

# Behavioural Digest

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Escape the Too Hard Box:  
The latest book by Howard Lees is  
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## Interpersonal Risk By Joanne Benjamin

At around primary school age, children start to recognise that what others think of them matters. They learn how to lower the risk of rejection or embarrassment. This interpersonal risk stays with us through adulthood. It's different for everyone and is assessed and reassessed in every environment we find ourselves in. For leaders seeking to create an environment of high performance, something to consider is how we can minimise people's perception of the interpersonal risk they face each day.

## Skip Intro By Howard Lees

Are we being conditioned to be more impatient? Streaming TV services allow us to skip the intro of programmes; it also cuts off the credits at the end in order to quickly load up the next episode so we can skip that intro. Does this translate into the world of work? Could we cut the fat from meetings and only focus on the lean juicy content? Would this make us more impatient for another lean meeting? As our impatience strengthens, what's next for the chop?



[Click here](#) to join the BMT group on LinkedIn.

## Do You Suffer From Back-to-Back Pain? By Garry Sanderson

Back-to-back pain is defined (by me) as the highly unpleasant physical or mental sensations caused by meetings following one immediately after the other; in unbroken sequence; usually online.

For obvious reasons, back-to-back online meetings infected many of our work calendars during the pandemic induced lockdowns. However, the infection seems to have persisted into the post-pandemic working environment. More than 70 people responded to a questionnaire exploring the impact of back-to-back meetings. Key findings from these respondents were:

- Over 60% have work calendars badly infected with back-to-back meetings
- For 63% the present frequency of back-to-back meetings has increased since before the pandemic
- Over 40% consider that their personal effectiveness has reduced as a result of the increase in back-to-back meetings
- Over 50% consider that the increase in back-to-back meetings has had a negative impact on their wellbeing
- 40% are working from home; 40% are 'hybrid' working; only 14% are office based

This simplistic research has highlighted a leadership imperative. During lockdown, through necessity, we established a set of habits and behaviours regarding back-to-back meetings. For many, these behaviours are persisting, with negative implications for personal effectiveness and wellbeing.

What should leaders do to improve the situation regarding back-to-back meetings? Please submit your ideas on the BMT for Leaders LinkedIn site.

# Never Rob a Person of the Opportunity to Learn

## By Bruce Faulkner

Next time you see someone making a mistake, resist the initial urge to intervene. Ask yourself, is this person going to get physically injured? If the answer is no, then never interfere with their opportunity to learn. Why? Because natural consequences explain things that rules can never define.

Understanding flows from the consequences of actions, it does not precede it. Reading about a situation and experiencing it are not the same thing. Because writing the written word inevitably omits key details. Those details are the context, all the aspects of the environment that surround the event. The environment is a complex moving target. The people involved are changing. What they are saying and doing and the 'why' behind those behaviours is also changing. This person needs to experience the dynamic of the environment. They need to learn how to read and interpret what they observe. Interfering interrupts the learning process. The wiser alternative is to support them after the fact.

Start by asking questions. Get them to make observations about the environment, what they saw people saying and doing. This reveals the details they were attending to. Next, ask them what they think the other people are interested in. They may try to turn the table early by asking for your opinion. Resist providing your perspective. Give them the chance to talk. After they run out of steam, then provide your take on the situation. It is the process of reflection, not interference, that accelerates their learning.

## Top Loop

### By Howard Lees

A few years back Alasdair Cathcart spoke at our conference and mentioned the effect called 'top loop'. It is where the executive leaders in an organisation spend most of their time with each other, rather than tending to their clients and their people. It's not that they don't like their clients or their people, it's just that the number of reinforcers available for doing cool things with each other are abundant. From the outside it can look like they are luxuriating in their own importance. It does them no credit at all, but do they care?

I think that I have observed another version of top loop: It's 'safety top loop'. Take a look at LinkedIn posts by safety professionals, nearly all the 'likes' are from other safety professionals. It's safety people talking to each other. There's some really interesting stuff talked about, but I wonder how this gold is ever going to make its way to the supervisors and workforces in the world of work, the places where people get hurt.

## Torschlusspanik

### By David Lees

Germans have a brilliant word: Torschlusspanik. It means 'gate-closing-panic'. It's an excellent way of describing irrational, urgency based behaviour.

Urgency can make us do strange things. While in this state of torschlusspanik, the brain over-weights the things put in front of it. The fear of not having enough, or missing out, leads us to behaving irrationally. This phenomenon recently led to brawls over toilet paper in supermarkets in Sydney and California, and armed robbers stole 600 rolls in Hong Kong, leaving the cash registers untouched.

Torschlusspanik overstimulates the area of the brain that balances value. It's not a particular stretch to link this to the hole that we find ourselves in when we are chasing both ends of the rainbow at the same time - like back to back to back meetings, chasing a client's every thrown stick, sales-leads, indiscriminate attendance at away-days, conferences and award shows, (insert your own version of role-creep here), and the general malaise that could describe so many people's over-tapped lives in organisations today.

The hit of reinforcement we get when we take some action, decide to go somewhere, agree to something, add one more thing to our plate is classic immediate gratification, it's a hit of the good stuff. It's what we're searching for to alleviate the loss aversion triggered by Torschlusspanik. So what to do? Well as with everything, the first step is to admit that you're doing it in the first place...

## Shades of BMT

- CEOs could get closer to their 'customer experience' by phoning their own call centres, again and again, and again!
- You can't have a pissing contest if one person is not pissing.
- "I am a better judge of an omelette than any hen." - BF Skinner