their toll. The dynamics of effective and motivational remote working is, of course, a big subject, but I do have one specific hypothesis I would like to test with you.

I have found my own mood and motivation to be much more influenced by the weather and daylight (or lack of it) than it would be normally. My hypothesis is that the 'zoom world' gives us little or no 'social energy' (positive or negative) that we would feed off in a physical workspace. We start the day and remain at a low level of energy, and therefore the normal effect of the weather and daylight is simple more noticeable. I'd love to get your thoughts on this if you have the energy and time between zoom meetings... though that may not be possible as all meetings end and start at the same time, as defined by the Outlook default settings!

Shades of BMT

- By refusing to put language to it we are trying to pretend it doesn't exist.
- Some leaders look on the coaching and pastoral care elements of their job as an administrative chore. These folks are still immature, not yet leaders – caterpillars, not butterflies.
- Performance increases as obstacles are removed.
- Solutions are much simpler when you are talking about other people's problems.

A Dearth Of Self-Awareness (Name withheld)

I enjoyed the David Marquet ICE lecture very much. A number of people in my world of work also watched and enjoyed it. Since it happened a number of leaders have quoted it, saying how interesting it was and urging us to think about things like word share and power gradient. My problem, and my need for anonymity is that the very people that are encouraging us to understand the content or Mr Marquet's lecture are the worst offenders when it comes to the share of words and power gradient in meetings. I am bemused that the people encouraging us to read leadership articles and watch meaningful TED Talks etc do not seem to understand the irony of their own hopeless leadership habits. This obvious hypocrisy makes the whole thing like a pantomime: "Oh no it doesn't," "Oh yes it does."

Accountable vs Responsible By David Lees

"Holding people to account" is a phrase that is often used to describe what needs to happen to people in an organisation. Their leaders have read some books, maybe been on a course, so they know not to use the word "blame." The phrase is a label for lagging behaviour: If you screw up, I'm going to hold you to account (punish or penalise you in some way). It's negative reinforcement and therefore will only ever lead to just enough behaviour to avoid the threat.

Alternatively, creating an environment where people know that they are "responsible" for the performance of a task, and possibly even overcoming obstacles that might be in their way, you have a leading label which is much more useful. The secret is in the clarity of where the responsibility starts and stops. A person cannot be responsible for solving issues that are out of their power to solve, but they can be responsible for raising a flag the second they see a roadblock ahead.