

A **FULLYALIVE** *White Paper*

Getting more of what you want and less of what you don't want

"We're a lot like turkeys."

Just a Thin Slice of Information

John Stuart Mill was reputed to be the last person to know everything there was to know in the world. That was no small feat, even in 1873, the year he died. Whether the description is accurate is unimportant; Mill was learned and wise, the Einstein of his generation and it's unlikely anyone will ever again be similarly described.

Of course, information has exploded in repeated Big Bangs since Mill's time and the possibility of knowing a large percentage of what there is to know is essentially zero. Indeed, over 90% of the scientists who have ever lived are working now on new breakthroughs and understandings and the notion of keeping pace in as little as a single discipline is laughable for all but a few.

Today's human brain and its capacity for learning is identical to that of cave men 20,000 years ago. Knowledge was accumulated at a much slower pace then and our brains are designed to function at that rate. However, information comes to us today in a constant tsunami. Somehow we have to find a way to deal with that, and we do.

Lower animals deal with the same challenge. Imagine a wild turkey hen and the myriad of things she has to attend to. She has to build and guard the nest, find food for her young, distinguish between danger and non-danger and balance all of that with a very tiny and extremely limited brain. Still, when she hears just the right *chirp-chirp* she recognizes her own offspring, ignores other input and responds with food for her young. She has learned through evolution and experience to pay attention to certain things and give her best, while she pays virtually no attention to other things. She can do no more.¹

Where this intersects with your leadership is that those who look to you for leadership are as saturated with information as you are. In fact, we are all a lot like that turkey hen. Your followers cannot possibly evaluate everything that comes their way, including all of the physical, mental and emotional messages you send to them. Consequently, they behave just like the turkey hen and pay attention to a narrow slice of the information that comes from you to them and they respond to that. This is where things become a bit trickier.

Daniel Golemanⁱⁱ tells us clearly and compellingly about how human beings do the dance of decision-making. As much as we like to see ourselves as rational and analytical, most of us make our decisions emotionally and justify them rationally. The process may shift very rapidly from emotion to justifying, but the process moves in that direction nevertheless.

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That means that those who look to you for leadership make their decisions about following you first on an emotional level. It is at that level that they focus their attention for that narrow slice of information clues from you. After all, they cannot pay attention to everything. They pick up on your eye contact, your tone of voice and the sharpness of your focus on them when they speak. They are looking for presence from you – are you with them or are you somewhere else? If you are focused elsewhere you can lose them in a nanosecond.

In this information overload world, how you show up with those who look to you for leadership has never been more critical. Be with them when you're with them. They will read that narrow slice of your complex message set and respond with their best, their A-Game. Indeed, you will be such a great leader for them that that they will never call you a turkey.

ⁱ Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D., Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion, William Morrow & Company, New York, 1993

ⁱⁱ Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, Bantam Books, 2005