

# Behavioural Digest

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## Use With Care

By David Lees

Maxims are everywhere, and it feels sometimes as if you haven't said anything of value unless you've pinged a soundbite across at the people listening. Therein lies a problem.

Here are two questions, the answers of which should highlight the caution to be used:

What is the purpose of maxims?

Essentially, getting people's attention. They are snappy and memorable and can pot a lot of information into one phrase as a base principle.

What do they achieve?

Nothing really. They are by definition, reductive. They boil things down into a natty one liner, in the hope that the one liner will stick. For us as coaches and teachers, we use them to garner attention, increase engagement, with the hope that people will want to learn more. If the attention stops at the end of the maxim, there is a problem. No situation at work is that simple, so, ignore context at your peril, because when it boils down to it, most questions could be answered with the response – "it depends".

## Faking the Pith

By Liz Franklin-Kitchen

I used to sell health insurance. I was terrible at it: My lead rate was the lowest in the team. I was teased by my colleagues, even by my training manager. He told me I spent too long with clients. "They're not your friends," he'd say, "they're your commission!"

I lost confidence in myself, and soon also lost faith in the product I was selling. Deciding that sales wasn't for me, I quit. A few days before I left, the MD took me to lunch. To my genuine surprise, he told me that I had the highest conversion rate in my team, and wanted to know if there was anything he could do to persuade me to stay. From my perspective, he had seemed happy enough to witness me being teased and bullied, and was only now stepping in to try and keep me... because I made him money, and now he would lose that money.

Twenty years later, not much has changed. Our inboxes fill up with fake, over-familiar "Hey! Looks like we're friends, lemme sell you something lol" messages. We scroll through well-meaning-but-incomplete memes that tell us "X type of people treat you like dirt; Y type of people don't show up; Be a Z person.", as if that's the sum total of the tools we need to survive; maxims all. The inference is that we will only understand a short, pithy message, if we already have a lived or shared experience to corroborate it. When we constantly chase the quick fix – get in, close the deal, get out – we lose connection with ourselves, and with our communities.

So if there's one thing that I hope to see more of, it's that we take a little bit more time. More time to get to know one another, more time to consider someone else's perspective, more time to connect. Turn down your volume, and instead, listen.

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# Creating a 'Safe to Try' Environment for Leaders

By Dave Lees

Any strategy which attempts to improve performance in any way must change behaviour in an organisation. If people keep doing what they've always done, they'll get what they've always got. Leaders are the creators and maintainers of the workplace environment for their staff. If there is going to be behavioural change then the leaders need to make sure that this workplace environment will support the changes. Leaders will probably need to change their own behaviour to do that. That might be quite a challenge.

Behavioural science shows that people will hold onto things with much more veracity than they will chase after something new. In other words, loss aversion is strong. So, if we consider upper management, they have achieved some success; they have a good salary, some status and standing with their peers and extended network, life is peachy. Considering the loss aversion issue for the people who have something to lose, their success was achieved by behaving exactly as they have done thus far, will tend to resist any nudges toward change.

The question for CEOs, senior leaders, boards and the like is surely: How do we create an environment for those leaders which will encourage positive behavioural change despite the reflex to protect the status quo and say NO?

## "You've Missed a Bit"

By Howard Lees

Feedback is very important in many situations. Delivering feedback that is welcomed by the recipient is a skill requiring much elan, wisdom and aplomb. In order to get away with a loaded phrase like "you've missed a bit", then the relationship would have to be excellent. A solid, robust and trusting relationship can respond with humour to most lazy comments disguised as feedback. The success of feedback is proportional to the quality of the relationship with the receiver (i.e. don't take any chances with strangers). How can you tell the strength of your relationships? Test them out, ask people what they think, look at their faces when they reply and see if you can detect any dissonance! If you get a wide eyed smile then you are probably OK to proceed.

## Shades of BMT

- "How can we be collaborating with others if we aren't even responding to them?" - Garry Sanderson
- Some people can turn praise straight into an insult, e.g. "That was great, much better than last time."
- If you don't ask for any dissenting opinions, are you likely to get them?
- A little bit of praise every day, keeps extinction at bay.

# Measuring the Soft Skills

By Lynn Dunlop

It can be easy to think of a focus on relationships and leadership as 'soft skills'. They might feel like something nice-to-have but not necessary for the organisation to function. However, there comes a point in an organisation's life cycle when they can choose whether to focus on higher levels of performance, or simply to accept the current levels and just increase staff numbers in order to attain growth. At this stage in particular, relationships and leadership skills are the critical factor in which route the company elects to take.

There are some barriers to moving to a focus on leadership skills. Some people may require a little training or coaching. A shift in focus will often feel uncomfortable or unnecessary to someone who has achieved personal success up until now. A key barrier I tend to encounter is that the 'soft skills' can seem difficult to measure, especially when we're comparing them to more tangible outputs like sales, reportable injuries or the amount of concrete poured in a day. But this doesn't have to be the case. It is perfectly possible to choose key performance indicators for relationships and leadership in exactly the same way as we would for any other aspect of business.

It's just a matter of taking sufficient steps back to establish some underlying key pinpointed behaviours. For example, one simple way to damage a relationship is turning up late to meetings. We can therefore infer that one way to improve or maintain good relationships is to turn up on time to meetings. This behaviour is something that is very easy to measure and if measured over time is a key indicator of the health of a relationship. Taken as part of a suite of similar basic measures, it is perfectly possible to establish objective, measurable data points which broadly indicate levels of trust, collaboration, psychological safety and other key 'soft skills' which are essential for high performance in organisations.