

BMTFed Newsletter

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Safety Leadership
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Trust Without Context

By Joanne Lees

It's common to see 'trust' included in a company's values. People talk about trust as if it's the holy grail. However, I would question whether 'trust' is the right thing to be having conversations about. We can trust someone to be on time every day, but we can also trust that same person to miss a deadline every time. So is talking about trust really the right thing?

Organisations aspire to gaining trust and having consistency, but it's not the focus on these things that will achieve trust, it's the focus on the day to day contextual stuff. Leaders understand that something is missing and they're focusing on trust. There's no point in having aspirations without having a plan to achieve them. Trust is nothing more than a nice idea until someone decides what it looks like and how they're going to get it.

To find out about trust, asking "I trust people in my organisation" is a pointless question. Instead add context: "I trust payroll to pay me on time"; "I trust my boss to cancel my one to one"; "I trust my colleague to always turn up to meetings on time"; "I trust Corporate to send me a survey every three months." What are we achieving by focusing on trust without context?

Perspective Taking

By Lisa Kazbour

Leaders are always shaping the environment for their people, and whether they're doing it intentionally versus unintentionally, it's happening anyway. Unfortunately, the latter happens quite often, most of the time without the leader realizing it until it's too late.

Let me explain further with a recent example: A worker was injured while using a stack of boxes to climb on to get to the equipment she was attempting to fix. When asked why she didn't use an appropriate ladder, she explained that there just weren't enough ladders for all the maintenance crew to use. She further explained that they had been denied funding for additional equipment earlier in the year, and had also been told that the site was trying to save money because they "needed to save money." So whose fault was the injury? Sure, the worker did not have to climb on to the boxes, however it is environment that drives behaviour and this worker is an energetic hard worker, committed to the company and the team she works for.

Every sentence that leaders utter, each edict they state, each e-mail they send; all have an impact on someone's workplace environment, and it's not always what they intended. "We need to save money" was never meant to read, "We need to save money so take unsafe shortcuts when you're working because we can't afford to do things safely." That is how it was perceived and that's how it played out, and painfully for this particular worker.

The Bitter Taste of Safety

By Howard Lees

Safety is in the news right now. This subject perfectly fits the 'management by exception' tag, i.e. everything is OK until it's not OK. When it's not OK, it can mean disaster for many people. Safety management sometimes tries to join up the two extremes of 'virtual safety' and 'real safety': Balancing the official setting up and recording of legal requirements whilst still providing a safe place for people to work. Safety at work is treated differently to safety in the home. We take the time to teach our children to be careful on the stairs rather than resort to rules and signs. Even the strictest of safety enthusiasts wait until their children can read before they resort to safety signage in the home!

There exists a fear of talking openly about safety in many workplaces. The conflicting messages of 'honest reporting' and 'zero injury' are admirable goals but unfortunately drive uncertainty. "I want you to be safe all the time but I also want you to tell me if anything goes wrong" is the dichotomy that is baked into these instructions.

We have been asking workers about workplace safety for some time now. One of our questions is - 'If I was asked to do something I felt to be unsafe, I would... - 1/ Do it anyway. 2/ Speak up. 3/ Something else. Just by asking the question it makes the scenario real and survey facilitators can observe visible relief on the faces of the survey participants in the room. Injuries occur where there are high levels of uncertainty. Simply by asking workers about safety provides relief and increases the certainty that someone out there cares. Soliciting the opinions of workers, listening to the answers and responding well makes workplaces safer.

Memories

By Walter Hufnagle

Most people like to return to places that they have previously found reinforcing; a holiday destination, a comfy chair, a cafe, spending time with a particular person. Our brains are good at remembering the things we found positively reinforcing at the time. A phone message from an old friend, if we have not spoken to this person for a while may delight us, or we could be disappointed. Perhaps someone decided to return to Port de Pollensa where they had that great holiday back in 1996 only to discover they have ruined the place - memories are suitably adjusted!

That great job we worked on sparks memories of the good times and the people we worked with. Perhaps a reunion occurs; how many of those events live up to expectations? You can't go back. As Nelson Mandela said, "There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered."

Getting Feedback

By Lynn Dunlop

At our May conference, the keynote speaker Alasdair Cathcart told us about the person who wanted to find out if anyone read the long reports she was obliged to submit every month. He suggested she include a paragraph on page 5 saying, "If you get this far, call me on this number and I'll give you £10." No-one called.

Afterwards, she cut out a section of the report every month until someone complained about a missing section. Only when she got a complaint did she know which parts of the report were valuable and which not. The parts with value were replaced and those no-one missed were permanently cut. The streamlined reports were both easier to produce and much more useful to the people in the organisation. Sometimes it's important to find out who is reading what.

Break the Cycle

By Morven Sumner

People have set patterns of verbal behaviours. When we first get to know someone, their possible responses will be hard to anticipate, but after a while it's possible to predict what they might say in any situation.

If you're frustrated that the same old conversations keep happening, you can do something to change the pattern. Say something new. Change your own verbal behaviours to break the cycle.

Shades of BMT

- Workplaces, to some extent, contain badly executed good ideas.
- Failing fast is brave, failing soft is clever, failing forward is genius.
- Humans don't need training courses to learn how to collaborate, it comes to most of them naturally.
- Some workplace environments make collaboration almost impossible.
- Some workplace environments make collaboration easy, fun and productive.

