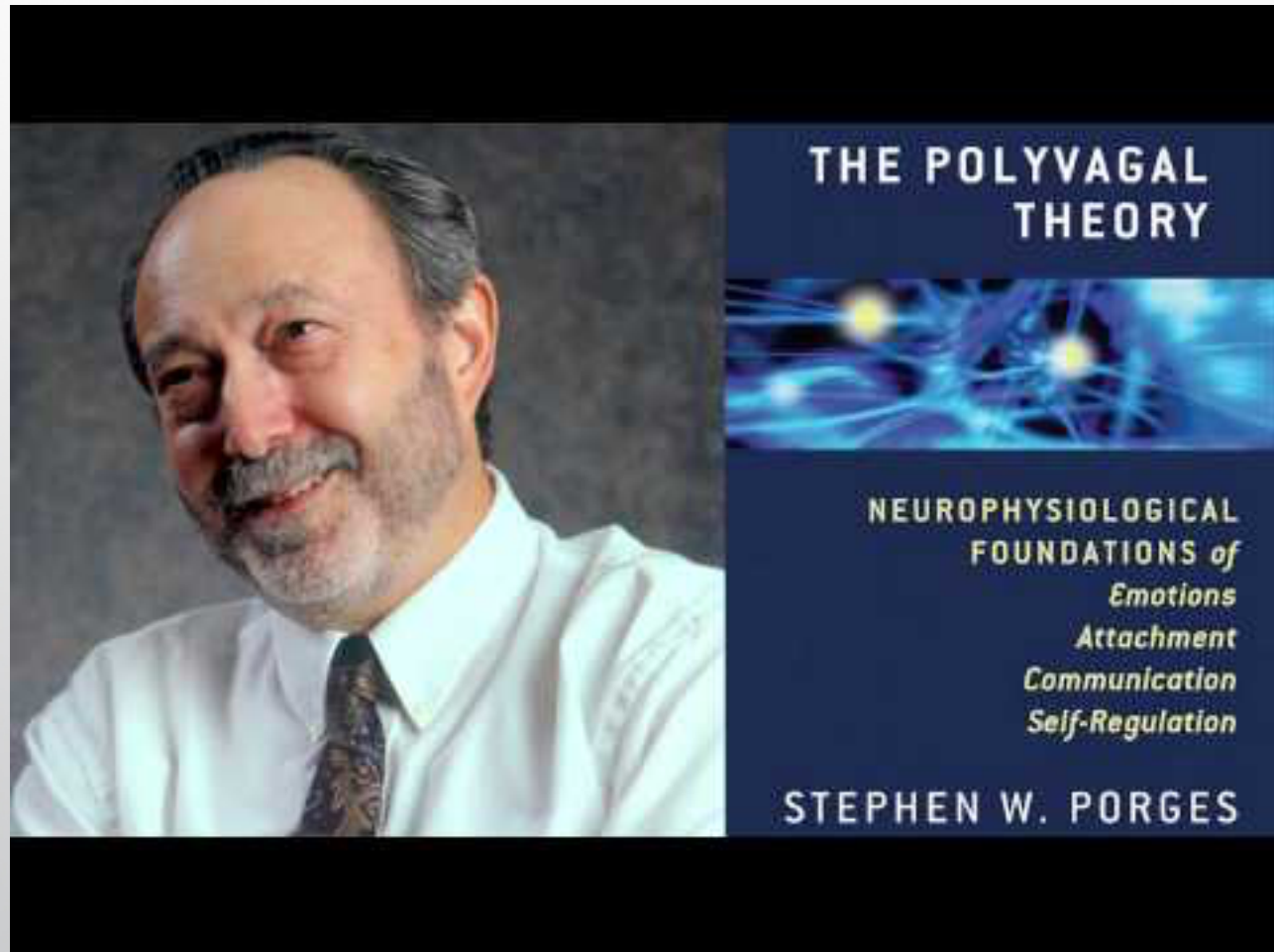




**“The Polyvagal Theory – Pro-Social Behaviour”
Creating Safe, Calm and Trusting Space
to Strengthen Social Engagement Processes**

Social Engagement and Safe Space



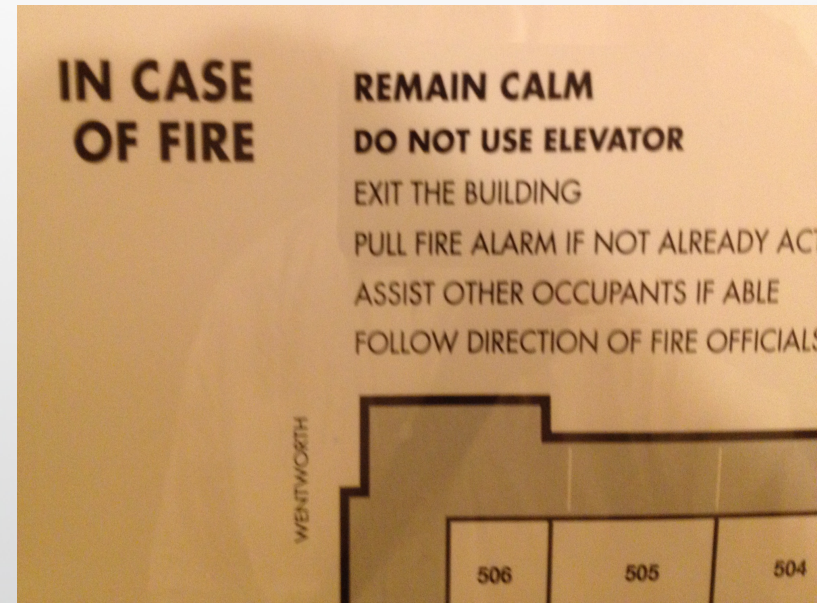
Basic Needs for Human Well-Being

There are at least four sets of needs that are basic to the motivation, functioning and well being of all humans. They are the needs for;

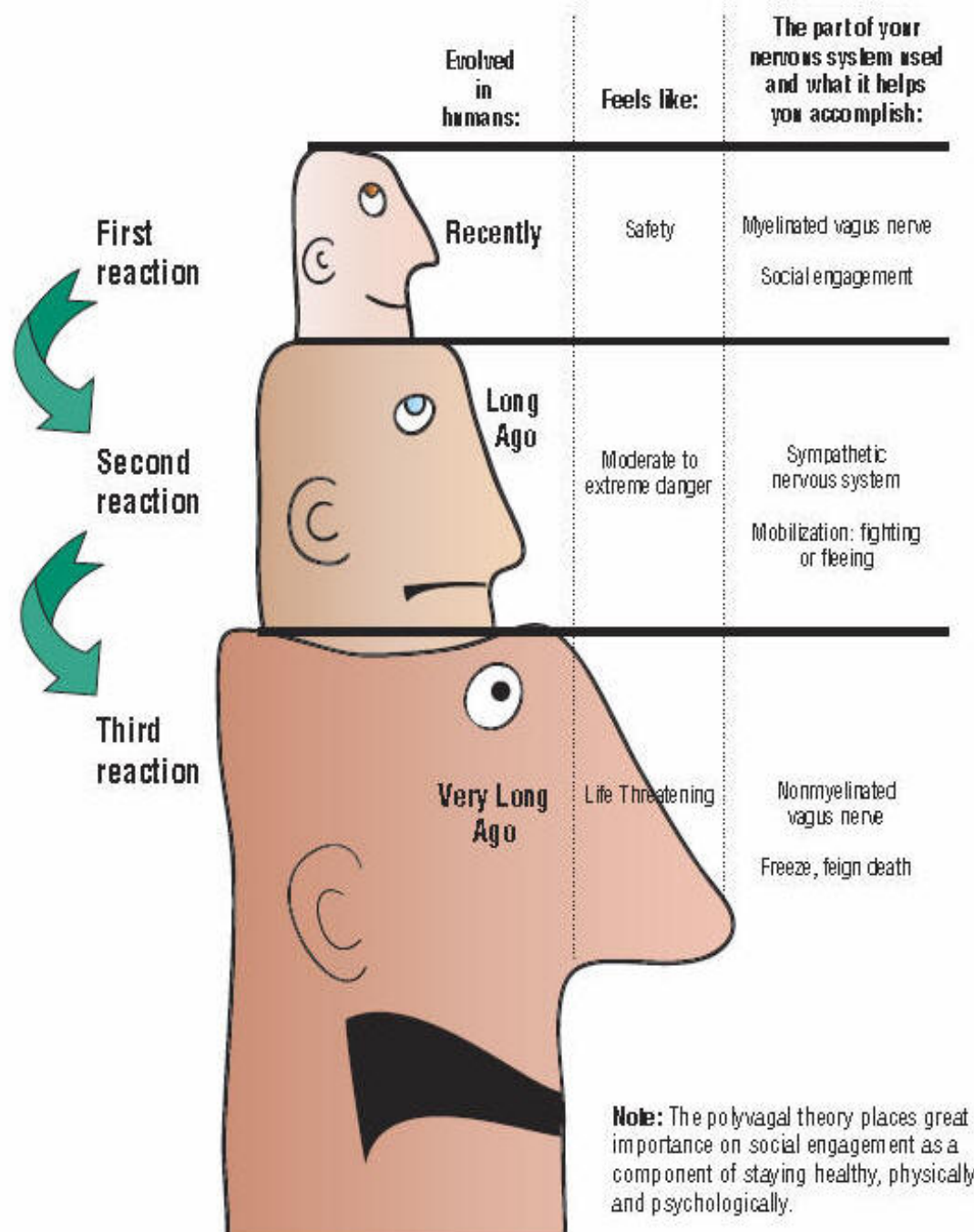
1. **safety**, **security** and sustenance;
2. basic competency and self-esteem;
3. connectedness; and
4. autonomy and authenticity.

Why Safe, Calm and Trusted?

"We don't want anybody to get hurt when they come back, SWN comes back," says John Levi, a warrior chief at Elsipogtog. "We figure it's only good that we train people to be calm."



Auffrey said crew members remained calm throughout the tense ordeal, easing the nerves of anxious passengers.



The Vagus System

The Polyvagal Theory

Events trigger you to react. If your first reaction doesn't make you feel safe (pending personal capacity), you revert to the second, then the third.

First Reaction (Evolved Recently)

Creates a Feeling of Calm, **Safe** and Trusting

Part of the Nervous System Used:

Myelinated Vagus Nerve

This Helps You Accomplish:

Social Engagement and Constructive Behaviour



The Polyvagal Theory

Events trigger you to react. If your first reaction doesn't make you feel safe, you revert to the second...

Second Reaction (Evolved Long Ago)

Creates a Feeling of Danger and Fear (Stress)

Part of the Nervous System Used:

Sympathetic Nervous System

This Helps You Accomplish:

Mobilize **Aggressive** (Fight) or **Passive** (Flight)
Non-Constructive Behaviour



The Polyvagal Theory

Events trigger you to react. If your first and second reaction doesn't make you feel safe, you revert to the third...

Third Reaction (Evolved Very Long Ago)

Creates a Feeling of Life or Career Threatening

Part of the Nervous System Used:

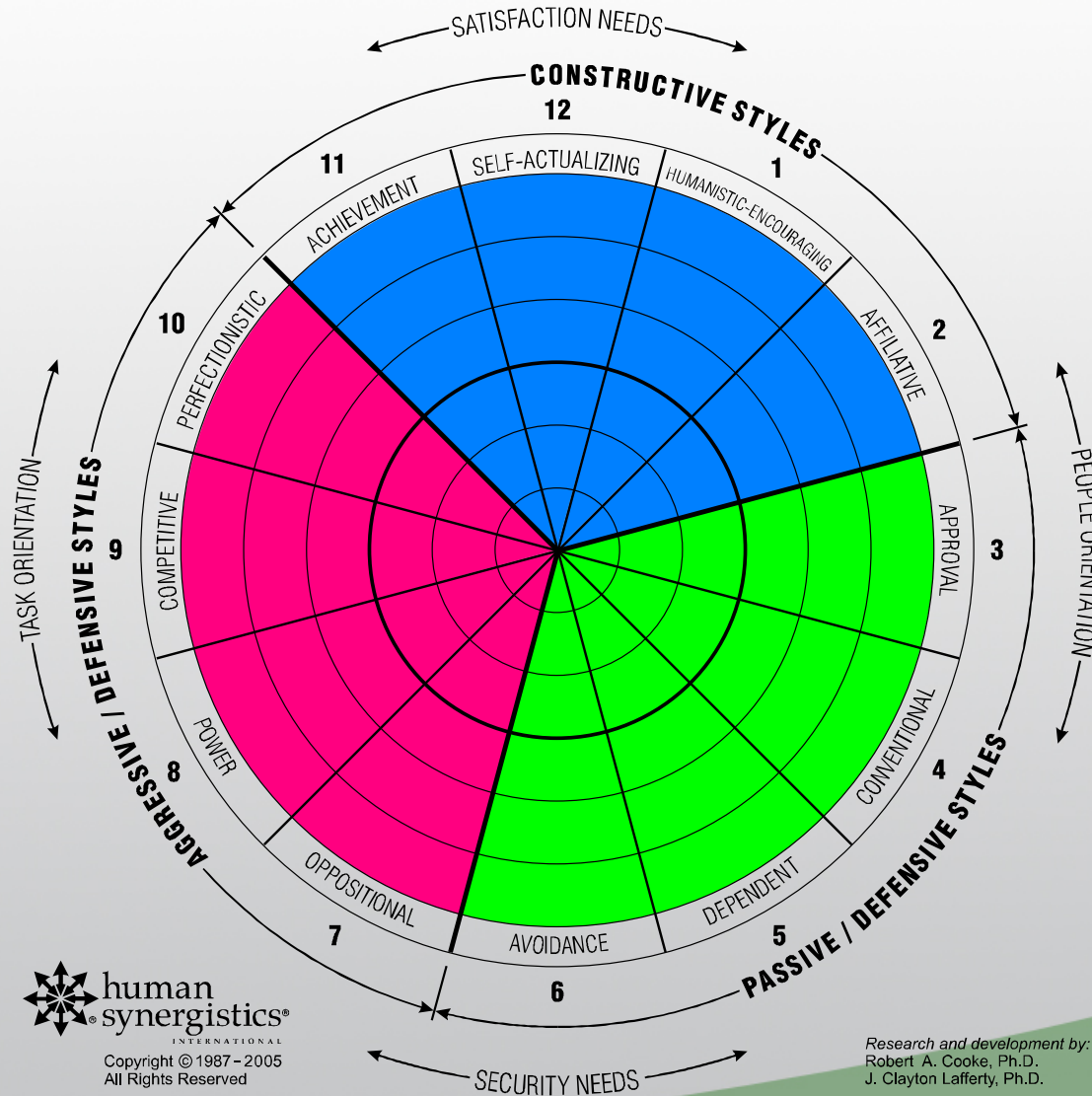
Non-Myelinated Vagus Nerve

This Helps You Accomplish:

Freeze – Feign Death (Non-Constructive Behaviour)



Three Core Thinking Styles Areas



Social Engagement

Person A



Person B



Constructive Behaviours via Group Process Skills

- Goal Focused (task)
- Process Focused (the how)
- People Focused (relationships)

Social Engagement Brake Down

Person A



Feeling of Danger
and
Fear (Stress)

|

Vagal Brake

|

Heart

Person B



Mobilize **Aggressive** (Fight) or **Passive** (Flight)
Non-Constructive Behaviour (Amygdala Hijack)
Requires a skilled and motivated person to get
back on track (use of constructive skills / motivations)

The Polyvagal Theory

Ties a number of unconventional techniques together, in that they all activate situations that in the **past** (emotional memory via amygdala) have precipitated the participants into **uncontrollable** “flight-or-fight and freeze” modes.

With these various techniques that rely on interpersonal rhythms, visceral awareness and the primary use of vocal and facial communication, attempt to **reorganize the perception of danger** and the capacity to manage emotional engagement to solve problems. (peek-a-boo)

The Polyvagal Theory

Understanding how both bodily states and mental constructs dynamically interact with environmental and emotional triggers to precipitate and maladaptive behaviors.

It is helpful to understand why...

a kind face, a soothing tone of voice and **constructive motives (intent) can dramatically alter the entire organization** of the human organism – that is, how being seen and understood can help shift people out of disorganizing and fearful states. (that promote defensiveness)

The Polyvagal Theory

The phylogenetically, self regulatory development starts with a primitive behavioral inhibition system, progresses by the evolution of a fight-flight system and, in humans, culminates in a **complex social engagement systems mediated by facial gestures and vocalization.**

According to Porges, this evolutionary development allows social interaction to stabilize physiological arousal by means of facial expressions, speech, and prosody. **When the environment is appraised as being safe, the defensive limbic structures are inhibited.** This makes it possible to be **socially engaged** with calm visceral states.

The Polyvagal Theory

When the systems break down, as we witness **particularly under conditions of stress**, when asked to step out of ones **comfort zone and/or under pressures to perform**, the **social vagus no longer can stabilize the organism**. The physiological cohesion that forms the basis of interpersonal neurobiological communication between different organisms breaks down, and the phylogenetically “older systems” will be recruited to regulate metabolic output to deal with environmental challenges.

As long as people feel threatened (aggression, fear, distrust or an unsafe environment) **they can not meaningfully engage with others and will resort to more primitive and solipsistic fight-or-flight behaviour** (mobilization mediated by the sympathetic nervous system) **to ensure safety and survival**.

The Polyvagal Theory

Poly:
Many

Vagal:

Refers to the vagus nerve; the 10th cranial nerve. The vagus nerve exits the brainstem and branches that regulate structures in the head and on several organs, including the heart... especially the heart.

The Polyvagal Theory

Autonomic Nervous System (ANS): The nervous system that you don't control consciously, that causes you to do things automatically (i.e. digestion). Your autonomic nervous system regulates homeostatic, or 'steady state' functioning of your body.

The ANS is composed of two subsystems, the

- 1.Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)** and the
- 2.Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS).**

The PNS and SNS represents neural systems that originate in the brainstem and contribute to the regulation of a variety of target organs including the eyes, salivary glands, blood vessels, heart, larynx, lungs, stomach, adrenal, pancreas, intestine, bladder and external genitalia.

The Polyvagal Theory

Parasympathetic Nervous System:

The PNS promotes functions associated with growth, rest, restoration systems and personal (energy) renewal – allowing for stress management and future performance.

Sympathetic Nervous System:

The SNS promotes increased metabolic output (energy) to deal with challenges, stress and tasks from outside the body – external to self.

Neuroception: Neuroception describes the **subconscious system and how neural circuits distinguish whether situations or people are safe, dangerous, or (life) threatening**. These reactions happen so quickly that we are not aware of them until they have occurred.

Faulty neuroception may lie at the root of several disorders including, but not limited to, anxiety, depression, post traumatic stress disorder, reactive attachment disorder and conditions like autism and schizophrenia.

Pro-Social Behaviour

Pro-social behaviour is voluntary pro-active social behavior intended to benefit the other. A social behavior that ensures a positive impact on a leaders, staff and/or the workplace culture as a whole.

From a leadership effectiveness perspective, the pro-social behavior triggers neurophysiological circuits that not only support affect regulation and social interaction between the leader / leader and leader / staff but also promote health growth and restoration in self and others.

It is essential the engagement from the “leader / leader and leader / staff is pro-social therefore promoting constructive behaviour.

Pro-Social Behaviour

Signs of aggressive / defensive motives or critical intent from the leader (anger, frustration, impatience, disrespect etc.) triggers distrust and fear in 'the other' person.

This quickly mobilizes their sympathetic nervous system to ensure the self-protective mechanisms of aggressive (fight) or passive (flight) behaviors are put in place to ensure personal safety. (95% of the time this is done unconsciously)

By being self-aware and attentive to your voice tone, facial expressions, emotions (how you're feeling) and personal stress levels you can strengthen your ability to listen and show a sense of care and concern for the other (creating a positive impact).

Evidence suggests that pro-social behavior is central to the well-being, trust and overall effectiveness of individuals and work (social) groups.

Key Attributes of the Pro-Social Domain

Adults who are optimally regulated in the pro-social domain will demonstrate the following key attributes;

- The ability to help regulate others and to co-operate with others;
- a sense of honesty, both with themselves and others;
- empathy, or the capacity to care about others' feelings and to help them deal with their emotions;
- the ability to put the needs and interests of others ahead of their own;
- the desire to “do the right thing” and the conviction to act on their values.

The Polyvagal Theory

Myelinated Vagus Nerve:

Is the more recently evolved and complex ventral branch of the vagus, also known as the 'smart branch' because it is associated with the regulation of sympathetic 'flight or fight' behaviours in the service of social affiliative behaviours. These behaviours include social communication and self-soothing and calming. In other words, this branch of the vagus can inhibit defensive limbic circuits.

Non-Myelinated Vagus Nerve:

This branch of the vagus is known as the 'vegetative vagus' because it is associated with primal survival strategies of primitive vertebrates. Under stress, these animals freeze when threatened, conserving metabolic resources. This is an older system of stress response which is essentially left over from our evolutionary past, and can actually have lethal consequences for mammals. 'Scared to death' is a saying which describes the outcome of prolonged disinhibition of this system.

The Polyvagal Theory

Vagal Break: The main “trust filter” of the mind / body connection.

The ventral vagal nervous system can act like a very precise intensity controller for arousal and doing. In this function, it affects more than the heart but its effect on the heart is very illustrative. The ventral vagal keeps the heart rate well below its intrinsic rate of the pacemaker. This means that a decrease in the ventral vagal slowing frees up energy for activity in a prompt and precise way.

This 'brake' once lifted can be reapplied just as promptly and precisely. This makes for fluid shifting and balance between goal related activity and social activity. If it was not for the vagal brake, then an increase in activity or goal related behavior would require an increase in the firing of the sympathetic-adrenal system.

The Polyvagal Theory

The downside of this is that the sympathetic system, partly because it uses the release of 'adrenaline' tends to be an all or none system rather than a finely tuned system.

Adrenaline cannot be retrieved promptly once it is released. This makes it hard to shift gears.

There are many people who have a hard time shifting gears once they have become alarmed or scared, even if shortly afterwards, information comes that indicates it was a false alarm.

This is because chemicals have 'flooded' the body. This state has long been intuitively referred to in psychology as flooded for that reason and it is understood it is impossible to shift quickly.

Leader – What Could Be Going On For You?

What could be going on for you?

- The problem to be solved or decision to be made requires the assistance of another(s).
- Feeling insecure in your or others abilities to perform effectively to get results leading to increased personal stress.
- Questioning your own ability to control your emotions and you - trigger into an amygdala hijack - displaying ineffective leadership styles / motives.
- H.A.L.T. (Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired) intensifies negative emotions, personal confidence and your ability to trust and communicate effectively with others

Other – What Could Be Going On for Them?

If the environment is safe, they predominantly use their newest "hardware", so to speak.

They are socially engaged, communicate and use their constructive, interpersonal and rationale skills. If pro-social behaviors are not utilized in the initial interaction by 'the leader', they will scan their environment to assess if it's safe (unconsciously).

This is done by observing (or remembering) the facial expressions, listening to the leaders voice tone, assessing your motives and/or connecting to past (emotional) + / - experiences with the leader. When they encounter what feels like a dangerous situation, they revert to an evolutionary 'older' system.

They'll stop engaging socially and instead flight, freeze or flee. The lack of pro-social behaviours and/or a sense of aggressive motive by the leader will trigger their neurophysiological circuits and the sympathetic nervous system will mobilizes aggressive (fight) or passive (flight) behaviour to ensure they feel safe. This is done unconsciously.

Leader – Responsibilities for Being Effective

Be attentive of your level of stress and mindset when asking for help and assistance in solving a problem, making a decision or delegating a task.

Be self aware of your leadership style (LSI), your strengths and weaknesses and negative emotional triggers in high stress situations. Before initiating “the other”, work to be aware of and control negative emotions (emotional intelligence and/or self discipline techniques) that may trigger of aggressive / defensive or passive / defensive behaviour in yourself.

Ideally calm down, get support and/or control before interacting with others. Encode the introductory messages you would like to send to “the other” to ensure pro-social behaviour and a constructive leadership style. Work to create a safe, calm and constructive space between self/ other. Be extra attentive of the initial reaction of “the other” and take responsibility for any positive / negative impacts on them. Ensure clear and shared expectations are established.

Other – Responsibilities for Being Effective

Welcome the interaction and expect pro-social behaviour, respect and a constructive styles and approach from the leader.

Be attentive of your “emotional memory” and “history / experience” with the leader (i.e. how you expect and trust them to behave). Utilize good listening skills to be in a position to best help in solving problems, making decisions or accepting a delegated task.

Ensure communications in developing clear and shared expectations, and the depth and timing of the deliverables are established.

Be self aware of your own leadership style (LSI), strengths and weaknesses and emotional triggers in high stress situations.

Before engaging with “the leader”, work to be aware of and control negative emotions (your own emotional intelligence and self discipline). Contribute to creating a safe, calm, trusting and constructive space.

If dealing with a person in a position of authority, tap into your self-actualized values base (personal integrity) to have the courage to provide feedback on your perceptions of intent, motives and overall effectiveness of the leadership styles / behaviour of the leader.

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