SUMMER 2014 ISSUE

Solutions

PRACTICAL PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP THE BEST IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS

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FEATURE ARTICLE

By **GEORGE AMBLER**
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THE IMPORTANCE OF A CLEAR

Leadership Philosophy

Consistent leadership action and behavior requires a clear leadership philosophy. Why? Well, because your leadership philosophy determines how you respond to people and how you respond to situations.

Your leadership philosophy affects your behavior and ultimately your leadership effectiveness. So what exactly is a leadership philosophy? Encarta defines philosophy as the:

1. examination of basic concepts: the branch of knowledge or academic study devoted to the systematic examination of basic concepts such as truth, existence, reality, causality, and freedom
2. school of thought: a particular system of thought or doctrine
3. guiding or underlying principles: a set of basic principles or concepts underlying a particular sphere of knowledge
4. set of beliefs or aims: a precept, or set of precepts, beliefs, principles, or aims, underlying somebody's practice or conduct

Our leadership philosophy is a set of beliefs and principles that strongly influence how we interpret reality and guide how we understand the way the world works. It's our philosophy, our understanding and interpretation of leadership that affects how we react to people, events and situations around us. How we think determines how we behave! Steven Covey described this as the power of the space between stimulus and response:

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." – Stephen Covey

How we choose to respond, in the space we're given, between stimulus and response, is greatly affected by our understanding of leadership, that is, it's affected by our leadership philosophy.

This article continues on the next page.

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The importance of a clear leadership philosophy

Continued from Page 1

The key components of a leadership philosophy

Research by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, described in their book, "*Built to Last*" has shown that enduringly successful organizations have a clear leadership philosophy, the authors call this an organization's core ideology that they describe as:

> "…core values and sense of purpose beyond just making money – that guides and inspires people throughout the organization and remains relatively fixed for long periods of time."

At its core, a leadership philosophy consists of a key set of beliefs, describing:

- What you believe about people…
- What you believe about life….
- What you believe makes groups and organizations effective…

These three belief systems are expressed in our values, and ultimately how we behave, resulting in our unique leadership style. It's these beliefs that guide how we choose to respond to people and situations.

To be effective as leaders, it's useful to create a leadership philosophy that is clear and helps to guide our actions.

I suggest that all leaders take the time necessary to write down their personal leadership philosophy, which should contain the following components:

A Significant Purpose:
What are you about? What business are you in? What's your purpose? Are you passionate about your purpose? Is it clear?

A Compelling Vision:
Where are you going? What will it look like when you get there? Why should others support it?

Inspiring Values:
What are your core values? What guides your actions? What guides your decision making?

Guiding Principles:
What are my guiding principles?

Once you have written them down, share and teach them to others around you. A clearly communicated leadership philosophy helps build trust amongst constituents.

Leaders are guided by their leadership philosophy

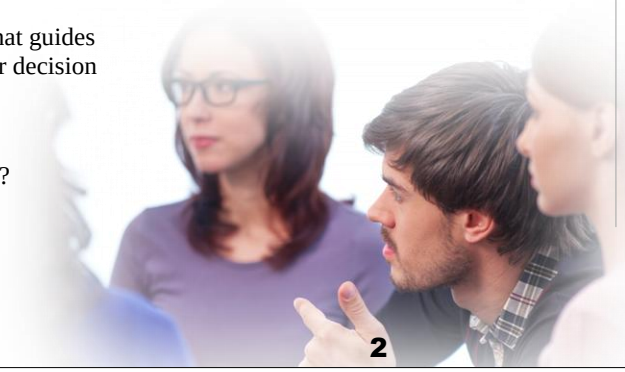
Two leaders who use completely opposite leadership philosophies to lead their teams is effectively discussed by Harvard Business School Professor Scott Snook, who asks, "as a leader is it better to be loved or feared?" He underscores his point with the following leadership examples:

Bobby Knight, also known as "The General," a fiery, in-your-face taskmaster who led through discipline and intimidation, which some critics said went too far. Knight left a long career at Indiana University after grabbing a student, and prior to that he was filmed clutching one of his own players by the neck. And then there was the infamous incident during a game when Knight tossed a folding chair across the court to protest a referee's call.

Then there is *Mike Krzyzewski*, also known as Coach K, with the men's basketball program at Duke University. Krzyzewski relied heavily on positive reinforcement, open communication, and caring support. For Coach K, "It's about the heart, it's about family, it's about seeing the good in people and bringing the most out of them," says Snook.

The Results?
Different styles, yes, but the results are similar: After long careers, both have similar win-loss records for their teams and are acknowledged as top coaches in the collegiate ranks.

So what do Knight and Krzyzewski tell us about leadership?



What you believe about human nature, says Snook, influences your leadership style.

"If you believe people are fundamentally good – meaning that they're trying to do their best, they're self-motivated, they want to perform – then your fundamental leadership style will be one way. It will be empowering them, getting obstacles out of the way, and setting high goals while maintaining standards.

"If you believe people are constantly looking to get something over on you, and just get by, and won't do anything unless they're watched – then you'll tend to lead with a very transactional management style that's built primarily around rewards and punishments. Tight supervision characterized by a great deal of social distance between leaders and led."

Key lessons

Effective leaders understand their own assumptions about human nature.

How you lead (leadership style) is influenced by who you are (self-awareness) and the demands of the situation (situational awareness). Expanding your self-awareness, situational awareness, and the ability to adapt your leadership style increases your overall range of effectiveness as a leader.

The primary lesson for me is that leaders need to gain clarity about, their leadership philosophy, style and behavior.

How clear are you about your leadership philosophy? Are your actions guided by your leadership philosophy? How big is the gap between what you say and what you do?

"One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And, the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility." – Eleanor Roosevelt

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Originally posted at **www.georgeambler.com**.

10 Q to deal with negative employees

They thrive in most offices. You can find traces of them in the breakroom, and they like to huddle in corners and scurry when you turn on the lights. Who are they? NEGATIVE EMPLOYEES!

Most organizations have them. They are the eternal pessimists who have the amazing ability to extract the worst attributes from any situation. These employees are typically unfriendly, love to build 'coalitions" in the office (misery loves company), and complain regularly about virtually anything.

What's most interesting about some of these folks is their unwillingness to offer solutions to the very issues they are concerned about.

As a manager, it's important to resolve negativity in the workplace because it will affect the morale of your team or department. And morale, as we all know, is directly correlated to the level of output from your staff. So, as a manager, what can you do to reduce the negative atmosphere in the office?

The following questions may help you in assessing and creating procedures to combat negativity. The questions will also use a "virus" metaphor to stress how negativity can affect and spread to members of your team.

Why are they negative? Believe it or not, there could actually be a legitimate reason for the not so positive attitude of your team. Has the workload suddenly increased? Is there a threat of downsizing? As a leader, it's important not to dismiss the concerns of your employees as typical staff grumblings – because those "grumblings" may be a foreshadowing of much larger issues to come.

How did they get infected? What specific event (or series of events) caused the negative attitude(s)? If you can isolate this variable, you will later be able to apply the correct anecdote for that specific problem.

How is this infection passed to others? Does it occur through verbal communication, electronically or by other means?

Who's currently infected? This is an important point. Before you can resolve the issue you need to know who is infected and to what degree. Their "infection level" will determine the amount and frequency of the correct dosage of the solution that needs to be administered.

How long have they been infected? This is another important point to help you resolve the issue of negativity in the workplace. If the negativity has existed for months or years, then you must allow for an equal amount of time to resolve the problem.

Why do outbreaks occur? What specific events cause a sudden spark in negative communication and poor morale?

When do outbreaks occur? Is there a specific time or date where negativity increases (e.g., end of the month, end of the quarter, end of the fiscal year, etc.).

Where do outbreaks occur? Do these outbreaks occur in certain sections of your office or is it a department-wide issue? Can you isolate the problem?

How has the management team contributed to the outbreak? This may be difficult to read, but how has your behavior directly or indirectly contributed to the undesirable behavior of your team? Think objectively about this question.

What is the solution? Now that you've answered the questions above, begin to make a list of the necessary actions you will implement to correct the issue.

For example, is the workload distributed unevenly or unfairly? Consider asking team members to submit a list of their work tasks in a given week so that you can analyze if changes need to be made. Do you find that gossip or negative conversations erupt after staff meetings? If so, take some time to have a Q & A session after each meeting to answer all questions and alleviate any concerns.

What have you done to reduce negativity in your office?

As a leader, how would you answer the question:

"How good are you at motivating yourself through challenging times?"

☐ *Very – I'm able to easily motivate myself through challenges*

☐ *Somewhat – I can get through tough times but it takes work*

☐ *Extremely – Challenging times simply aren't challenging for me*

☐ *Not very – I struggle through challenging times*

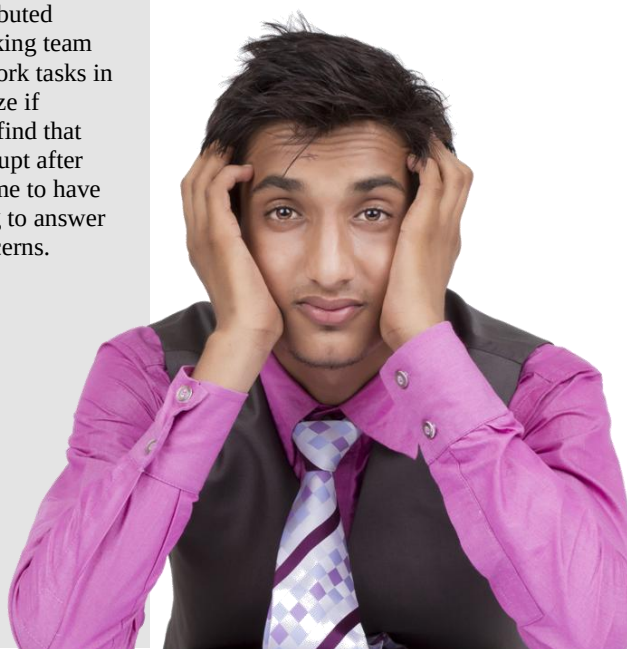
☐ *Not at all – I need a lot of help from others to overcome challenges*

All leaders face adversity on a regular basis. Unfortunately, not all leaders have people around them to pick them up and motivate them through those challenges – so the task falls to them.

Many leading experts believe that the fastest way to pick yourself up is to establish a touchstone phrase or memory that can quickly reorient your thinking from "woe is me" to "let's get moving." The faster you're able to reorient yourself, the faster you can get your team moving in a productive direction too.

As you think about motivating and inspiring yourself, what's your anchor going to be? What's that situation where you overcame a huge obstacle on your own? Or where you watched somebody else overcome something that was hugely challenging and you really respect the way they got through it?

That reminder is what you need to have so when you run into the next difficult situation, you can reach out, grab that source of strength, and keep going.



"It is easy to sit-up and take notice. What is difficult is *getting up* and taking action."
- Al Batt, American writer

Just a thought…

Train yourself in the art of listening

Listening "correctly" to your employees will help you communicate better and solve more problems. Here are some tips to help you get the most of each employee meeting:

Clean off your desk when meeting with employees. If there are loose papers on your desk, you'll unconsciously start to fiddle with them – and may even start to glance over them. Clear your desk for every conversation with employees so you can focus your attention on what they're saying.

Train yourself to ask questions instead of making statements. Example: Don't say, "Joan, don't forget that the Anderson report needs to be in on Monday morning." Rather, say, "How is the Anderson report coming…any problems with making the deadline?" By asking questions you'll start a dialogue, and you never know what you might learn.

Don't blurt out questions as soon as the employee is finished speaking. It looks as if you were formulating your reply instead of listening. Before you ask a question, paraphrase the employee's words. Example: "So what you're saying is…" Then, ask your question: "Let me ask you this…" It cuts down on miscommunication.

Don't smile the <u>whole</u> time. A lot of managers do this because they think it sends a friendly message. It can, but people can mistake it for mental absence, or a sign that you're not taking them seriously too. So be mindful of how often – and when you show that great smile.

Any praise is not always good praise

Many managers think that handing out praise indiscriminately is better than no praise at all. While that may sound okay, the bad news is that if you hand out praise the wrong way, at the wrong time, or for the wrong reasons, it can do more harm than good. Here are some guidelines to follow when using praise to motivate employees:

Be very specific about what you praise. Never say, "Frank, you're doing a great job, keep up the good work." For all you know, Frank spent that morning making personal phone calls and goofing off. He's going to think that you are a pushover and easy to fool. Wait for something specific to praise, e.g., "Frank, great job on the cost analysis. Keep up the good work."

Do not praise ordinary performance. If you praise employees for doing routine tasks, they won't be motivated to do better. Also, if and when they do excellent work, your praise will not mean as much.

Don't just "hit and run." If an employee does excellent work on a project, spend some time with that employee to let him or her know why it means so much to you and the organization.

Use praise to improve poor performance. If an employee is doing well in one area, but poorly in another, use praise to improve the poor performance. Praise the employee for what he or she is doing right; and then say, "Now, I want you to take the same approach on this other matter…"

Never assume praise is enough. Superior performance over times deserves more than compliments. Praise starts to ring hollow if that's all the employee ever gets. Interesting job assignments, and other forms of appreciation are absolutely essential at some point.

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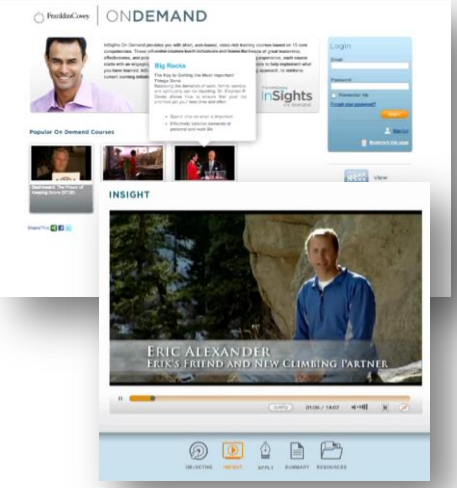

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Another perspective on interviewing

In a recent post on *Inc.com*, Alan Schaaf, founder and CEO of Imgur (pronounced "Image-er"), one of the fastest growing online image-hosting sites in the world, was asked about keeping up with the high demand for exceptional employees and his approach to the interview process.

While discussing his interviewing philosophy, Schaaf made it clear that having a strong focus on teamwork is important.

"It's not always about 'can you do the job?' It's about 'can you fit in with the team?' Are we going to come in every day and be really excited to work with you? Are you going to be that glue that holds a team together, or the person that separates the team?"

A lot of potential candidates don't make it too far in the interviewing process either. Schaaf pointed out, "We turn down a lot of really smart people who just say something weird in the interview. They might refuse to answer a question or seem unwilling to participate in the conversation. We watch for the people who can only talk about themselves, and not be interested in a problem scenario they are presented with."

Because pointed interview questions and responses are so essential to his company's selection process, Schaaf was also quick to provide one of his favorite questions.

"My favorite question is, 'If you could have a superpower, what would it be?' Everybody says 'flying,' right? So I ask: How fast are you going to fly? Are you going to fly so high that you can't breathe anymore? Can you carry someone? We try to take whatever they say and almost turn it against them so they can figure out the problem associated with that. At the same time, it's also really personal."

The answers to this question have often been interesting—and enlightening about the job candidate too. "One of the best answers came in an unexpected way. This guy had a normal answer, like being invisible, but his follow up was, 'you know what else would be good…having a really ordinary superpower…like the ability to never say 'you too,' to someone when you don't mean it.' Like, when the waiter says, enjoy your meal, and you say 'you too.' You'd save yourself from an awkward situation many, many times. I thought that showed something about his character. And it was funny."

Don't keep the most challenging work to yourself

If you have recently taken over a work team where the previous manager kept all the interesting (and challenging) work to himself, you may have a dual problem on your hands. Your staff may not know how to do the challenging work; and they may think that this work is "manager work," and resent you trying to assign it to them.

How do you change this? Patiently! Don't push too hard to force workers to "step up," but keep the pressure on. Recognize anyone who accepts challenging work, and recognize them again for doing it well. You have a basic psychological fact on your side: Most of us really do prefer challenging work. So don't lose heart, keep encouraging, and let your workers' natural desire to do challenging work take over.

"I would praise you, but your value is beyond words."

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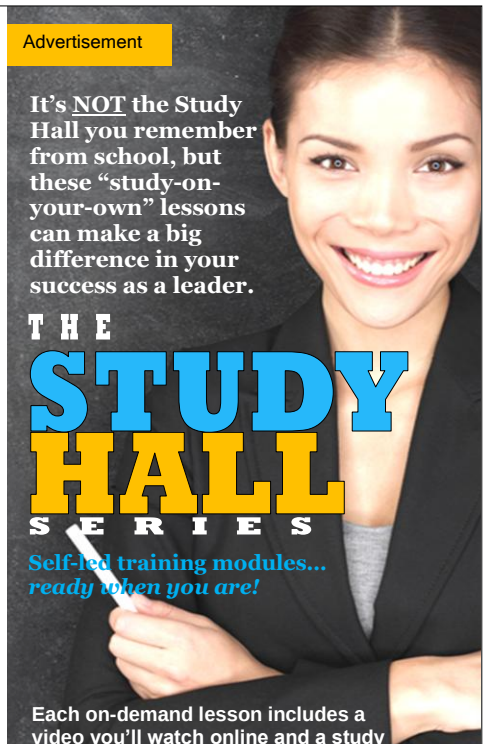

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Working well with a micro-manager

Almost everybody has to report to someone. That's good because we all can use some guidance from time-to-time, and support from the "boss." But there are also some managers who are so involved in their employee's day-to-day duties that they actually impede productivity. If you work for such a boss, here are a few things you may want to consider:

Supply all the information your boss needs – and more! There's no way around it…micro-managers need to know what's going on. Don't wait to be asked for information. Find out what the boss needs to feel confident and comfortable, and then provide it.

Establish priorities. Micro-managers are often poor at ranking the importance of tasks and assignments. They may give the same attention to small details as they do to vital projects. Come up with a simple, straight-forward method, such as a numerical or color-coded system to decide which duties you should tackle first.

Stay on top of deadlines. You can reassure your boss that you're competent and organized by meeting – or better – beating your deadline.

Learn from the "best practices" of others. Your manager probably backs off with some employees more than others for a variety of reasons. Watch those people closely to learn the secrets of their success.

Avoid these common mistakes when using email to manage people

Almost everyone is using email these days to communicate to their employees. However, the smart manager understands that email can be dangerous if not used properly. Here are some common email abuses to avoid.

Hiding behind the terminal. Don't use email for performance reviews, discipline, or other touchy matters. Some things you have to do in person. If you're still not sure when it's okay to send an email, and when you need to communicate face-to-face, ask your HR team for help.

Forgetting it's in writing. The informality of email is part of its convenience. However, it is a permanent record of a written communication – and much more easily retrieved than an ancient memo. Remember, just because you forgot about it doesn't mean you won't see it again.

Sarcasm. Spontaneity is another benefit of email, but you should watch the tone of an email message as closely as you would a memo written on paper. Sarcasm can be devastating when it is glowing on the screen!

"One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say."

-- Bryant McGill, American writer and motivational speaker

The leader in you

How do others experience you as a leader? According to psychologist Kathryn Cramer, every leader has a "signature presence," a set of leadership assets that are as unique as your signature. Just as your signature defines who you are, so, too, do your daily leadership actions.

Think about your signature for a moment—how has it changed over time? As a child, your signature was probably a carbon-copy of how you were taught to write your name in school. And as you grew older, your signature probably began to reflect more of your life experiences and personality.

Experts say that someone's handwriting can also indicate signs of stress or distraction. Look at a document that you or someone you know well may have signed during a hospital stay or in a time of crisis. In much the same way, the act of writing is largely unconscious as we scrawl our name at the bottom of a credit card receipt. Similarly, as leaders, we can be unaware of the messages we send to co-workers and team members too.

In her book *"Lead Positive: What Highly Effective Leaders See, Say, and Do,"* Cramer writes about the difficulties of seeing ourselves as we really are. She says it's imperative that leaders use a combination of *personal reflection* and *asking for feedback* to understand the positive qualities that comprise your signature presence (your leadership style); and that once you know what they are, you can allow them to "shine through in all that you do."

Here are five questions you can ask yourself and others to help determine those distinctive qualities that define your leadership.

1. When I'm at my best, how would I describe myself?
2. When I receive compliments, what specifically do people praise? Is there a common theme to the praise?
3. What types of situations do I easily handle with confidence?
4. Ask a colleague, "In what ways have I been a help to you?"
5. Ask three people you know well: "Name five things about me that you can count on me to do."

Is your leadership a true representation of the person you really are? All leaders have unique gifts they use to be successful at work. Use the five questions to help you understand the person that others see so that you can lead with your own distinctive flair.

TECHNICAL JOURNAL

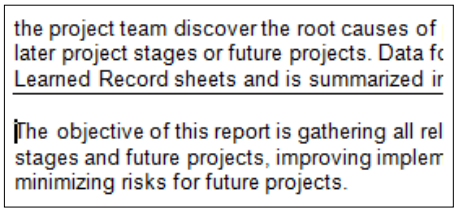
Office 2007 Tips

From the Center for Management and Professional Development's
Computer and Technical Skills Training Team

Insert horizontal lines in Word documents quickly

In Microsoft Word, when you want to quickly insert a horizontal line into your document, instead of going through the Borders and Shading dialog box in the Ribbon here is a keyboard shortcut to save you time.

By typing 3 dashes — and hitting "Enter" immediately after a solid line will appear.



If you would like to change the type of horizontal line, you can input different characters for this short cut. The area below shows other possibilities.

Three asterisks ***

Three underscores ---

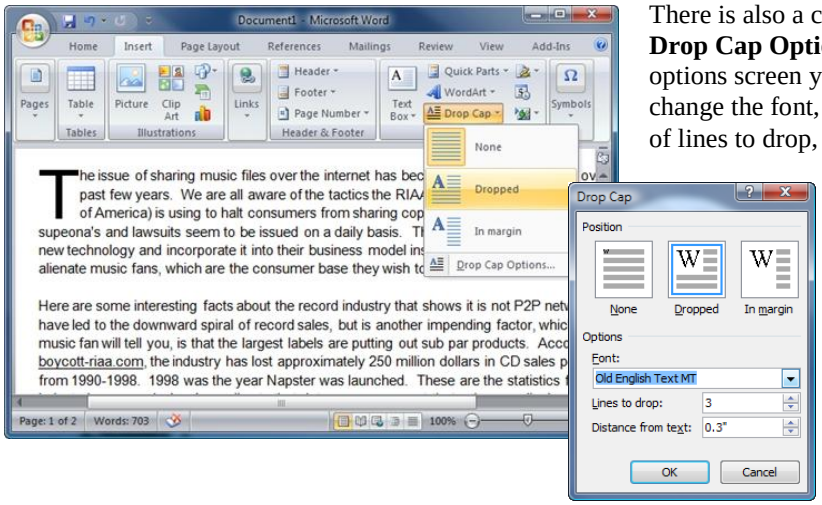
Three equal signs ===

Three pound signs ###

Add emphasis to paragraphs with Drop Caps

You can add emphasis to your Word 2007 documents by using Drop Caps… you know, those big letters at the beginning of a document or paragraph that make your document look really professional. Here's how:

Click the beginning of the paragraph you want to emphasize. Then click the **Insert** tab on the Ribbon and choose **Drop Cap**. You can scroll to any of the three preset Drop Caps and the document will change with your choice. By default it will drop by three lines.



There is also a choice for **Drop Cap Options**. In the options screen you can change the font, the number of lines to drop, and position.

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Dr. Alan Zimmerman, author, national speaker and President of Zimmerman Communi-Care Network has spoken to more than a million people. The Center for Management and Professional Development is proud to offer Solutions readers the opportunity to benefit from Dr. Zimmerman's expertise and his solution-focused approach to leadership and personal enrichment.

Dr. Zimmerman's Comment

If you dare to teach, you must never cease to learn.

You may have a leadership title at work, or you may be called on to exert some leadership in your home. But somewhere or other, you serve as a leader. That means you're also a teacher. You're teaching people what to do and how to do it.

My question is ... are you still a student? Are you continually learning? You can't expect to be an effective leader or a positive influence if you're not in the process of learning more and getting better.

I see it all the time in my speaking programs. The audience is excited about the material I'm sharing and the skills they're learning. Then they'll write on their evaluation forms, "Great stuff. But why aren't our managers and leaders here? They need to learn this too."

And I see their point. In some organizations, the leaders are "too busy" to attend the training session. Or if they do come, they're constantly popping in and out of the meeting. Even though they don't mean to be doing it, they're subtly sending the message that they don't really "need" to be in the session. They have "more important" things to do.

I wonder if those "more important" things are really "more important." After all, leadership effectiveness does not automatically come with the "leader" title. It comes from being a student of human behavior.

Dr. W. J. Mayo, one of the founders of the Mayo Clinic, wrote about that way back in 1927. In the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Dr. Mayo said leaders tend to spend too much time on "getting the job done" and too little time on "vision and people management." He said, "Without intending to criticize unkindly, I believe that we devote too much effort to driving home detailed information and too little time to the development of perspective."

No matter what kind of official or unofficial leader you might be, I've learned several things that will make you a phenomenal leader – whether that is with your coworkers, team members, or employees.

1. Leadership Is more often learned than earned.

I was speaking with Lou Holtz, the great football coach when he hit us all right between the eyes with this statement. He said, "Someone can name you to a position, but no one can name you to a leader."

He's right. All too often, great workers are promoted to managers. But the skills needed to manage – and manage well – have almost no similarity to the skills needed by the worker.

A cartoon in the *New Yorker* magazine said it best. The caption read, "I made the change from skilled labor to unskilled management." Sad – but often true.

It should be obvious, but it seldom is. Leadership is learned, not earned. So that means...

2. School is never out.

Good leaders, who are in the process of becoming great leaders, are always in the learning mode. In some of the very best organizations I address, I will invariably see the CEO taking notes. He/she is in the process of honing his/her leadership skills.

At one of my recent programs, a participant from American Airlines talked about how school is never out for their leaders.

She said they surveyed their employees to find out what they thought were the most important characteristics of a truly effective leader. They collected the data, compiled a list, and gave the list back to the employees. The employees were asked to circle the three characteristics they most wanted to see in their supervisors. That allowed the supervisors to "tailor make" their leadership styles to fit the needs of their employees; and has added a great deal to the whole employee-morale equation.

And finally, all people in an organization -- but especially the leaders or leaders-to-be -- need to make sure they use what they learn.

3. People need to be held accountable for the training they receive.

There's no question that training pays. That's been proven many times over. But it really pays if you hold people accountable for the training they receive.

A survey by the American Society for Training and Development compared two groups of 40 public companies. Those in group one invested $900 per employee for training, while those in group two only invested $275 in each of their employees.

The findings? Those that spent more money on training reported 57% higher sales and 37% higher gross profits per employee than those that spent one-third as much. The difference was huge, and the difference was significant.

But I would suggest you take it a step further. Don't just offer training. Make it an expectation that you and your coworkers WILL attend training and WILL use the training.

Action:

If you were asked by someone to outline your routine for continuing education, what would you tell him/her? Would you be able to specify the number of courses you're taking, the books you're reading, and the CDs you're listening to on a regular basis? …And would you be proud of your answer?

If you stumble over the question, if you do not have a clear plan for your personal and professional development, you are cheating yourself and those you're supposed to lead.

Look at the opportunities for training and learning that are available to you. Then make a plan that works for you – and stick to it!

Lay a foundation of accountability

In real life, you reap what you sow, so work hard to establish a culture of accountability at work. Consider these five principles as you lay the foundation for accountability on your team.

1. **Outline the goals.** It's hard for employees to align their workplace efforts with organizational strategy if they don't know what the strategy is. Show them how their efforts move the organization – or at least the work team – forward, and why quality work products and high productivity matters.
2. **Set expectations.** Make sure each employee knows what he/she is accountable for. Clarify performance goals and stress the importance of meeting specific targets and deadlines.
3. **Set them up for success.** When someone needs training, tools or continuing education to do their job better, do all that you can to help the employee get those things.
4. **Offer feedback – both positive and negative.** Never "dress people down" in public, but if someone fails to meet your expectations, let them know it. Also, let them know, and let others know if appropriate, when they exceed your expectations.
5. **Inspire.** The original meaning of the word "inspire" was to quicken or animate—that is to bring life to something. How do you inspire your people? Make your people proud of your leadership. Practice what you preach. Be equitable with everyone. Be a good role model. Be reliable and do what you say you will do. Behave in the same way you ask of them.

What happens when things don't work out?

Most people perform better when held accountable for their results, but it's still possible that a team member will not perform as expected. When this happens, don't do their work for them, or assign it to someone else – unless it's a last resort or the situation requires it. What does (or should) happen next will likely depend on several factors concerning the employee's work:

Was the failure an oversight, or did the employee deliberately choose not to perform?
Is this a one-time thing, or has it happened before?
How badly did their failure impact the team's productivity?

Based on the relevant combination of these factors, you have several options which can escalate if the situation gets worse.

A gentle reminder. "Nudge" them about the matter. It may be all that is needed to get the person back on the right track—and it's the most common response in most situations.

Send a clear message. If their failure has seriously hurt team productivity, or if this has happened more than once, be clear about the issue so there is no misunderstanding about your expectation.

Make it official. If needed, and you haven't done it yet, make it a point to "schedule" an earnest face-to-face meeting with the person. Going through a formal process of actually putting this type of meeting on the calendar further demonstrates how important the issue has become to you. During the meeting remind the employee of his/her promise, and pin down a firm due date for any appropriate action.

The nuclear option. If the employee just seems not to care – or worse – thinks it doesn't matter if they lie to you and don't do what they agreed to do, consider the next step carefully. It may require some type of discipline. Consult your human relations department to discuss your options.

Never give up. With enough effort and the right tools, you can eventually build a culture of accountability in which you don't have to ride people to get them to do the right things at the right times.

SPECIAL TRAINING EVENT

CLARIFY YOUR PURPOSE, INCREASE YOUR PASSION, AND ADOPT THE PROCESSES THAT LEAD TO GREATER ACHIEVEMENT!

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Presented By:

Dr. Alan Zimmerman

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September 30

Governor Office Building
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- Refuse "good enough" behavior and commit to "excellence" instead.

COURAGE

From Margie Warrell

Are you as confident as you'd like to be?

I recently had the opportunity to speak at two leadership events. After each event I had the chance to speak with attendees who shared their challenges, aspirations and anxieties. One of the common threads that wove through our conversations was about their self-confidence. One woman asked me how I'd become such a confident presenter of if I'd always been that way. "No way," I said. "I've built up my confidence to speak on stage simply by doing it again and again and again. The first time I ever got up to speak my legs were shaking. Sometimes they still do. It's not that my fear has disappeared now, I've just got better at overcoming it."

Of course we often assume that other people don't suffer from the same self-doubt as us; that they 'are somehow immune to the misgivings we struggle with – particularly those who've achieved success in their field of endeavor. But I know from having worked with many leaders and accomplished people that this simply isn't the case. The reality is that even the most successful people sometimes doubt themselves, second guess their decisions, feel nervous about handling conflict and managing change. And while my experience is that women tend to doubt themselves more and back themselves less, the reality is that many people wish they felt more confident, more often.

Whether or not you aspire to positions of leadership, or you simply just want to lead yourself better, here are a four ways to build your confidence, and in so doing, your ability to make positive changes, manage conflict, influence outcomes and pursue the goals that excite you.

Act as if. Research shows that when we change our behavior, emotions will eventually follow. So it's important to realize that you should never wait to feel confident before you act with confidence. I'm not talking about being fake, but I am talking about embodying the posture, the expression and the energy of someone who felt really confident in themselves. Research has also shown that when we shift how we hold ourselves physically, it can shift how we feel emotionally. So start with your posture and facial expression. Stand tall, walk confidently, look people in the eye, smile warmly and own all that makes you who you are.

Don't talk yourself down. Your words create your reality. Our subconscious mind can't discern between truth and fiction. Rather it just listens to everything you say and processes it as the truth. So when you say to yourself or others, "I'm really hopeless at networking. I'm a walking disaster in job interviews. I am hopeless at saying no or promoting myself or talking to strangers…." your subconscious processes your words as the truth. In turn, you don't take the actions that would nurture your self confidence and limit the results you produce. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. So if you want to feel more confident at something, stop talking yourself down. Instead, re-language your concern in a position and action oriented way. For example, "I'm getting better at speaking up in meetings." Whatever you do, don't dump on yourself. It serves no-one!

Pursue stretch challenges. If you wait until you know you are going to succeed at something before you try, you can spend your entire life waiting. The real recipe to success is not to wait until you've attained mastery before you step out of your comfort zone and pursue a stretch challenge because it's in the pursuit that you'll build the mastery.

In my book, *Stop Playing Safe,* I shared how we are all wired to avoid situations where we put ourselves at risk of failing, falling short, or making a fool of ourselves. It's a natural human instinct to play it safe and protect our pride, status, security and ego in the process. But the truth is that the only way to build confidence is to put yourself in situations that may, in the short term, be uncomfortable. Whether to take on a role that puts your reputation on the line, or to take on some challenge that offers no guarantee of success – only when you do things that stretch you, can you grow the competence and skills to take on bigger things in the future. Avoiding situations that stretch you deprives you of the very opportunities to build your confidence in your ability to succeed at bigger things.

Kick fear out of the driver's seat. Fear is one potent emotion that can help to keep us safe and protect us from pain. In this day and age, it's not actual physical pain or danger that it focuses on, but emotional pain. It is our fear of failing, rejection, criticism or feeling inadequate that holds us back far more than any actual experience of failure or rejection. Accordingly, we let our fear run the show and sit at the helm in our life, eating away at our confidence and keeping us from taking the very actions required to build it.

So be very intentional in your choices lest your fears run and shape your life without you even realizing it. Ask yourself – is this fear serving me, or is it holding me back? If the answer is the latter, then literally take a deep breath and feel that fear, then stand tall and step right through it into action.

The more often you do that, the more confident and courageous you will become. I promise. Just try it!

Confidence breeds confidence.

Used with Permission.

An intrepid Australian, **Margie Warrell** draws on her background in business, psychology, and executive coaching to help people live and lead with greater courage. The bestselling author of *Stop Playing Safe* (Wiley 2013), and *Find Your Courage* (McGraw-Hill 2009), Margie is also a keynote speaker and the mother of four noisy children.

Connect with Margie on Twitter, Linked In, You Tube, or join her Courage Community on Facebook. For more 'courage-building' resources and information, visit www.margiewarrell.com

Purchase a copy of *Stop Playing Safe* (on Amazon or elsewhere) to register at no cost in Margie's 8 week Stop Playing Safe video coaching program. Details at www.margiewarrell.com/stopplayingsafe