

For culture to change, first I must change

We all know how much behaviour matters in organisations.

It impacts everything: performance, safety, innovation, speed, customer satisfaction. This increased awareness has given rise to a recent and encouraging surge of interest in actively managing culture.

It's like a whole new leadership discipline opened up. To build the right culture, leaders will be expected to manage the behaviour of their people, just as they are expected to manage the organisation's performance.

Not yet so prevalent, however, is the awareness that effective leaders will also have to learn to manage their own behaviour. Personal behaviour management is a skill. And, like any skill, it can be learned and it can be improved. But what are the building blocks?

1. Self as cause

Behaviour matters most when it is viewed in terms of the consequences it has. "When I do THIS... THAT happens." And, to develop it further, "If I do something different, a different outcome will occur." This is a fundamental thinking pattern for anyone who wants to start managing their own behaviour. Why? Because it

creates a motivation to change. Making this link requires observation and inquiry. Seek to notice cause and effect, ask others for their opinion on it. "What could I have done differently?". Or "let me try doing this and see if it makes any difference."

2. Key moments

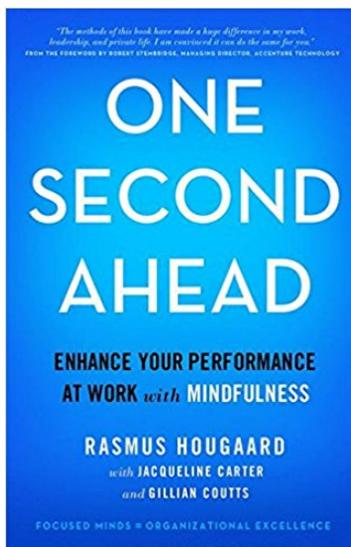
Most behaviours are longstanding, unconscious, habitual responses to what is happening. Imagine a leader who is under pressure to deliver to a deadline. She stops collaborating or reaching out to others, telling herself she does not have time. But how could she manage her behaviour differently? Our manager needs a trigger; something that reminds her to choose a different behaviour in those circumstances.

If she can recognise the 'moments that matter' and link a new behaviour to those moments, she can break this pattern.

Don't be overly ambitious with these. Picking half a dozen moments when a different response would be valuable is a good place to start.

3. Creating a pause

There's a great book on mindfulness called 'One Second Ahead'. In it, we're shown how it only takes one second's pause to choose a different response. To live unconsciously--on automatic pilot--means there is no pause. Those who practice mindfulness report that it provides the very same opportunity. Find your own technique to create this pause. Even a walk around the block can do it.



4. Practice key moves

For all of us, behaviour change that's observable by others is often achieved by moves that are remarkably simple: Asking a question where previously you would have jumped in and told people how things should be. Showing interest in someone's personal life,

where previously you would not have bothered. Finding a phrase which helps to resolve a conflict. Developing a new routine. A decision made where previously you would prefer to delay. Pick your key moves and practice them. One at a time.

5. Feedback and reward

Allow yourself to notice the changes in your behaviour. Managing your own behaviour is not about having a personality transplant. It's about choosing to make key moves in key moments that you previously would not have made. Each one creates a new consequence, for which a personal pat on the back is always warranted.

You can also ask those you trust to give you feedback when they see you making an effort to change behaviour. Behaviour change is do-able, especially when approached with strong intent and realistic goals. It all starts with the man, or woman, in the mirror.

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