

# BMTFed Newsletter

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BMT for Leaders  
Workshop & Conference  
10th & 11th May 2017  
Manchester, UK



## Nurturing Nature By Rachel Edwards

As I sit looking out of my office window admiring nature springing into action, it's lovely to watch the garden come to life again. A couple of weeks ago there was nothing doing, and now I look out and there's buds, blossom and green shoots galore; nature's cleverly orchestrated way of getting things going for another growing season. Nature is seasonal; the plants go through a cycle of shooting up, being in full bloom, dying back, and then having a period of apparent hibernation, only to pop up again a few months later and start the cycle again.

It's not that different for people at work; there are cycles of high activity where growth is very visible, and perhaps also times when it looks like things are tailing off. Maybe some people need transferring to a new pot from time to time as they've outgrown the current one, or some people just need a good pruning back! Gardening relies heavily on the skilful observer; making sure the basics like food and water are plentiful and available when needed, with a guiding hand and intervention when needed to help nature along. Not bad principles for leadership either.

## Shift Attentional Focus By Bruce Faulkner

Sometimes we have work relationships that feel distant and frustrating. These may cause us to experience some anxiety and most likely a degree of annoyance. We find these experiences difficult to master and often we don't see many options to improve the situation. During our conversations with these people we are often focused on their seemingly unreasonable behaviours. This focus inhibits us from seeing a broader context.

The other person's behaviour is out in public available for all to see. They are leaking information. We can gain a wider perspective by shifting our attentional focus. We can move from 'monitoring for specific points' to 'recognising patterns of stimulus and response'.

People's day-to-day environment often swamps them with demands for attention. They arrive to most conversations without being properly prepared. They improvise their way through, but are actually relying on some very narrow, repeated behavioural patterns.

Try observing these patterns of stimulus and response. You may notice that some discussion points will draw particularly strong reactions. When you see these, you know you are on target. Use this new information to expand the range of options of how you respond. Try poking about a bit at that thing that just prompted their strong response. Remember, they haven't thought this through so they are going to give up new information freely.



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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.*



# Why Relying on Motivation is a Mistake

By Lynn Dunlop

Relying on motivation to reach our goals is a flawed strategy. Motivation is what helps us work towards an aspiration, and it is very useful. But in the short term, motivation will rarely win in a fight against current circumstances and context. I am motivated every day to eat healthily, but relying on motivation alone to drive my behaviour when I'm tired and hungry and someone offers me a doughnut is just foolish. I need more than 'motivation to do the right thing' to drive my behaviours.

For some, a bit of willpower is all that's needed. But sometimes it's still not enough. Willpower works well when everything else is going smoothly in life - the days when our relationships are friction-free, when our family and friends are in good health, when our work is going well - but do those circumstances arise frequently enough to base a strategy on them?

Author Stephen Guise suggests that the best thing to do when looking to maintain a behaviour that isn't habitual is plan for those days when motivation alone isn't enough and our willpower is low. If we can come up with a strategy for behaviour change that will work in the harshest of circumstances, it's likely to be a successful one.

With that in mind, let's change the analogy. We're no longer trying to change my behaviour based on an aspiration (eating healthily); we're trying to change others' behaviours. The aspiration this time is: "everyone goes home safely every day". There can be no disagreement with the aspiration, but relying on people being consistently motivated to achieve it as a strategy for driving safe behaviours is as foolish as assuming that I'll always say 'no' to that delicious doughnut. It will sometimes work, but not always. The same is true of willpower. It will sometimes work, but not always.

I am fortunate not to have underlying health issues, so the occasional doughnut will not kill me. If my strategy is flawed, it's frustrating, but not life threatening. This is not the case with safe behaviours at work. Asking people to do something in the face of their ever-changing environment and not taking that environment into account is relying on motivation and willpower to drive safe behaviours. As a strategy, it is simply not good enough.

Instead, look at ways to make the safest thing to do also the easiest thing to do. Change the working environment so that in times of stress, hardship and distraction, the easiest thing for people to do is also the safest.

## Shades of BMT

- Verbal behaviour - every time you respond to someone it shapes their opinion of you, it sets up your levels of the stimulus control you will have with that person going forward.
- Verbal response of the year - "That's great feedback thanks."
- Leaders are supposed to open up conversations, not close them.



# Thank You

By Howard Lees

My granddaughter is 22 months old. She is at the biting stage. Teething and the temptation for mischief combine and result in one of us being bitten periodically. We ask her to say sorry and she resists that particular act of contrition. The other day her father really held out for her to say sorry to me as I nursed the teeth marks on my knee. Eventually she said "sorry." It was a good 15 minutes' wait. I have been looking for similar 'resistance' in people in the workplace and I think I have found the phrase that doesn't get uttered as much as it should do - it's "Thank You".

## Embracing Variability

By Bruce Faulkner

Organisations are often viewed through the metaphor of a moving mechanical system. Variations to the smooth running of the system can then be a bad thing. This leads to the conclusion that the path to improving results runs through a reduction in variability. The continuous improvement industry is a testament to the ubiquity of this belief. Policies and procedures are the most common attempt at reducing this variability. Embedded in this approach is the belief that variation in behaviour is to blame. An expert can define a set of behavioural guidelines for others to follow. Ones that are sufficiently narrow and constricting may produce the desired results for a period of time. Results are a function of behaviour, but behaviour is a function of its inputs. Humans can struggle to control all that variability. A far more flexible approach would be to specify the results and allow the behaviour to vary. This moves the focus from pleasing the people who do the monitoring to delivering the results. Simply put, "Start being clear about the desired result and stop worrying about the how".