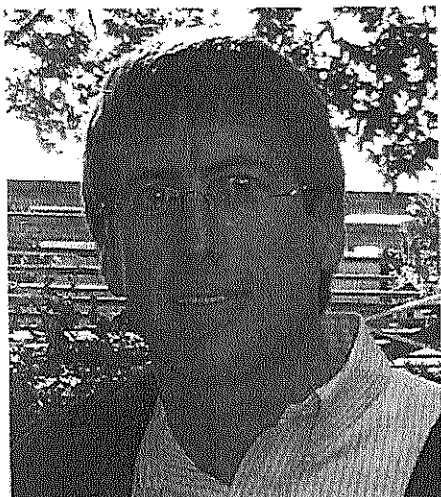


Better leadership through anxiety management



Paul de Beer is a director of The Village Leadership Consulting.

It has been interesting to observe that many of the factors limiting leaders appear to be associated with the avoidance of anxiety. It would therefore be a huge advantage for leaders to learn to astutely observe their reactions to the world around them and learn to understand and control their emotional responses thereto.

A key factor in the success of modern leadership is learning to hold back personal assumptions and listening to the views of those that are able to deliver valuable input on a particular subject.

This is a very difficult skill to master as it necessitates that such leaders are able to trust first, believe in the potential of others and embrace the fact that their own personal view of the world may be skewed with their own subjectivity.

More traditional or directive leaders often feel that their style is participatory, but are sometimes shocked to hear that this is not what their subordinates think. Leadership rank tends to have a magnifying effect on their actions and often limits the feedback given to them by others.

Modern leaders need to learn skills such as coaching and facilitating in order to help enable their teams. Good coaching and facilitating requires the suspension of personal judgments while guiding others towards the best solution.

So why do we as people feel such anxiety when hearing views that contradict our own, particularly in the work place? Can we learn to embrace differing views without anxiety?

The normal human response is to avoid anxiety by taking input, but discarding

many of the ideas proposed to us. Leadership behaviour such as this, in a team setting, could be described as energy draining behaviour and will result in decreased creativity and minimised team performance.

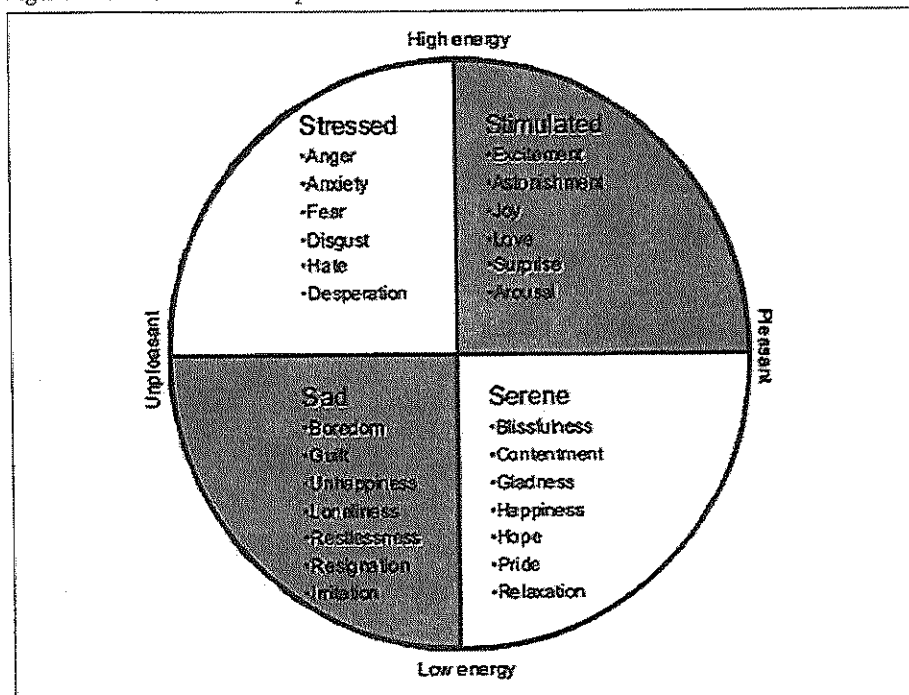
In order to better understand our own anxiety, it may be useful to consider the constructs of our brain. In our evolution as humans, we survived with the aid of our autonomic nervous system also known as the limbic brain, the most primitive part of our brain.

At times of danger, this limbic brain would produce the emotions of fear and anger which would trigger a chemical change in our bodies to prepare us for 'fight or flight.' Later in our evolution we developed the cortex, housing the central nervous system and we became more intelligent beings.

Today our limbic brain is alive and well and unfortunately often confuses situations such as opposing views as life threatening. Our *amygdala* (part of the limbic brain) then starts to ready us for fight or flight and hence we feel anxiety.

The limbic brain cannot be trained through cognitive learning, but only through experience, reflection and trial and error. Daniel Goleman tells us that

Figure 1: The emotional map.



many of these skills are first learned through our experiences by the age of 22, but we can continue to learn them with age; it just takes more effort.

One could then say that leaders are not born, but developed, however, certain people have more development to do than others.

It may be interesting to reflect that this complex post modern world in which we live demands a new set of leadership skills that enables people at all levels and liberates creativity within organisations.

It is therefore no surprise to see that there is an increasing demand for executive coaching to assist leaders to cope with complexity, anxiety and hence their emotions.

A good way to develop ourselves and 'take charge' of our own minds starts with

understanding our own emotions during the day. Ideally our organisations would like us to spend most of our time in the top right 'stimulated' quadrant for that is where we are efficient and creative.

Once a person understands their 'swings,' they can slowly start to recognise their triggers and pull themselves back to the top right. Each time one manages to take control of ones anxiety, the task will become easier.

It has been interesting as an executive coach to observe that many of the factors limiting leaders appear to be associated with the avoidance of anxiety. It would therefore be a huge advantage for leaders to learn to astutely observe their reactions to the world around them and learn to understand and control their emotional responses thereto. ■

Coaching centre increases national footprint

The internationally accredited Centre for Coaching at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business is embarking on one of the largest scale roll-outs of coaching expertise yet, with a new coaching course in Durban and additional courses in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Craig O'Flaherty, founder and director of the Centre, said the national drive is geared towards addressing the rapidly rising demand in South Africa for coaching expertise and bolstering organisations in their skills development and growth efforts.

"Coaching has developed a formidable reputation over the last ten years as a methodology that develops better leaders and long term performance excellence.

For South Africa, it is a methodology that can be a powerful ally in terms of tackling challenges such as skills development, economic growth and global competitiveness," said O'Flaherty.

"South Africans, perhaps more than other nation," he commented, "understand that great leaders can effect extraordinary change and coaching is a competency whereby leaders leverage the development of those leaders underneath them – not simply just growing followers who need increasing oversight and attention.

"We believe that having enough leaders who adopt a coaching style is the catalyst to accelerating the development of the leadership gene pool in organisations. And if the increased demand for coaching courses in South Africa is anything to go by, others have realised this too."

The Centre for Coaching offers a variety of coaching options from a two

day Coaching to Excellence (CTE) workshop to a year long professional coaching course.

The Coaching to Excellence course is designed to introduce participants to the principals and methods of coaching which they can immediately apply in their work place.

This course is run four times a year in Cape Town, Johannesburg and once a year in Durban.

Building on the CTE, is the six month Associate Coaching Course (ACC), an internationally accredited programme specialising in the study and application of the principals of coaching.

This course is an intensive coach training and apprenticeship programme designed for participants to emerge as coach practitioners in their areas of work.

The ACC runs three times a year in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

The CTE and ACC courses are prerequisites for the top of the ladder professional coaching course, designed by one of the leading coaching schools in the US – New Ventures West.

Course participants join a group of 22 other professionals to study, learn and coach together over one year, forming a supportive community and guided by an international panel of certified integral coaches. This course is offered in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

The Centre is a fully accredited, listed service provider of coaching services within the ETDP SETA so participants can earn NQF level qualifications.

For more information on Centre for Coaching programmes, please telephone (021) 406 1148.