



HR DIRECTORS BOARDROOM Birmingham 2019

Headspace – Using Psychological Distance to Make Better Decisions



Delegates gathered at the **Eversheds Sutherlands (International) LLP** and participated in this thought provoking and informative boardroom event. Introduced by **Karen Brown – Senior Business Manager & Jacqui Wall, Head of HR Recruitment - Midlands & North** for Ashley Kate HR & Finance and chaired by **David Beswick**, Partner, Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP.

Glenn Mead, Executive Coach, Face Value Performance Psychology led this hugely informative and interactive session. The session was dedicated to demonstrating how by understanding why you have the emotions that you have, you can then start to manage your response to them more effectively in order to make the decisions and changes that you want to make. This is a huge topic, but Glenn assured us all that by the end of the session we would all benefit from being better informed, more aware and have new strategies to support us and the leadership teams that we support to make better decisions.

We kicked off with a quote from Carl von Clausewitz, a general and military theorist, which demonstrated for centuries people have realised the importance of a calm mind in relation to performance

“The only way to maximise potential for performance is to be calm in the mind”

Glenn then utilised a number of questions and techniques to demonstrate how quickly our emotions rise. We were asked to talk about a time recently when our emotions took over and we reacted quickly and in hindsight wish things had turned out differently. We all had different examples, but they were all run of mill, such as parking the car, children and spouses just talking this through demonstrated that we had “over reacted” but also that these would happen again and how could we ensure a different reaction – whilst accepting that our immediate emotional reaction is not in our control.

A clear message from Glenn was not to beat yourself up! You will experience survival emotions – these are incredibly quick reactions for basic survival. Survival behaviour is spurred on by emotions, and needs quick thinking, and is very absolute. This survival emotion doesn’t deal with the future, it is binary – go or no go. Whilst this is the quickest reacting part of our brain, we do fortunately have others and it is vital that you understand how to ensure that you can allow these parts to kick in.

There are 3 tiers of decision making:

Tier 1 – Object Detection – “What is it?”

Tier 2 – Reward Evaluation – “What does it mean?” – this is the survival-thinking stage

Tier 3 – Conscious Planning – “What could I do now?” – this is the logical thinking process

The reactions in Tier 2 can stop you ever getting to Tier 3 and this is the part of the brain that takes the longest to develop. In fact, this takes 30 years to become fully developed – which shocked us all!

Each Tier serves a different purpose, but the key to this is not to let Tier 2 take over your decision making and be the way that you interact with colleagues. It will happen, accept it, but the key is to “step back” and allow time for your cool thinking, planning-orientated, developed brain to kick in and allow you to make considered decisions based on many factors including, perspective and shades of grey, logic, considering the past, present and future and facts and evidence.

Glenn then introduced some emotional speed dating! Admittedly, most of us were not looking forward to this, and this in itself demonstrated our survival brain kicking in – fear of failure, looking foolish, nervous. We were all asked to think about what we like and what upsets us, and then to pick a partner and reveal these factors about ourselves. All of us admitted to feeling anxious about this, and this anxiety arises from being in a group when the individual needs are at risk. This can be very common at work, and over everyday things, this then manifests itself in physical reactions such as increased heart rate, increased blood flow, impact on the liver etc. In the short term this is not an issue, but over the long term this can lead to serious consequences such as high blood sugar, diabetes, suppressed immunity and heart disease to name a few.

So, and the key to the session and to the work that Glenn conducts with leadership teams, is how to utilise this information and understanding to improve decision making?

The first area that we discussed were thinking errors. Your emotional brain makes absolute judgements, you see things in black and white terms. We were then asked to look through a list of 13 common thinking errors and identify which we typically fall victim to, such as

Focusing on the negative

Discounting the positive

Emotive judgement

Blame/ personalization

This really highlighted our go-to position, and how straight away we were in the negative and then this would affect how we thought from there.

In order to move away from these “black and white” decision and thinking errors, you need to buy yourself some time and allow your more logical, planning part of the brain time to work. One very simple way of doing this is to ask open questions and encourage open answers and perspective.

You need to create “psychological distance” to reduce emotional thinking and stress, Glenn advised us that we could do this by focusing on 4 key areas:

Time – How soon or far away is the event likely to happen. When will it happen, in a year’s time will this matter?

Scale – How big is the problem? How does it compare to other things? Rate it on a scale of 1-10. When things are on top of you they feel big, you need to break it down.

Social Immersion – How in deep are you? Can you just dip your toe in? How would people react? Try and put yourself in a 3rd party position.

Probability – What are the chances that it will happen? Your emotional brain needs certainty, but you need to have time to collect facts, evidence and to plan.

This will enable you to create distance between you and “the thing”. It is also advantageous to put things into perspective and to not have a “success or failure mindset”. Scale your results, you won’t always hit a bullseye.



So how can we make this work for us and those around us?

Individually – make time for your own reflective practice, invest in executive coaching

In groups – facilitate team coaching and training on areas self-improvement programmes

Across your whole organisation – raise awareness of emotional needs and psychological distance by means of a motivational key note speaker – encourage a culture of questioning

As a last, great piece of advice:

Move away from your dark side! Get people to speak to allow the logical, planning part of the brain time to work.

We all agreed that we had really benefitted from the time with Glenn, and had given us a lot to think about and techniques to use.

Glenn works with individuals, teams and whole organizations to help them maximise their potential for performance. His company Face Value Performance Psychology offers executive coaching, drop-in coaching clinics for wellbeing, and team performance facilitated sessions, as well as keynote talks and inspirational insights into the way we feel, think and behave, and what we can do with that awareness.

See Glenn's discussion with Karen Brown, Senior Business Manager [here](#)



Ashley Kate
HR & Finance

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Ashley Kate
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Thursday 6th June – London
Thursday 20th June – Cambridge

AUTUMN
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Thursday 28th November – Leeds

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Thursday 3rd October - Cambridge
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