

VERNON CRESSWELL

Natural Teamwork Lessons from Nature

From Bushveld to Boardroom

I am often confronted with requests to assist with improving communication within an organisation. Poor communication is probably one of the biggest issues resulting in ineffective – and often bad - teamwork. If people are not communicating effectively, you can be sure that they are not working *together* effectively...

Animals are expert communicators. Through vocal and non-vocal sounds, body language, facial expressions and touch, animals tend to get their message across surprisingly clear and effective.

A few years ago we were watching a young male leopard in a marula tree. He was perfectly relaxed and we were watching him from a distance of about 7 metres. After some time, another vehicle approached the sighting, and it was at this stage that the young leopard started exhibiting signs of uneasiness. Pic 1 shows him looking towards the approaching vehicle – just starting to look a bit apprehensive. The approaching vehicle got his attention! Pic 2 shows a bit of unhappiness – the vehicle was starting to come too close – was invading his “personal space”. The look in his eyes, slight rotation of ears and an emerging snarl was clear to be seen. At this stage the driver of the vehicle should have picked up the signs and stopped. Pic 3 shows a distinctive snarl and flattening of the ears – a very clear warning sign. Unfortunately, none of these signs were identified or interpreted by the other driver – resulting in the young leopard hurrying away into thick bush not to be seen again!



In a way, this is nature's way of ensuring that the gene pool of the herd is strengthened

Clear and effective communication is a prerequisite for any group wanting to work together as a “team”. Only with good communication will a team succeed – whether that team is a group of people in business or your family

There are many instances where I have witnessed people looking a bit sad or depressed, happy, under pressure etc – and these “signs” aren’t being picked up by other people. Think of the consequences – in this case a “lost” sighting, in other cases, someone in your team resigning or, more seriously, having a fit or stroke in the room! It’s not the resignation, fit or stroke, but one’s inability to pick up the warning signs that could possibly have avoided the resultant resignation, fit or stroke....or at least, afforded you an opportunity of addressing a potential problem.

We “lost” a wonderful sighting because of someone’s inability to pick up and interpret some very obvious signs – make sure you don’t you lose someone in your team – at work or at home – because you paid scant attention to warning signs that you should have picked up!

BOOK VERNON CRESSWELL TODAY!

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EXCITING BOOK

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Vernon is the author of a truly remarkable book entitled "Natural Teamwork" which contains many wonderful examples of teamwork in nature – supported with beautiful colour pictures to illustrate each example. The book is an ideal corporate gift or handout at his talk or workshop

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Nature affords us so many wonderful examples of clear and effective communication. I sometimes think we have lost that innate and instinctive ability to communicate with each other. Look for “signs” that may assist you in better understanding a particular situation. We all “communicate” via signs and body language – if you are aware of the signs, identify and interpret them in time, you have a much better chance of succeeding as a team.

DID YOU KNOW?

Have you ever noticed herbivores eating or “sucking” bones? I’ve often witnessed giraffe in the dry season chewing/sucking dry bones. This phenomenon is called “osteophagia” – meaning bone-eating!

Why? During the dry season they sometimes don’t always get enough trace elements such as phosphorous and calcium from their usual plant-fibre diets and thus resort to this practice – usually accompanied with lots of dribbling saliva!

Leopard tortoises are also known to practice osteophagia by eating old hyena dung to assist with their shell development (hyena dung turns white due to the high bone content in their diet)

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