

Be SAFE & Certain

Self-awareness is a critical part of being a leader. Indeed, some research (see link) suggests it's the *most* important capability.

Neuroscience offers a compelling route to increasing self-awareness. If we understand how our brain drives our behaviour, we are offered a portal into understanding ourselves (and others). In this chapter you will learn to recognise what your brain is really craving when you want or need something (your needs), and what you are reacting to when you are uncomfortable, irritated or upset (your triggers). Wants, needs and triggers all drive our behaviour in different ways.

The limbic system is an ancient part of our brain that has the job of keeping us safe. The limbic system is always on, and by pushing us away from threats or towards rewards it unconsciously but powerfully influences our behaviour and our choices.

Threats



When the limbic system perceives a threat, it issues a fear response, so we avoid the threat.

Fear responses are often described as fight, flight freeze. In today's world, fighting might show up as arguing, insulting others, or being quietly disruptive.

Flight might be disappearing, avoiding, giving the cold shoulder or ignoring someone.

Freeze might be actually freezing – not knowing what to say or do or maybe it shows up as confusion or overwhelm.

Rewards



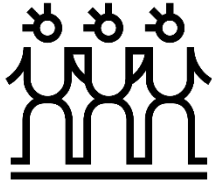
If the limbic system senses the possibility of a reward, it releases feel-good dopamine which encourages us to move towards that opportunity.

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Once you have a vocabulary around your limbic system, you will start to notice just how powerful it is at driving your behaviour (and the behaviour of those around you).

To understand how your limbic system is driving you – in its efforts to keep you safe - we have pulled the six social elements we move towards and away from into the **Be SAFE and Certain** model.

Belonging



A sense of safety with others - of friend rather than foe

Belonging to a tribe kept people safe and ensured survival.

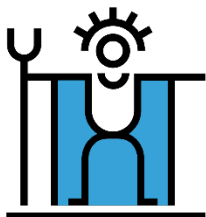
A sense of belonging helps a team form and creates the foundation for collaboration.

Belonging was important for early man, when survival depended on other people and safety in numbers.

Today, in our business environment, it is still important; we strive to belong, to fit in, to be liked and we are afraid of being cast out. A sense of belonging will help a team work better together.

A fear of being kicked out of the tribe will keep people from voicing an unpopular opinion, offering an innovative – but controversial - idea or sharing key information, e.g., that a project is headed off track.

Status



Relative importance to others, our place in the group and our role

Knowing one's place in the tribe created stability and strengthened the tribe.

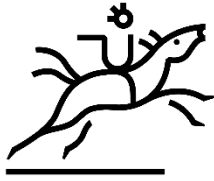
When people feel relevant, special and needed, they are more likely to be positive, to contribute and to recognise others' contributions.

It was important for early man to be relevant in the tribe, to know his position, his role and his worth. Not everybody needed to (or could) be the alpha-male, but we needed to know our place.

When individuals have an unfilled need for status they may become self-focused, critical of others or "ego-driven."

Today, in our business environment, we all feel better when roles are established, when we know how the (formal and informal) structures work, who is the boss and what is my relationship to her.

Autonomy



A sense of having a choice

Finding new ways of doing things allowed tribes to survive especially in challenging environments.

Autonomy allows for independent thinking, new ideas and innovation.

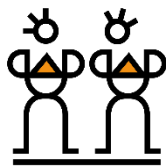
Even for early man, it was important to have some autonomy – it was important for the survival of the species that some of the members of the tribe experimented, did extra-ordinary things, tried out new food sources, or even left the tribe to walk to another continent.

In today's world, we each want some sense of autonomy; to be able to do things our own way. People want to share their ideas, solve problems their own way and to contribute to their tribe. Allowing people autonomy produces a reward response for them, it increases motivation and morale.

For some, a strong need for autonomy will prohibit teamwork and collaboration.

Micro-management and too many rules or restrictions creates a threat response and can result in lower morale and less engagement.

Fairness



A perception of fair exchange between people

With a fair environment, more people survived.

Experiencing unfairness (to self or others) creates a deep-seated emotional reaction and the desire for revenge.

Neuro-biologically, the unfair reaction is very closely related to disgust – it creates the same physiological response as when we encounter something rotten. It is a strong emotion and we can spend a lot of energy overcoming it when it happens.

Fairness is an important driver in today's workplaces. When we believe we have been treated unfairly, we want revenge. It doesn't even have to be personal - watching someone else being treated unfairly creates a powerful reaction in us.

People appreciate being treated fairly and are more likely to be generous in their contributions when a culture is fair.

To keep stability in the workplace we need to be as fair as possible. We also need to remember that people react to their *perception* of fairness. It is easy to misinterpret someone's choice or actions as being unfair to others. Communicating what is happening and why will help prevent some of those misinterpretations.

Expectations



Imagining what will happen and being disappointed when it doesn't turn out that way

Creating expectations helped our ancestors to be hopeful and to persevere season to season and year to year. Expectations create motivation and inspiration.

When expectations are not met, we experience disappointment which can be surprisingly painful.

When working with others, it will be helpful to set clear, motivating and realistic expectations.

Expectations motivate people move towards a vision and goals but if you set high expectations and then do not meet them, it will likely lead to disappointment for others and you might lose credibility and trust. If you have not supplied enough information, people will automatically and unconsciously create their own expectations and might suffer disappointment when those unrealistic expectations are not met.

Communicating what you are planning to deliver will help them know what to expect and will increase your chances of satisfying others' expectations. This also creates trust.

Certainty



Feeling clear about what is going to happen

Knowing where to find sustenance and where danger lurked helped people survive and stay out of trouble.

A sense of certainty helps people relax and trust. If their basic needs are met, they can more easily focus on tasks.

A lack of direction, vision or planning creates instability, lack of trust and discomfort. It might lead to a need in some people to over-control events and other people.

Some people will feel threatened by uncertainty and will do anything they can to establish a sense of certainty. When interacting with others – as a leader, consultant or team member – it is helpful to create a sense of certainty. Even with a number of unknowns, consider how you can create some sense of certainty – what can you be certain about? Then communicate this information.