

## Lap of the Gods

Locus of control refers to our perception of how much difference we make in any given situation. It is widely recognised by psychologists as the single most influential variable affecting employee engagement, motivation and productivity. It is the bedrock from which each one of us answers the question “so – what do I matter?”.

If we experience a high level of understanding of what is going on within a working environment and if we gain good feedback for our contributions and our fellows include us in their plans and deliberations, then we feel like we “have some say in things”. We feel that we matter. And we experience a sense of control over events that gives us a degree of comfort.

When circumstances, especially those outside of our control, introduce elements of randomness into our normal routines, our sense of control weakens. And if the random elements continue or increase over time or if there is a sudden very large random change, then we can experience symptoms of traumatic stress – called prolonged duress stress disorder or post traumatic stress disorder.

What is often forgotten, however, is that it is not only the direct victims of randomness who can experience PDS or PTSD. Those who witness others’ major traumatic events can also experience symptoms as bad as those actually affected. Those proxy symptoms underlie survivor stress and guilt from trench warfare to its peace-time equivalent, mass redundancy and yet are almost never addressed. “There but for the grace of God go I” can destroy in an instant the carefully woven web of corporate thrall that has taken years to nurture.

Thankfully, once their mental thrall has been broken by redundancy, the actual “victims” typically find that they can work through the rubble towards a new future with more vigour than they’d ever thought possible. Freed from thrall, they usually find a new safe haven for their dignity pretty quickly and off they go. There is, indeed, a very healthy corollary of “OK. What’s done’s done. Now I’ll get on and move forward”.

Not so, though, our survivors. Fuelled frequently by hope, anxiety, anger and frustration, our survivor now has the prospect of remaining in thrall without all of the comforts of belief in the system that have previously taken the edge off its rigours. And precious little control.

So how do we conclude? Well, of course, look after those being made redundant. But don’t forget the survivors, who may need even more nurturing than their long-gone workmates. And they may well need a new and different rationale for continuing to give their all within a perceptibly different environment from the one they believed they had signed up to. They, after all, are going to be the foundations of the new organisation