

BMTFed Newsletter

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Save the Date: BMT for Safety Workshop & Conference

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A Bitter Pill

By Howard Lees

These days, we consult Google when looking for answers to medical questions. I am sure we have all looked at the 'list of possible side effects' and scared ourselves half to death. The probability of side effects is mostly very low, but they always mention them. What this actually does is create an imbalance. You may decide not to take a particular pill because there is a 0.005% that you could develop an ulcer if you do.

Decisions in business sometimes suffer the same imbalance. We decide to do 'x', then someone says, "Hang on - here are some possible downsides to this decision." The downsides are discussed, and some very low probability events end up wrongly influencing or delaying the decision. Getting the right balance of side-effects on decisions means that the upsides and downsides have to be accurately assessed, including the probability of them occurring at all.

These last few weeks I have witnessed a number of 'crying wolf' contributions from people quoting 'potential legal reasons', and 'potential safety reasons' for why an action cannot take place. It is too easy sometimes to make waves, waves that over time overwhelm the ship.

Hush Little Baby

By Dr Richard Kazbour

I coach leaders about behavior for a living. I have a PhD in behavioral science and I've dedicated my adult life to helping people achieve results. All of this, yet I was reminded recently of one critical factor: the laws of behavior don't play favorites.

My wife and I welcomed our precious baby girl into the world October 26th and only 6 months later she was giving us a dose of behavioral reality. It seemed she was doing a better job of shaping our behavior, than we were doing of shaping hers.

The problem was sleep - or lack thereof. When she cried and wasn't hungry, we would give her a pacifier. This turned into singing to her, which turned into picking her up, which turned into lying her on our bed. Before we knew it we were spending half of the night consoling her. In behavioral science this phenomena is known as R-. We kept attending to her because it eliminated her crying and we'd do anything to make it stop. She kept crying because it encouraged our attending to her. When something stopped working we tried whatever we could and so the cycle continued. Influencing behavior, regardless of whose, requires an understanding of environment and an understanding of consequences... a little bit of sleep never hurt either.



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Behavioural Management Techniques (BMT) is a blend of applied behavioural science tools and project management skills. BMT is used to improve business and safety performance.



Wisdom

By Allison Reynolds

Here are my top five quotes from the talks at the BMT Leadership Conference on Collaboration in May 2016, and my reasons why...

“One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results.” - Howard Lees

One of Milton Freedman’s classic lines, used on the day by Howard Lees. This has to frame everything else because so much of what I observe in business and life is based on intention rather than impact. Science is all about impact.

“When your boss comes up with a good idea, the best thing you can do is ask him to take a deep breath and get the experts to think it through.” - Jack Sheehan.

When we come up with engineering solutions, we use technical experts who can think things through and predict outcomes to determine the best way forward. Yet when it comes to leadership and influencing human behaviour, we so often skip this stage entirely.

“If you’re not changing the environment, why would you expect to be getting different results?” - Andy Bull

A solution which is behaviourally sound will always - that’s right, always - involve creating a change in the performer’s day to day environment. If it doesn’t, it’s not going to have any kind of sustainable impact.

“What are you paired with: R+ or R-?” - Howard Lees.

One of my favourite topics: If you’re influencing other people’s behaviours, you’re doing it on one of two ways; through R+ or R-. The blend that you use will determine whether you can create that elusive discretionary effort or engaged worker, or whether your folk are just doing enough to get through the day and avoid hassle from you.

“As a leader you need to get used to delayed reinforcement” - Neil Park.

To be successful at just about anything in life you need to get used to delayed reinforcement, or perhaps create your own sources of reinforcement for doing the critical leading behaviours. One thing’s for sure; if, as a leader, your own behaviours are driven by immediate day to day reinforcers, you’re likely to be constantly doing the urgent and never getting round to the important.

Shades of BMT

- With some people, the words they say don’t matter; they telegraph their intent anyway.
- Processes alone are unproductive; people make them productive, or not.
- The higher up an organisation one gets promoted, the easier it gets to act without getting any correcting consequences.

It’s Corporate, Stupid!

By Howard Lees

The same type of ‘corporate events’ regularly happen in vastly different industries and organisations. I am talking about the ‘directors artlessly talking to large groups of their own people’ type events. I have written about this before and am doing so again because a really sad one has come to my notice. The workforce and staff on a large project were summoned to the canteen one afternoon and subjected to two hours of corporate speeches with complex PowerPoints showing graphs and charts. It included pictures of the main board as it travelled to Europe visiting a site and the usual snapshots of directors receiving their safety award at the Grosvenor hotel from a C list celebrity.

The project in question is on the cusp of finishing on time and has a good record on a number of measures. The workforce and staff alike are reasonably happy, the site leader is good; there are no worries on any front. The stand-down to listen to the corporate message was not received very well. People were taken off task for this three line whip event.

After the ‘high ups’ had eased out of the car park in their 4x4’s, the site manager recounted to the attendees what he had been told by his boss before he left. “As you all know, the company has a ban on overtime and I have just been told to ask you to be sympathetic to this and still complete this week’s production. He did add that at some point in the future when things get better he will make it up to you all.” Mutters, boos and dissatisfaction all around.

This breed of company directors do not have a behavioural integrity problem, they have an integrity problem!

