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KATE RAMSAY AND THE AND COACHES WELCOME YOU TO OUR STAYING IN TOUCH NEWSLETTER.

In **Learning Moments**, we cite an article from the Harvard Business Review about how leaders can help their teams achieve peak performance, and some research that shows intuition can now be scientifically proven. In **Did You Know?** we share four key benefits of spending regular time alone. Our **Good Read** in this edition is about no less than existential risk and the future of humanity. **And to Close** we quote the Renaissance poet-philosopher Petrarch on solitude.

Learning Moments

i Achieving peak performance

In a long article in the May 2007 issue of the *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) titled *Inner Work Life – Understanding the Subtext of Business Performance*, authors Teresa M Amabile and Steven J. Kramer suggest leaders can help their teams achieve peak performance through a better understanding of the 'inner work lives' of their people. They describe this as:

The complex interplay between employees' deeply private perceptions of what's happening around them, the emotions they experience as a result of those perceptions and their level of motivation to do good work.

The authors set the scene by suggesting that when people form negative perceptions about their organisation and their work, this causes them to feel frustrated and demotivated which will of course impact their job performance. Conversely they argue that when employees form positive perceptions about their job and workplace the 'cycle turns from vicious to virtuous'. They suggest leaders can achieve this by creating conditions that enable people to get their work done in ways that will enhance their motivation and boost performance:

*Positive emotions fuel peoples' motivation, which in turn drives performance along four key dimensions: **creativity** (ability to come up with novel and useful ideas), **productivity**, **commitment** to the work, and **collegiality**. Not surprisingly negative emotions corrode motivation, so peoples' performance suffers.*

The authors suggest such things as praising subordinates, working collaboratively with them and making the

workplace fun or relaxing as ways to create this 'virtuous cycle'. However, they stress that:

The single most important lever is to give people the sense that they can make progress in their work. Success in achieving a goal, accomplishing a task, or solving a problem – whether mundane or immense – evokes intense pleasure and even joy.

ii The science of intuition

Do you ever have an instant reaction, either positive or negative, when you meet a person for the first time – what we sometimes call a gut reaction? If you do, the science now tells us that this reaction comes from our amygdala and is based on previous experiences with a previous person who we either liked a lot or disliked intensely.

I'm not sure I've ever quoted the GoodWeekend section of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) as a source for this newsletter before. But, as we know, there's always a first time for everything. In the April 24, 2021 edition of the SMH Amanda Hooton wrote about her interview with Professor Joel Pearson from the Future Minds Lab of UNSW. Having wondered about his gut reactions to certain academic journal papers for some time, in 2016 Pearson set out to research the source of his gut feelings.

In their study, Pearson and his research team defined intuition as 'the ability to make successful decisions without rational, analytical thought or interference'. They used a technique called 'continuous flash suppression' during which images were flashed onto a screen so fast that study participants did not register these consciously. They had no awareness of seeing these images yet Pearson and his team found that the images were still being processed in their brains because their retinas were registering them

and their amygdalae were reacting to them. Pearson's experiment helped describe two important characteristics of intuition: it's swift and it's physical. How?

Because (they found that) intuitive judgements involve processing in the amygdala and other limbic areas, the ancient, instantaneous flight-or-fight system of our brains.

Pearson also pointed out that intuitions are generalisations based on past experience, not 'infallible divinations of the future'. He recommends a five-point checklist to help us work out when our intuition is more or less accurate:

1. *Only use your intuition in situations where you have expertise and experience.*
2. *Don't use intuition at moments of high emotion.*
3. *Don't rely on intuition to predict low-probability events.*
4. *Don't mistake primal brain system impulses (such as appetite, lust, fear and aggression) for intuition.*
5. *In a new environment, don't trust your intuitions.*

Pearson recommends we ponder on each of these five points before we act on an intuition.

Editor's note: we recommend the use of the Pause Model from the AnD leadership coaching toolkit (attached) to ensure that you work through these five points rather than just trusting your intuition and acting in haste.

Did You Know?

On Solitude

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden lockdowns to reduce its spread, many of us have possibly spent more time alone than we would like. As I was pondering this thought while alone at home, an article in the October 22, 2020 edition of *The Conversation* caught my eye. Written by Matthew Sharpe, Associate Professor in Philosophy at Deakin University, the article invites the reader to consider the possible benefits of solitude:

- ***Freedom to do what you want – any old time***

You can get around in your PJs, and who's to know? There is a release from the needs and demands of others. ... We may do, think, imagine and pay easy attention to whatever pleases us.

- ***Reconnecting with yourself***

Advocates of solitude stress how, with fewer preoccupations, we can reconnect to aspects of ourselves we usually don't have time for.

- ***Finding your 'inner citadel'***

Solitude can enable us to recharge.

- ***Seeing the bigger picture***

In ordinary life, the horizons of our concern are practical and short-range. ... Solitude gives us the means to recall the bigger picture: our lives are quietly passing by; there are good people who we too often take for granted; we have neglected many things we deeply wanted to do.

A Good Read

As it says on the back cover of *The Precipice – Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity* (Hatchette, 2020), Toby Ord, a philosopher at Oxford University has written 'An urgent and eye-opening argument that protecting humanity's future is the central challenge of our time.'

In this dense and thoroughly researched book, Ord argues that he believes humanity is currently facing a time where we humans are at high risk of destroying ourselves. He calls this time a Precipice. Further Ord proposes that 'safeguarding humanity through these times is among the most noble purposes you could pursue'.

Ord describes the existential risks facing humanity and divides these into **natural events** – such as asteroids, supervolcanic eruptions and stellar explosions; **anthropogenic events** such as nuclear weapons, climate change and environmental damage; and **future risks** such as unaligned artificial intelligence, dystopian scenarios and pandemics.

Yes, you read correctly. Published in 2020 Ord predicts a pandemic; yet by the time his excellent book hit the bookshelves we were in the midst of a global pandemic. I can only guess at his frustration about not being able to record this in his scholarly work – perhaps he's writing an extra chapter as I write this newsletter.

And to Close

Petrarch, the Renaissance poet-philosopher, on solitude:

Solitude rehabilitates the soul, corrects morals, renews affections, erases blemishes, purges faults (and) reconciles God and man.

How might you create more solitude in your life?