

Behavioural Digest

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Workshop:

Building a Post-Lockdown Culture

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Snakes, Tax Breaks and Behavioural Mistakes

By Dave Lees

Back in the days of the Raj, the British Governor was concerned about the number of venomous cobras in Delhi, so he offered a bounty for every dead cobra. Initially, this was a successful strategy; large numbers of snakes were killed and returned for the reward. Later on, enterprising people began to breed cobras for the income. When the Governor became aware of this, the reward program was scrapped. At this point the cobra breeders set their now-worthless snakes free and the wild cobra population further increased, causing havoc.

This occurrence seeded the term 'the cobra effect'. Here are some more examples: The Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) was a government grant with good intentions, however it enabled people to make profits by simply using more and more renewable energy to heat their premises; people were profiteering by heating empty buildings. The U.S. Army at Fort Benning had a problem with feral pigs and offered a bounty for every pigtail turned in; people bought pigtails from butchers then handed them in to the Army for the bounty price. Some Fire Departments around the world are funded by the number of fire call-outs they receive; I don't even need to finish this one, do I? My question to you is, do you have anything in your business that has become a victim of the cobra effect?

It is Not an Accident

By Dr Scott Geller

I urge people not to use the term "accident" anymore because it implies a lack of ability to prevent. Prevention implies some level of control. Even with Covid-19, we do things to control its spread. Systematic prevention is not "accidental." It's better to describe a car 'accident' as a 'crash' to give the much wiser impression that these events can be controlled and prevented.

Life As We Know It

By Rachel Edwards

The number of rules, guidance, new laws, and reminders that we have encountered in the last 18 months about new behaviours required in order to suppress the spread of Covid-19 has been remarkable. What's been interesting too is people's reactions to each new rule and the subsequent levels of compliance; even amongst friends and family I've seen opinions at different ends of the spectrum about how precisely the Covid-19 social interaction guidance should be interpreted and applied.

Sometimes it has felt to me to be abundantly clear what I needed to do to best keep my family and others as safe as practicably possible, other times it's felt like a muddle and hard to decipher. What has become evident is that when it's simple and easy to understand what's required, an overwhelming majority of people will participate in achieving the goal. When it's worked well, the strategic principles are transferable and applicable for business and industry. Many organisations struggle with creating engagement with rules and guidance, and sometimes sufficient motivation around achieving goals too. It would be great if, out of this crisis, we could figure out what level of simplicity is the bare minimum required in order to achieve engagement.

Four Bite-Sized Pieces By Howard Lees

Back to Back - A Simple Fix

People are still spending their workdays on back-to-back video calls. The recent Microsoft research is compelling: It says that back-to-back meetings cause stress, and that the effect is cumulative. There are well-paid leaders out there complaining about too many back-to-back meetings, something well within their gift to fix. This is an opportunity to insert breaks between meetings. Simple time management will fix this problem. It is quite easy to manage an Outlook calendar. We do not need to show the brilliant confirmational brain scans from the research, simple nous will suffice.

Mindful Fluency

Dr Scott Geller enjoys reminding us that 'mindful fluency' is a simple tool that can help us with safe behaviours. He suggests that if we are carrying out a potentially risky behaviour that we simultaneously narrate in our heads the safety element of what we are doing. His common example is 'I am walking down the stairs and I am holding the handrail'. Of course, mindful fluency can be used for non-safety scenarios. Leaders could say to themselves 'I should wait until everyone else in this meeting has said their piece before I speak'. Managers in meetings could say to themselves 'I am listening to what the others are saying, and I am making notes'. Parents could silently remind themselves in the company of their child that 'this young person that I love deserves my undivided attention'.

When You See It

Safety occurs when supervisors say the right things to their workforce at the start of every shift. It occurs all day when the supervisors are actively caring for their people. Safety occurs when management teams respond well to freely-given and well-meant feedback and concerns. Safety occurs when all the equipment is maintained in good order and enough time is allowed for the making of products. Safety occurs when everyone has the freedom and desire to want to 'do and say' the right things.

Communication

Communication is more reinforcing when an environment has been created where people don't take offence when their work is being checked. Pilots do check-lists out loud, surgeons verbalise check-lists with the rest of the surgical team; it's not an insult, it's not inferring that you don't know your job. Instead, it's reassuring communication. It says "understood, over and out". It's like when the chef shouts "two risotto, three fish, two veal" and the commis shouts back "two risotto, three fish, two veal, yes chef." It's reassuring and it's valuable. The 'over and out' habits keep everyone on the same page and it can be fun to be in a reinforcing tribe.

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Plugging Away By Susan Prebble

We frequently find ourselves in scenarios where business managers want to improve their culture and request assistance in creating 'change' for the better within their organisation. We may point out that change can take time to effect - in fact, it can take an excruciatingly long time to change from (say) a command-and-control culture to a more 'enlightened and delegated' culture. A sea change would mean that every individual, every synapse, every relationship, every daily rhetoric will have to change in some way.

This means that enough time should be planned for people to experiment with new behaviours and adjust to the emerging new workplace environment. Typically, three or four months along the new journey, someone of influence gets impatient that people are still asking for permission. This can set up a fear that everyone could slip down a snake back to the start. My advice would be: Stay the course, keep the faith.

Success requires everyone to keep plugging away at the new way, and if they can survive the continued trip-hazards, one day the change will become real. Successful change requires a great leader to lead the change and to stay the course. If it's up to you to choose your leader, then I suggest that you pick someone with energy and integrity, someone that we would all want to follow.

Shades of BMT

- If you don't say what needs to be said in this meeting then inevitably there will have to be another meeting, and another meeting...
- Deflecting' is what politicians do. They ignore the question you asked and make an unrelated statement or ask an irrelevant question – it's infuriating, especially if you are being paid to coach them!