

Leaders, let's talk about video, are we are dropping the ball?

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It feels like a lifetime ago that our lives were occupied with endless face to face meetings. When we could see each other's faces and we would recognise our friends without masks. When we sat in restaurants without wondering if our seats have enough ventilation. When we would fill training venues with students and lecturers would ply their trade in lecture halls. A walk through a shopping mall would be a social event.

Post-COVID, our IT departments have become inundated as they rush to protect our data and support our online capacity.

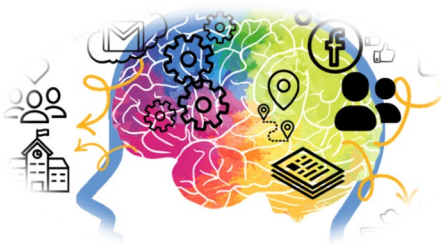
Over months since the beginning of COVID we have become more acutely aware of the value of personal connection and relationships. However, we have realised that we are able to function, at least to some extent, effectively in the remote world. We have also learnt the value of a stable WiFi connection!

While we have made great strides over the past few months, I believe we are still struggling and far from being as effective as we could be. This argument is supported by brain science or Cognitive Psychology.

This is an emerging science which studies how the human brain works, how we think, remember and learn. It is applied to understand how we perceive events and make decisions. An interesting part of this research is focused on how our senses stimulate our brains.

We all know that we have 5 senses: smell, taste, sound, sight, and touch. Each sense has certain benefits in feeding the brain, or our Cerebral cortex, with inputs. Interestingly, our sense of sight is perhaps the most complex, sophisticated, and effective of all five. It has been proven that the sense of sight is often much more effective in building and retaining information than sound, taste and smell.

More research is being done into Proprioception or "6th sense". Essentially this refers to a deep sense we have of what is going on around us. A sense of our environment and how it affects us.



So, what has this got to do with leadership.

Well, I would argue that the very term leadership means a relationship. A special relationship, a relationship with accountabilities. I would further argue that because leadership is a relationship, we cannot lead if we cannot connect.

As with all other relationships, this connection occurs through our senses. In a pre-COVID world we would connect through our presence. We are very aware when a leader walks into a room; the presence of the leader is a part of this level of connection. The sense of sight and sound are key to build connection. Smell, touch and taste are less significant, but as we engage our leaders or our subordinates, we develop a complete perception of each other by using all our senses.

This process works well in a physical world, but in the digital world our senses are significantly inhibited. We certainly cannot touch or smell each other. In this online world we only engage two senses, sound and sight. Thus, when we are connecting with subordinates through online platforms, only these two senses are providing leaders with the ability to connect and build trust.

In this digital reality bandwidth and data have become topics of discussion. The quality of our connection with people is significantly impacted by the quality of our internet connection. Online meetings are the new norm but usually occur without the use of video. The reasons given for this are often based on the quality of Wi-Fi connection or bandwidth.

The truth is, there is an inherent reluctance to use video. This results in hours spent in online meetings, with little to no real connection, as we are only engaging our sense of hearing (sound) and all we see is a blank screen or little circles.

Online Video works very well for connection and has for many years, if you don't believe it, watch your teenagers play online games and you will see how effective visual systems online can be.

Video is available on all online platforms and on a platform like Zoom, requires truly little bandwidth (Minimum bandwidth is 600kbps (up/down) and recommended is 1.5 Mbps (up/down)). There is major reluctance to use this platform due to security concerns.

Really!! There are security concerns with almost everything so let us weigh up the risks.

Our entire leadership team have been rendered blind. They do not have the access they previously had to their teams. They cannot use the 5 senses they used to, to connect with their teams, show empathy and build trust. This significantly diminishes their ability to lead.

To what extent is the risk of a hacker looking in on our morning team meeting greater than the risk of our leaders not connecting with their teams. What is likely to have a greater long-term impact on your business? What are the long-term effects of poor online leadership communication?

If you were holding a meeting in the boardroom at your office, would you allow the attendees to clear emails or scroll through Facebook during the meeting? Of course not! Are we not allowing this during online meetings when Videos are not required? Are we allowing a culture to develop where connection during meetings is not valued, where meetings are a time for multitasking and dealing with other issues? Should we be holding a meeting if the participants are not required to make a valuable contribution?

So, what to do?

We need to get on board and embrace the technology available to us. In fact, we should be using the technology to the full to improve the quality of our connection with our people. As leaders we need to insist on "Video On" meetings. We should use the opportunity to look our team in the eye and connect. Furthermore, we should allow the team to look us in the eye connect. As leaders who are passionate about connecting with our people, we should use all the tools available to us to ensure quality connection.



*This should not just be a challenge we place at the foot of our IT guru's
this is a Leadership Moment!*



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