

## The Psychology of Change

In this issue of the Raise the Bar ezine, RTB Performance Coach and Change Consultant to the Great Britain and Warrington Wolves Rugby League Team – Damian Hughes, offers his tips and advice on how to deal with change within the work place.

If I asked you to describe how you feel about change, what would you say? Many people often come up with a mixture of negative and positive terms. On the one hand, fear, anxiety, loss, danger and panic; on the other, exhilaration, risk-taking, excitement, improvements, energising. Which words do you most associate with?



In recent GE research about change programmes in business, it was established that 100% of all changes rated as 'successful' had a good technical solution or approach. The same research also highlighted that over 98% of all changes rated as 'unsuccessful' also had a good technical solution or approach. The critical difference between the successful 2% and the remainder were the people involved and their understanding of the psychology of change.

Raise the Bar can help you face the demands of change successfully and put you amongst the top 2%.

When the legendary football manager Brian Clough - a man who firmly believed that he was in the top 1% of any group - was asked by the press what made him believe that he was best suited to the job of changing the fortunes of Nottingham Forest, his face remained completely deadpan, he looked at the reporters and offered the mathematical observation that "90% of the game is half mental."

Let me begin by asking you a simple question. During times of change, how important do you think the mental side is?

With Brian Clough's quote in mind, compare yourself when you are operating at your very best and at your very worst. What percentage of the difference was mental?

When I do this exercise with groups, I get everyone in the room to stand up. I ask those who think the mental part was less than 10% of the difference to sit down. Those who think that it was less than 20% are then asked to take a seat. I repeat this process for those who believe that it is less than 30% and then 40%. When I finally get to 50% at least half the room still remain standing. What about you? Would you still be on your feet?

If the answer to this question is yes, then answer my next question: if you believe that the difference between your very best and your worst day was, as Clough said, at least 50% mental, then how much time do you actually spend on your mental skills and how it can help you cope with the pressures of change?

Let's have a look at how you can successfully deal with change.

### Self-Consistency Theory

When Brian Clough was managing one of his early football clubs, he was standing on the touchline as his striker got involved in a collision. The trainer ran onto the pitch to see to the player and reported back: "He's concussed, doesn't know what his name is." Clough replied: "tell him he's Pele and send him back on."

Joking apart, in psychology this technique is called the self-consistency theory, which means that we act according to the image which we hold of ourselves. In fact, you will already have applied this principle to your advantage. When you applied for your current job and completed your CV or application form, you identified and then wrote your best behaviours, such as "I am an enthusiastic team player" and then you did your best to demonstrate these same behaviours in the interview.

This was the reason why Rudolph Giuliani placed such emphasis on his employees' CVs when he was Mayor of New York City. He insisted that they updated and completed their résumé every year and present it to him. This was the basis on which he agreed to allow people to stay working in his team. Giuliani understood that when we complete such a task, it is one of the few occasions when we take the time to apply the self-consistency theory and identify our own best behaviours.

Why not write your own annual CV and take the trouble to identify who you are when you are at your very best? If you are a leader, could you get your team to do something similar?

### Energiser or Energy Sapper?

*“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.”* Winston Churchill

Think about the things which cause you to have an attitude. How many of those words relate to things that cause you to have a positive attitude? Or do a lot of them have a negative connotation?

The simple reality is that whatever labels we give to our attitudes when facing change, we can only ever have an attitude about one thing and that is facts.

We may call these facts different things, as we have already seen – we call them people; we may call them situations or circumstances; we may call them the job or where I live or even my family but the reality is that they are all simply facts.

I have taken sports teams to the Royal Marines training camp in Devon where they recruit their members by putting them through a gruelling selection process, which they claim only the elite will pass. This involves placing people in a pressurised environment where their reaction to briefs, understanding of briefings, leadership and team-working skills are tested and expanded. A central part of the assessment is to observe people's reaction to facts when things go wrong. They call this Dislocated Expectations. This is because some people think that facts control them, whilst others think they themselves have far more control. Either way, how people view facts is an external demonstration of their attitude. The criteria can be pared down to a simple question which they ask about each potential Royal Marine: Would you go into battle with this person?

If the answer is yes, it means that you have absolute faith in that potential team-mate's attitude to facts and that your life is safe in their hands. The Marines refer to these individuals as “Energisers”. If the answer is no, it is frequently nothing to do with the individual's ability. It is about their attitude and their effect on the team. The Marine's nickname for these people are “energy sappers”. What would you describe yourself as?

## Social Identity Theory: The Staffroom Test

Imagine going into work on a rainy Monday morning after you have enjoyed a great weekend, leaving you feeling positive and ready to face change head-on. You meet someone who hasn't had the same kind of weekend as you and is not as up for the day. The first words you say are, "Good morning." What kind of response do you get? How do some people often respond to those two simple words? Typical examples are, "Is it?", "What's good about it?" or just a grunt.

Then you make the fatal mistake and ask the one question you should never ask this type of person on a Monday morning. "How are you?" How do people respond to that question?

For the next week, actively listen to people's responses. I have collected examples as varied as, "Not so bad," "Surviving," "Can't complain," "Fine," to "Don't ask," "What are you on?" "It's Monday," "I'm having a bad year." My two favourites are, "As good as they'll let me be" and "I'm on the crest of a slump."

Recognising these kinds of comments and the people who make them are important. When Sigmund Freud wrote "lieben und arbeit" (love and work) were the keys to happiness, he also said that a key function of work was to connect us to reality and the wider society which we belong to. In other words, work shapes our social identity. What we feel about the identity it gives us is crucially dependent on how others view the organisation or teams we belong to. Psychologists term this, the "Social Identity Theory."

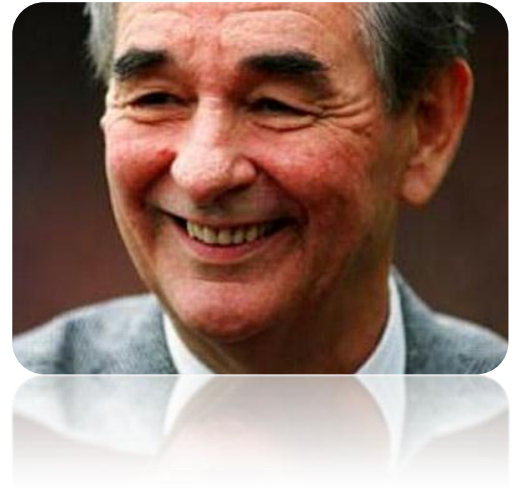
I once visited the country's worst performing school and at the end of the day spent time talking to the newly qualified teachers, who were understandably concerned about starting their careers in such difficult circumstances. I reassured them that the one main difference, which would determine whether they would enjoy their teaching careers, was not how well they knew their subject, how well they could control a class or even how the school's performance was judged. Instead, it was simply where they chose to sit in the staff room.

I challenged them to think about whether they wanted to sit with the people who love their job, enjoy the challenge of teaching and love the lifestyle it affords them or whether they positioned themselves next to those who love

nothing more than to moan, gripe and bellyache about the job, the management, the canteen and the tea. The attitude of the people they sat with would be contagious.

What about you? Are you sitting in the right seat?

I started this email by quoting Brian Clough and so I think that it is appropriate to finish with another quote attributed to him. When asked about the key to his success he said: "Dying is no big deal. The least of us will manage that. Living's the trick". Whatever the position, status or ambitions you hold, in the words of the band Wet, Wet, Wet about love, change is all around us. To live means to accept change.



I sincerely hope you will be ready to step out with a renewed confidence in your ability not to wither but to survive – and to thrive – in the face of change. Come on, let's go.

Raise the Bar Coach, Damian Hughes is a best-selling author on the Psychology of Change and is currently delivery full day workshops on the same subject.

For more information on how your organisation can benefit from Damian's expertise please contact us on [enquiries@raisethebar.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@raisethebar.co.uk), visit us at [www.raisethebar.co.uk](http://www.raisethebar.co.uk) or call us on **+44 151 426 0110**

