

10 INSIGHTS ON INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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IS INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP THE HOLY GRAIL OF LEADERSHIP? Well, I define such a pinnacle – the holy grail of leadership – as that which engenders the highest levels of employee engagement and commitment.

So, by that definition, then yes, hands down, inspirational leadership is the summit.

And your employees would agree with me.

A major study examined a half million employees and their assessment of 50,000 leaders in terms of 16 core leadership competencies. The outcome of the study showed that the ability to inspire “is what most powerfully separates the most effective leaders from the average and least-effective leaders. And it is the factor most subordinates identify when asked what they would most like to have in their leader.”

A pursuit worth the effort - but then you probably didn't need a study to tell you that. We all know how it *feels* when we are around an inspirational leader. Inspirational leaders spur the expenditure of discretionary energy. You feel uplifted. The power of possibility surges through you. You might even physically get the tingles as you are reminded and reinvigorated about what could lie ahead and why you are doing what you are. You feel connected to the mission, to the leader, to others, and to your work. You feel worthy, and worthwhile. You aim higher and try harder. You feel compelled to take action.

You can trigger this response.

And it turns out there are plenty of opportunities to do so.

In a major survey, 55% of managers said the ability to inspire was the single most important leadership attribute, and yet only 11% said their current manager was inspiring. Anecdotally and honestly, how many of the leaders around you can you say are truly inspiring?

So there is no question of the void to be filled. The question you may have though is, can inspirational leadership be taught? In another major study, almost 900 executives were asked to pick one leadership attribute out of 16 to focus on to improve. Amongst the 310 who chose to work on improving their ability to inspire others, when doing so they moved from the 42nd percentile, (below average), to the 70th percentile – a statistically positive gain and evidence that you can indeed learn to become inspiring.

You absolutely can elevate your inspirational firepower. What follows will fire you up to do just that.

HERE'S 10 WAYS TO INSPIRE OTHERS TO ACTION:

1) TO INSPIRE, BE INSPIRED - To inspire others to action you have to emit a passion for your own actions. Financial guru Suze Orman has openly admitted that the single secret to her success is her willingness to show her passion for what she is doing. Warren Buffet says that at Berkshire Hathaway, 75% of the managers they hire are independently wealthy and don't need to work – by design. Hiring such a profile allows them to focus in on talent that simply loves and is passionate about what they're doing “because that passion brings out an enthusiasm and a dedication in others.”

2) BE CUSTOM-BUILT CONTAGIOUS– Closely related to point # 1 above, while it is certain that you must have passion to foster passion, it is just as essential that you demonstrate this passion and energy *in your own way*. If the energy is emitted in an inauthentic manner, it defeats the purpose. Yes, you can light up the room with loud and heartfelt oratory – that's certainly one way to go if it feels natural. But introverts take heart. Some

of most inspirational leaders I've ever seen command the room as they do what I call "elegantly electrify". They might not even speak very often, but when they do, it is with a quiet authority and an underlying and intense focus and passion. There are many ways to transmit your energy. However you do it, you must do it though. It is a fundamental requirement of inspirational leaders to be able to turbocharge via osmosis.

3) REMEMBER IT'S ABOUT THEM, NOT YOU, A GREATER CAUSE, NOT YOUR CAUSE– There is an underpinning of modesty and a sense of servitude inherent in inspirational leaders. They are connectors, not climbers, more interested in relationships than their own reward. They ultimately see their role as serving something greater than themselves and couldn't hide it if they tried. Keep this mantra front and center for the times you might stray off center.

4) MOTIVATE THEM TO PROVE YOU'RE RIGHT (ABOUT THEM) – Sorry for the tongue twister – here's what I mean by this: The first part of this involves a commitment to actively instill confidence in others. When we do, often the first thing they want to do is demonstrate we were right to place such confidence in them. They will show their appreciation by wanting to further earn yours. The second half of this idea though is to not just express confidence in someone and detach, letting the energy from the positive transaction wane and leaving the compliment feeling empty. Instead, remain an interested stakeholder in their ultimate success. For example, instead of just stating your confidence in someone, you can say, "I believe in you and I believe you are going to crush this project. I'm here to help you see it through to the successful conclusion of which I know you are capable." You get the idea. Instill confidence and install a conduit of continued support. They'll take great pride in proving your belief in them is well warranted.

5) INSPIRE PEOPLE TO BECOME BETTER VERSIONS OF *THEMSELVES* (NOT BETTER VERSIONS OF YOU)– Inherent in this sentiment is a commitment to understand the unique DNA of those you are interacting with and a desire to help them build from that singular blueprint. It is both an investment in and an understanding of the individual. It requires unearthing the best qualities of each person. Leadership expert John C. Maxwell likens it to the plight of the gold prospector who is "always on the lookout for potential gold mines. When they find traces of ore, prospectors assume there's a rich vein to unearth, and they start digging.

In the same fashion, inspirational leaders search for the best traits within a person and commit to uncovering them.”

6) COMMUNICATE A CLEAR, RESONATE VISION WITH STRETCHING GOALS– People want to know where they are going, and why. They want to be connected to something bigger than themselves and pursue goals with intrinsic value that help them accomplish things important to them. Communicating such messages in a clear and compelling manner is a central function of the inspirational leader. And if your vision requires change by the way, make your case for change clear. People also want to be challenged and be given a chance to rise to the occasion. So set the bar high without being unrealistic.

7) ACT LIKE A PACE CAR– In auto racing, the “pace car” is a car that rides ahead of the field for a few laps at a high, even keel speed before the race starts. Then, having enabled a running start, they drop out of the way as the cars behind accelerate past with vigor. Likewise, the inspirational leader sets the pace for the organization, role modeling the behaviors they want to see, helping the “field” to a running start, and then getting out of the way after fully charging and empowering the organization.

8) PROVIDE REALITY AND HOPE– The key here is to provide a balance of both. It’s hard to be inspired by someone who infuses high doses of optimism and possibility, but is clearly not grounded in reality. Likewise, while transparency is inspiring, when that transparency involves a rough state of the union address, the constituents need to hear a reason to believe and a plan for better, brighter days ahead as well.

9) KNOW THE TENETS OF HOW TO BE, NOT JUST HOW TO DO (TO INSPIRE)– Inspirational leadership is not just about how to do, it’s as much about how to be. Research shows there are 6 core attributes that employees find most inspiring in their leader – 6 How To Be’s if you will:

- Be Humble (people are drawn to humility, especially when it includes showing vulnerability)
- Be Authentic (which makes you accessible)
- Be Accountable (including a zeal for facing challenges head on)

- Be Caring (including caring enough to really listen to what others have to say)
- Be Trustworthy (including doing what you say you are going to do – the well documented secret to Nelson Mandela being such an effective and inspirational leader)
- Be Driven (including an ability to get to the heart of the issue, cutting through the baloney, making things happen)

10) GET (& EXPECT) RESULTS– The truth is, while losers can be loveable and, yes, at times inspiring, you are much more likely to be inspired by a loveable winner. Winners get results. Getting results inspires an organization on many levels. And expecting results does the same.