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PRACTICAL PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP THE BEST IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS

THIS ISSUE

BEING

PRODUCTIVE

BUILDING YOUR

TEAM

AND

LEARNING FROM

EXPERIENCE

Along with Other
Strategies to Keep You
Moving Forward

PLUS

MS Office Tips

DR. ALAN ZIMMERMAN'S

Comment

AND

COURAGE

From MARGIE WARRELL

It's always something...

Maintaining Focus To Get Things Done

By Allan Forbis

Director, Center for Management and Professional Development

Years ago, I enjoyed watching the late Gilda Radner portray her famous character, Roseanne Roseannadanna on the Weekend Update segment of Saturday Night Live. After what was usually a long commentary about all the things going wrong in the world, Roseanne would always say, "Well, it just goes to show you, it's always something — if it ain't one thing, it's another."

While sadly, Gilda, who would have been 70 this year, and her many characters are no longer with us, that now famous phrase still rings true for many areas of life, and it can certainly apply to any discussion about getting things done. Why? Because there is always one thing or another that interferes with our own, or work team's effort to stay focused on accomplishing important goals. From competing priorities, unexpected obstacles or predictable ambivalence, it's always something!

By nature, many of us expect our work day to be pre-defined, and we accept that we'll just go through the motions of work once we get to the office. In truth, though, we need to work at turning desired outcomes into reality.

For instance, when you arrived at work this morning, did you know exactly what you needed to accomplish? Do you know what key outcomes you need to complete before leaving work in order for you to congratulate yourself and say "this was a great day?"

Whether it's you or your work team, to get things done effectively you need to have a plan of action. If Mr. Richard Fader of Fort Lee, New Jersey (the same person who always wrote to Roseanne Roseannadanna asking for advice) is still out there, the following observations may help him and the rest of us too.

This article continues on the next page.

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Maintaining Focus to Get Things Done

Continued from the Front Page

What's the goal?

The quote attributed to author Lewis Carroll, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there," definitely fits here. Simply saying "get 'er done" isn't going to help you. If you want to complete anything that is on target and on time, you need to be clear about what you want to see and when you want to see it. If you don't do that, you're placing yourself and possibly your team in a pretty deep hole.

Dr. Stephen Covey told us to "Begin with the end in mind. Start with a clear understanding of your destination. Know where you are going so that you better understand where you are now, and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction." While it's true that the process of setting goals can vary depending on the person, it's also been proven that putting the goal in writing is generally the best way to begin because it helps you visually construct (and see on paper) what you need to achieve.

What's the big deal?

Once you've established a clear goal, one of the most important things you can do as a leader is to get people to rally around the reason for achieving it. A great example of this is the following excerpt from President John F. Kennedy's address to Congress on May 25, 1961 about landing a man on the Moon. Remember, at that point in history, the total time spent in space by an American was barely 15 minutes.

While our goals may not be as history making as President Kennedy's, the importance of clearly stating to others why the goal is important should *never* be overlooked or discounted. Instilling a desire to win, to be better today than you were yesterday, and of course how accomplishing the goal will position you, the team and the organization for even greater success in the future gives everyone a stake in the game and a reason to be "all in."

We can't do that...can we?

Having the confidence to achieve your goals often comes from having a plan of action that makes sense to you and your followers—the stalwart group of people you may need to help you get the job done! A plan brings meaning and clarity to a goal, and can make even the most daunting of goals seem achievable.

A plan simply helps to put the goal into manageable pieces so that you or others can complete them—either in stages, or all at once by assigning the pieces to different people and making them accountable. The old adage, "How do you eat an elephant?" comes to mind, but it's more than that. You don't want people to question why you're trying to eat the elephant. Rather, you want to bring life and energy to your goals so that you and others can move confidently toward them. Nothing overly complicated, just a roadmap that anyone can follow. Plan to win. Don't plan to lose.

Are we there yet?

Accomplishing any goal requires maintaining focus, momentum, a sense of urgency, and using your time wisely. In "sports" language, it would mean helping others keep their eye on the ball (oversight and coaching), moving the ball down the field (progress), watching the clock (timeframes) and keeping score (results).

It should come as no surprise that doing this will take some effort on your part. You'll likely need to have weekly or daily meetings with team members, frequent one-on-one updates through email or in-person; and possibly include other tactics that have proven to work for you (i.e., scoreboards, wall charts, etc.). Always remember, though, the longer you delay in using this or any type of communication, the greater the risk that something might not get done.

In the end, when the work is done, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that in spite of all the obstacles you encountered along the way, your plan to succeed paid off; and what's more, you have a blueprint for similar success in the future. While there will always be "one thing or another" to accomplish, you'll have a process to help you maintain your focus and rally your team to help you do it.



"...if we are to win the battle that is now going on around the world between freedom and tyranny...it is time to take longer strides—time for this nation to take a clearly leading role in space achievement, which in many ways may hold the key to our future on Earth. ...we have never made the national decisions or marshaled the national resources required for such leadership. We have never specified long-range goals on an urgent time schedule...Space is open to us now; and our eagerness to share its meaning is not governed by the efforts of others. We go into space because whatever mankind must undertake, free men must fully share..."

I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth. No single space project...will be more exciting, or more impressive to mankind, or more important...and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish..."



Allan Forbis is the Director of the Center for Management and Professional Development (Center). The Center's team of consultants provide training solutions that help employers see what happens when they work together to provide direction, awareness and focus for employees. They succeed by providing strategies for managing the performance of the people that make success a reality.

Your past peak moments hold clues to your future great work

Taken from "Do More Great Work" by Michael Bungay Stanier
Used by permission



Michael Bungay Stanier is the founder and senior partner of **Box of Crayons**, a company that helps organizations make the leap from good work to great work. His new book **The Coaching Habit** is filled with high-impact managing tips and tactics.

Have you even seen those advertisements for mutual funds that promise wonderful results, and then say in small print that "past performance is no indicator of future results?" We'll that's not true when it comes to doing great work. Past performance—or more specifically, past moments of engagement and meaning—is actually a very good indicator of future results. Clues to what great work is for you are often found in the peak moments of your past.

WHAT IS A PEAK MOMENT?

A peak moment is a time when you could see and feel yourself doing something more than you usually do—when you stepped beyond where you normally stay and did something new, tried something different, and made an impact. It's a time when you felt fulfilled in your job, when you felt most like yourself.

It can be the quiet certainty that your contribution to the meeting was the one thing that tipped the balance on a major issue, or the hour when you rose to a challenge to sort out a crisis that was causing disruption in your workplace. It can be about a big, public project or a small, private triumph.

Whatever the context, it is a moment of certainty, a moment of insight when you say to yourself—*Wow, I'm doing this. I'm doing it well and I'm thrilled to be doing it.* When you say, *Yes, this is something to remember. This is me at my most essential, most authentic, and best.*

THE POWER OF THE PEAK MOMENT

One of the benefits of stopping to acknowledge your peak moments is that they can help you clarify your personal definition of success. Rather than asking yourself, *Did I do it well? Did I get the recognition I deserve? You ask, Did this have meaning for me? Did this stretch me, teach me, make me happy?*

We often limit what we can do by our education, training or work history. Peak moments get us beyond that. They tap the power of subjective experience rather than objective accomplishments. So when you think about your peak moments (as I hope you will do), remember to recall how you felt, not what you outwardly accomplished (although the two can go hand in hand).

IDENTIFYING YOUR PEAK MOMENTS

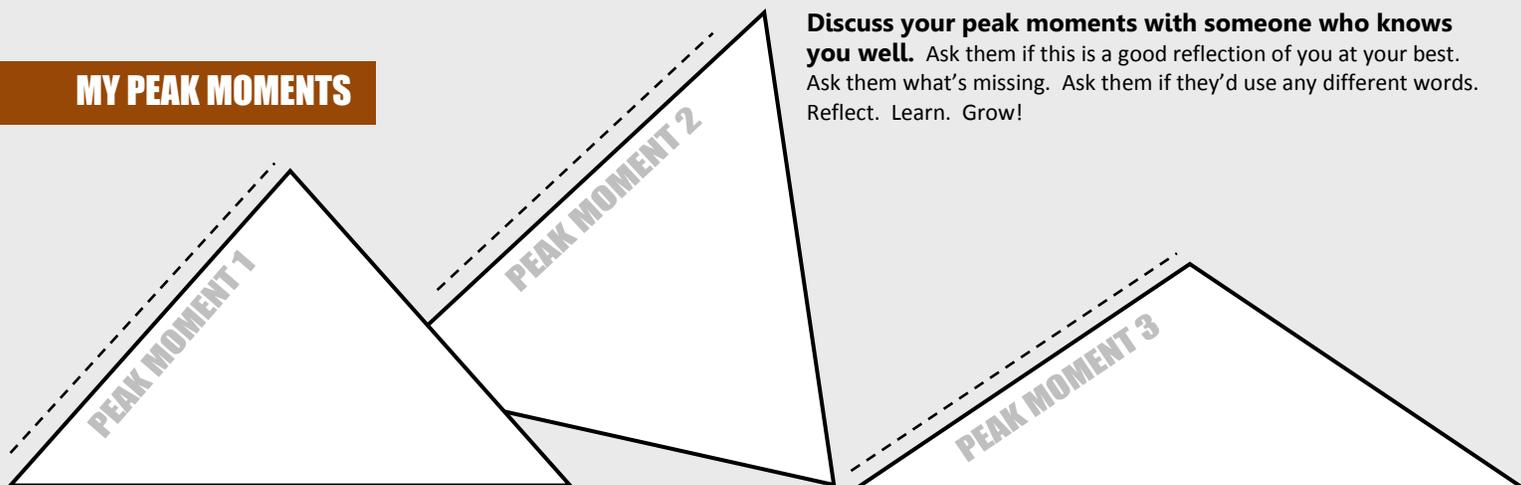
1. **Think back and remember three peak moments over the course of your working life.** For some people, this will be easy. For most of us though, it won't be so immediate. You might go blank, or feel overwhelmed. Don't panic. Take your time, and with your mind's eye, scan your memory and zero in on the times you were doing meaningful work. It's likely that you knew at the time that this was something significant. It's something that has stayed in your memory, something you're proud of, and brings a smile to your face.
2. **Give each peak moment a title, and write down the title on the line next to each triangle below.**
3. **Then write a short description of what happened in each triangle.** You might consider questions such as:
*How were you at your best?
What was your role?
What did you do? What behaviors did you exhibit?
What skills did you use?
How did you overcome difficulties?
What was the key moment that made the difference?
Who else was involved, if anyone?
What are you particularly proud of?*
4. **Now look at each of your peak-moment stories.** Do you see any emerging themes, any similarities? Is there a particular behavior that recurs? Is there a role you seem to favor? These are all clues about who you are, and how you accomplish the great work you are capable of doing.

GAINING INSIGHTS

As you remember those peak moments, what did they feel like for you? Remembering what it feels like to do great work can be a powerful "internal compass" to help you know whether you are on track to do more great work in the future. Retrace the steps you took that got you there. *How did it all begin? What decisions did you make? How did you get into the place where the opportunity to do the work presented itself?*

Discuss your peak moments with someone who knows you well. Ask them if this is a good reflection of you at your best. Ask them what's missing. Ask them if they'd use any different words. Reflect. Learn. Grow!

MY PEAK MOMENTS





Just a thought...

Another Tip from Michael Bungay Stanier in "Do More Great Work"

How to say no when you can't say no

One of the fundamental tasks on the path to getting your work done (especially your own work) is figuring out what to say yes to, and sometimes, even more challenging—what to say no to. If you say yes to everything, you're just adding more to your plate, which is likely already full.

Let's face it, some of us can't even say no to telemarketers. So how do you say no to people you work with and care about? The answer is not to focus on saying no, but rather on saying yes — *more slowly*.

What gets us in trouble is that yes is our fast, default answer to any requests that are made of us. Sometimes that's the right thing to say; and sometimes you're being asked just because you're the first person they thought of, or because the request hasn't been thought through. Often, it's worth getting to yes a little more slowly. Here's how:

1. Say, "Thank you for asking me. Before I say yes, just let me make sure I understand what you're asking for."
2. Then ask some good questions. There are three basic types:

Why Me?

- May I ask why you're asking me?
- Have you asked anyone else?
- Have you considered asking X? He's got some experience with this.

Specifics?

- When you say "urgent," what does that mean? When's the latest it has to be done?
- How much time will this take?
- If I could only do part of this, what part would you like me to do?
- What does "finished" look like for this?

What's the Big Picture?

- Who else is involved in this (i.e., how high up does the project/task go)?
- How does this fit with our/my current key priorities?
- It's possible something else may have to give for me to help you. What should I not do so I can do this?

If you use this approach, any of four things might happen.

1. The person will answer all your questions, and you'll be happy to say yes (this doesn't happen very often).
2. The person will say, "Good questions! Let me get back to you when I've got some answers." And they may not come back. Because instead...
3. The person may just ask someone who says yes faster.
4. Sometimes you'll be asked to stop with the questions and just do it.

Tip: Don't start doing this with the toughest, most senior person you work with. Instead, practice this with someone you're fairly confident this approach will work on. Then, as you gain confidence, use these questions in more situations with a wider range of people. By doing this, you'll get a reputation for being a strategic thinker, which in turn will make you a more valuable organizational player.

"How we spend our day is, of course, how we spend our lives." — Annie Dillard



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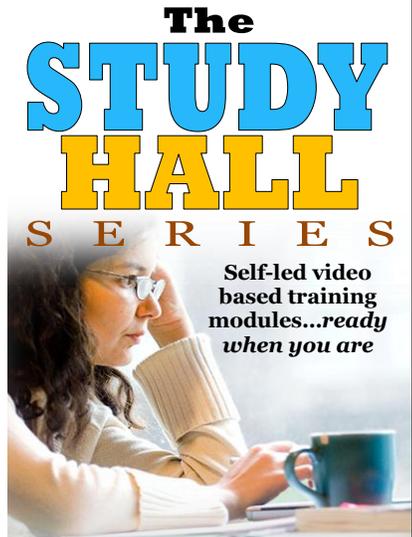
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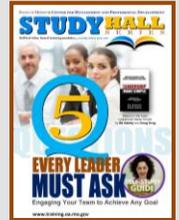
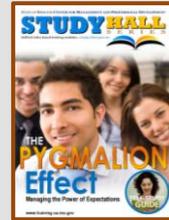
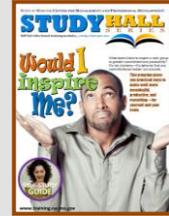


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BEST PRACTICES:

Common delegation mistakes and how to avoid them

Most managers and supervisors have heard about delegation, and they probably know that it is important. Still, when managers do decide to delegate, mistakes can be made that negatively impact the employee's ability to do a good job. Review the following common mistakes, and determine how you can avoid making those same mistakes yourself.

An attitude of "I can do it better myself." Particularly because most supervisors started out by doing the job, there is often the feeling that they are still the best person to "do the job." Even if the supervisor could do a better job, the choice is not between the quality of his or work and the quality of the employee's. The choice is between the benefits of the employee learning to perform that task and the supervisor spending time on planning, coaching, supervising and developing an employee. Believe in your employee's abilities. They might just surprise you!

Failure to let employees know the "big picture." Some supervisors delegate tasks without providing all the necessary information to do the task successfully. They leave out the big picture. They omit information about future goals, plans and important organizational decisions. Employees must be fully informed to make the best possible decisions for the organization.

Failure to require, receive, or use progress reports. When you don't have a method to check on the employee's progress, two things happen. First, you communicate to the employee that the delegated task is not that important. Second, you may set yourself and the employee up for failure. Agree with the employee on specific times to check progress from start to finish. Then, stick to them!

Unwillingness to let employees supply their own ideas. When you don't ask employees for their ideas and opinions, you are sending the message that you don't really value the employee. You are also limiting your opportunity to gain new information. Remember, if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got. Encourage employees to be creative and share their ideas about ways to complete the task.

**"If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together."**
– African Proverb.

Tendency to "dump projects." Dumping projects usually occurs because the supervisor has not taken the time to properly plan the delegation. There are two negative outcomes: (1) the chance for the project to be done incorrectly increases, and (2) the employee loses motivation because the supervisor did not take into consideration the employee's strengths or ability to get the job done. To ensure the delegation is successful, take time to plan the delegation, pick the right person, and discuss the task and its expected outcomes.

Failure to give the employee credit for shouldering responsibility. Some supervisors don't delegate because they like to take credit for work that occurs in their work group or section. And when an employee takes responsibility, the praise or recognition may not be passed on to the supervisor. Acknowledging an employee's success may be viewed as threatening to the supervisor. With feelings of insecurity, this same supervisor may fail to back-up an employee when the employee does make decisions. Give credit where credit is due. You will gain not only an enthusiastic employee, but also a loyal one!

Inattention to project completion. Not bothering to recognize when a project has been completed will practically guarantee that the next project delegated will be completed late, if at all. This then reinforces the supervisor's negative feelings about delegating in the first place. Always take a moment to acknowledge completion of a task, provide praise for a job well done, or to coach for improvement the next time if needed.

Lack of respect for the employee's ambitions. Supervisors who do not delegate that often may not have a large interest in developing their employees. This leads the employee to feel that the supervisor does not care about him or her. When we feel that the boss does not care about us, we lose our motivation, and our respect for the supervisor. Get to know your employees. Find out their strengths, weaknesses and ambitions. And when possible, support those ambitions. Help them grow.



Seconds Count: Excerpts from

myquickcoach

7 Steps of Persuasion

Transcript of a MyQuickCoach video lesson from Dr. Rick Kirschner

I've been studying the persuasive power of words and behavior for a lot of years now and recently I was asked in a radio interview if there was a method I could spell out for the audience to help a person to persuade just about anyone to do just about anything. Well, up to a point I'd say yeah, there is and that point is that if you're trying to persuade someone to do something that's bad for them, you may never get another chance to get them to do anything else. But assuming your intentions are good for both you and your *persuadee*, then yes, there are seven steps you can take to be persuasive. Remember, though, that persuasion is a deliberate attempt to influence a person's attitude and behavior. So while there are no guarantees you'll succeed, these seven steps will help you stack the deck in your favor.

The first five steps involve you answering some essential questions for yourself. Let's go through these one at a time.

STEP 1: "What do you want?" Confidence comes from preparation. And most people only know what they don't want. That's why it's so much easier for people to complain than to do anything interesting. So before you begin using persuasive communication, you need to dial in your persuasion proposition. What is it you want to persuade someone to do, to think, to feel, to believe? And you have to be specific about this with yourself because vague generalizations don't inform you enough to be useful. It's like that old Steven Wright joke...I went to a general store and they wouldn't sell me anything specifically! Asking yourself what you want is all about beginning your persuasive efforts with the end clearly in mind.

Now anytime you're in a situation that calls for you to speak and you don't know what you want as a result of speaking, my advice is back away. Buy some time, keep your powder dry and wait until you know exactly what you want. Because trying to persuade anyone without an outcome in mind is like driving a car without a destination. You waste a lot of time and energy and when you stop, you have nothing to show for it but wear and tear. The first and most important step is to begin with the end in mind. What do you want to have happen?

STEP 2: "Why do you care?"

Once you've identified your desired outcome, it's important to know your motivation for pursuing it. What you stand to gain if you get what you want and what you stand to lose if you don't. Engaging your own motivation may be just what's needed to take you across the finish line when the going gets tough, to give you the persistence you need to advance your cause and further your progress towards your outcome, even in the face of opposition.

When you know why something matters to you, it helps you to stay focused. It helps you to pay attention to incoming information to get feedback and to be in a learning mode instead of a reactive mode. Lining up your motivation adds passion to your persuasion, and emotional power to your words. Instead of offering some bland and boring blah, blah, blah exercise and intellectual occupation and obfuscation, you're talking about something you really care about. So the question again is, why do you care?

This article concludes on the next page.

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STEP 3: “Why would they care?”

It's important to understand that people are more often driven by self interest than by your interest. Even when it's your show on the radio, they've tuned their dial to WIIFM, or What's In It For Me? That means that a person you're seeking to persuade is narrow casting onto that frequency.

You can increase your chance of success by finding out everything you can about what motivates people, what their opinions are in the matter at hand, and what values they use to make decisions. Now I teach a model of motivation that allows people to be very precise about this and a model of communication style that allows you to pick up on what somebody needs very quickly so you can respond in kind. These things are important in shaping your perception of the perception of others. Because when you finally do talk, you need to be able to tell them how giving you what you want will help them get what they want.

STEP 4: “Where and when will I persuade them?” Identify the context in which they will be most receptive. You see, there's a time and a place for everything, but it's never all the time in every place. The fact is, some people are more receptive in the morning, others in the afternoon. Some people are more receptive in the hallway, others when they're seated in their office. Some people are more receptive going into a meeting, others coming out of one. Some are more receptive before they eat, some after they've eaten. This is all observable, but you have to pay attention for it. And your own experiences with people give you clues about this.

For example, if I asked my boss for a resource in the hall and it never happened, I'd call that clue. If I went into his office and asked and nothing happened, I'd call that a clue. The rule is that if what you're doing isn't working, anything else is more likely to be effective than something that's proven not to work – and that includes trying a different time or in a different place. So if you've tried and failed a certain way at a certain time or in a certain place, wisdom dictates the next time you try, change it up based on what you've learned from your experience.

STEP 5: Organize how you'll say what you have to say.

Once you've identified what you want, why you want it, what they want and how giving you what you want helps them get what they want, organize how you'll say what you have to say. Remember that people make decisions emotionally – and then justify those decisions after the fact with facts, reason and logic. You want to design what you have to say so it hits those powerful emotional buttons that move people to be persuaded. You also want to make it easy for people to go along with you by making what you have to say more palatable and easier to digest. Keep it simple. Make your point obvious and tell people what you want them to do and you actually increase the chance of them understanding and agreeing to your proposition.

STEP 6: Rehearse until you're completely comfortable.

I'm going to say this again, confidence comes from preparation. Why walk in cold when you can walk in hot? Why take a shot before lining up the shot? The problem with just saying what you have to say is that the first pass is just saying it for you. By mentally rehearsing, you grow comfortable with what you're going to say. And the more comfortable and confident you are with what you have to say, the more comfortable and confident you're going to be when others hear what you have to say.

STEP 7: Stand and deliver ...

...even though you can do it while sitting down!

In my training programs on persuasion, I actually ask people to stand up to talk to before I let them deliver their persuasive proposition. It's a metaphor about mindset. It's about having the courage of your convictions, about getting off your seat and away from your safety cushion. It's about putting it all on the line and going all in, as opposed to hedging your bets, playing it safe, keeping your head down and your mouth shut. If you're not confident in what you have to say, you might as well forget about it. When you want to deliver a powerful message, then do it. Stand up. Stand strong. Deliver it.

And there you have it, five questions to answer for yourself and two steps to take after that in order to deliver a persuasive message.



Planning for tomorrow

To plan your coming day, find a quiet time to review the day you just completed, and:

Reflect. Look back at your tasks and appointments you had scheduled for the day. Is everything done? If not, then reschedule the unfinished items at some other time on your calendar – or delete them if they are no longer important. The idea is to be accountable to yourself each day, making sure you were focused on what was most important, but also taking proper care of what you may have moved, not been able to do, or rescheduled in the process.

You'll also want to **capture the gold.** Throughout the day, there were probably some important bits of information, insights or new ideas that came along the way. If you haven't already done so, make sure those bits of information end up in the right place for you to use later.

Identify the Few Must-dos. Ask yourself, “What are the few must-dos that I want to achieve tomorrow? A must-do is something so important that you probably wouldn't end your day without getting it done, or at least devoting some time to it. Usually you're just recommitting yourself to your top priorities, but you might have to contend with some unforeseen emergencies, last-minute deadlines or pressing problems that could have serious consequences if not handled immediately.

Organize the Rest. Organize everything else around your must-dos.

Whether you do this at the end of the day, the beginning of the next day, or a mix of both, the point is to take the time to do it so that you don't lose sight of your most important priorities.

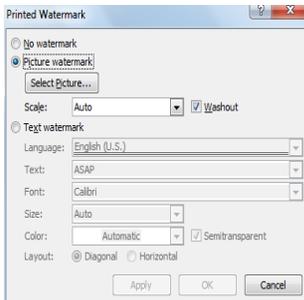
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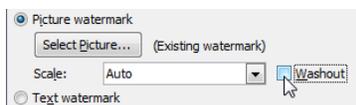
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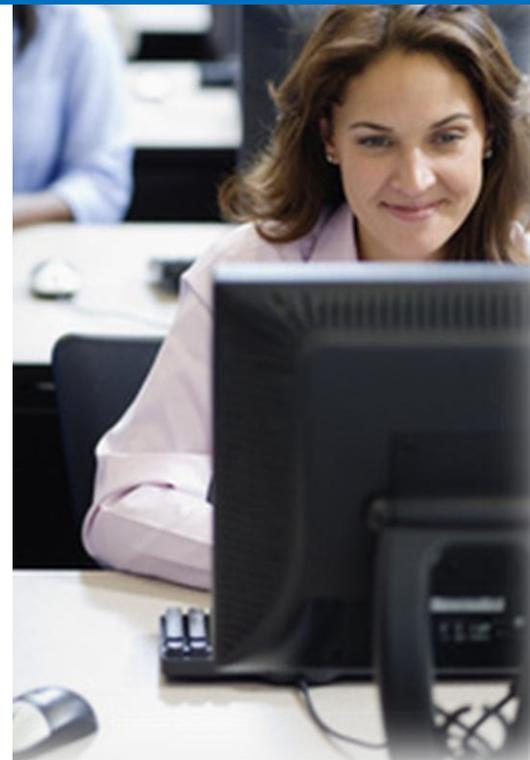
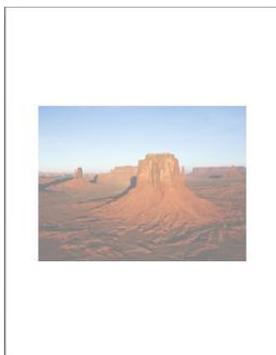
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Dr. Alan Zimmerman, author, national speaker and President of Zimmerman Communi-Care Network has spoken to more than a million people. The Center for Management and Professional Development is proud to offer Solutions readers the opportunity to benefit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



DR. ZIMMERMAN'S Comment

“No matter what great things you accomplish, somebody helps you.”

Wilma Rudolph, Olympic gold medalist

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Leadership, whether it comes from the top or from the trenches, makes a world of difference on every project.

That's why I devote my life to speaking and training in organizations. I want to provide strong leadership for the obstacles you're facing. Today, if you're wondering what YOU can do to provide stronger leadership in your organization, here are three things I recommend.

Commit yourself to your enterprise and its objectives.

One of America's greatest businessmen and philanthropists, John D. Rockefeller, knew that. He would often tell prospective leaders, “The road to happiness lies in two simple principles: find what it is that interests you and that you can do well, and when you find it put your whole soul into it – every bit of energy and ambition and natural ability you have.”

So you should ask yourself, “How committed are you to your organization ... your coworkers ... and your customers? Are you 100% committed? Or do you find yourself thinking, ‘Another day, another dollar?’ Or ‘I've just got 5 more years, 3 months, and 2 days and I'm out of this place?’”

In plain English, if you're going to be an effective leader anytime, but especially tough times, you've got to have ... and you've got to show ... **PASSION** and **ENTHUSIASM**.

To put it another way, if you're not passionate about what you're doing in your organization, it's a sure bet your employees and customers aren't excited either. The same goes for **ENTHUSIASM**. After all, enthusiasm spreads from the top down more often than the other way around. That's why I ask my audience members, “If attitudes are contagious, are yours worth catching?”

So on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your enthusiasm? And how alive, energetic, and effective would your organization be if everyone in the organization had the same enthusiasm score as you gave yourself?

A leader's enthusiasm is critical. As philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson so clearly noted, “Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it. Stamp it with your own personality. Be active, be energetic, be enthusiastic and faithful, and you will accomplish your objective. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”

Let your staff know THEY are the most important assets in your company.

If your organization has achieved any type of success, it likely wasn't due to any one person. It got that way through the efforts of lots of people.

Jill Blashack-Strahan, the President of Tastefully Simple, constantly lets her staff know that they are the most important asset in the company. In her book, *Simply Shine* she said in part, “...I'm not the one representing Tastefully Simple at every home taste-testing party held by our consultants across the nation. I'm not the one representing Tastefully Simple when they're hiring or dealing with sensitive issues, handling intense special projects or impromptu, immediate marketing and public relations needs...”

So true. And yet I wonder how many leaders actually remember this point.

As Jill goes on to say, “Teamwork is the bedrock of great things. I didn't build this company. An amazing team of dedicated, passionate and loyal people did.”

That's why I like author John Maxwell's statement: “If I want to do something good, I can do it on my own. If I want to do something GREAT, I'm going to have to develop a team.”

Let your people know that what they DO matters.

You can't expect people to give their best and be their best if they don't see any value in what they do. They've got to know that their job serves some purpose. It does **MATTER**.

When people forget that their jobs matter, when leaders forget to tell their people that their jobs matter, then people get some very negative feelings about their jobs. As Drew Carey so wryly observed, “Oh, you hate your job? Why didn't you say so? There's a support group for that. It's called *EVERYBODY*, and they meet at the bar.”

Yes, people get negative feelings about their jobs when they forget the importance of their jobs. And they also get negative feelings about their customers.

As an insurance executive once told me, “We are an insurance agency, and when you do the same things day in and day out you become so accustomed to your work that you begin to think everyone should know what you know. And that can be disastrous.”

As she explained to me, “We had a truck driver in one day asking to have his bill explained to him. After a staff member helped him she came back to my office and said, ‘What an idiot! He can't even read a bill.’”

“I couldn't believe what she had just said. So I asked if she could do me a favor and run outside, jump in his semi, back it up, and unload the gravel. She just looked at me and said, ‘what?’”

“I asked her if she could follow my request. She replied, ‘I don't know how to drive a semi or unload gravel.’ I looked at her and said, ‘Exactly! And our client can't read his bill either. That is exactly why you have a job and why your job is so important.’”

ACTION:

List **3 things** you are doing – or could do – to let coworkers know that their job matters. Then do those things this week.



COURAGE

From Margie Warrell



Is unconscious bias derailing your decisions?

A few months back a friend shared how she was on the fence about hiring a man for a role as a financial advisor because he was 60 and seemed 'a bit old' despite being imminently qualified. I encouraged her not to let his age deter her from taking him on if he was the best candidate on every other measure. She did and he's become an invaluable addition to her team.

Our tendency to stereotype based on an external attribute – from age to gender to religion – is just one of a host of 'cognitive biases' wired into our psychological DNA. If you're a woman then you've almost certainly been at the other end of someone else's unconscious (or conscious!) bias, including your own! Yes, we women actually have an unconscious bias against our own gender!

Our unconscious biases serve a purpose but if we aren't careful our unconscious biases can drive us to make snap decisions and judgments that move us further away from what we most want rather than toward it. Here's a few more.

Confirmation Bias. We each have a tendency to actively seek out information that supports our values, choices and opinions and to discount or ignore information that contradicts them. It's why we like to hang out with people who see things the way we do, and steer away from those who don't. But it can keep us from exploring alternative, and possibly even more useful, perspectives and options. Just imagine the possibilities that would open up if our politicians spent more time understanding alternate views rather than espousing their own!

Risk Aversion Bias. Likewise, when considering making a change, we're innately biased toward focusing more on what we could lose than what we could gain; on what could go wrong than on what might go right! As Nobel Laureate Dr Daniel Kahnemam observed in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, "Losses loom larger than gains." This tendency drives risk aversion and explains why people opt to languish in mediocre jobs and lousy relationships for years rather than take a chance on something better. It's also why one of the greatest regrets of the dying is that they wished they'd taken more risks and been braver.

Sunk Cost Bias. Another common bias is our tendency to give too much weight to what we've already invested in a course of action when we are deciding whether to persist with it. Coined the 'sunk cost' bias, it explains why otherwise smart people sometimes 'throw good money after bad' and why you've likely had something you hardly wear taking up room in your closet far too long because you paid a lot for it. There's no magic cure for unconscious bias but there are things you can do to counter its potential negative impact. Here's my top five!

1. Slow down your decision-making. Unconscious bias drives us to make snap decision without giving the logic much thought. When you slow down your decision-making you create space to think more carefully and less reactively. For instance, if someone has let you down, instead of rushing to judgment and saying something you may regret, take time to find out what's going on.

2. Challenge your reasoning. Write down all the possible reasons why you shouldn't stick with your current decision. If you're looking to make a change, give more consideration to what you could lose if you don't take the risk! Likewise, if you're wrestling with self-doubt about your ability to take on a challenge, think of other times you've risen to a challenge with great success. This is particularly relevant for women who have a much stronger bias toward underestimating themselves than the men we share our lives with!

3. Elevate your perspective. Often we get so lost in the minutia of a situation that we lose perspective. Taking just a minute to sit still, close your eyes and imagine yourself zooming up to 500 feet and looking down on your situation. It will help you view it more objectively and identify where your biases are clouding how well you're responding to the situation you're facing.

4. Watch for stereotyping. Where are you making judgments about people without any solid grounding? Again, start looking for exceptions to your 'rule.' Is somebody's age, gender, race, religion or sexuality impacting how you're dealing with them? Ironically, our bias toward stereotyping doesn't only impact how we assess and engage with others. A recent study cited in *Harvard Business Review* revealed how women can hold a gender bias against themselves. Researchers asked women to judge the creativity of various architectural designs. When women were told men had produced them they judged them as being more creative than when they thought women did them.

5. Recruit monitors. Ask people you trust to challenge what you are doing (or not doing!) and your reasons for doing it. My husband is continually calling me out when I underestimate myself or am being too quick to judge others. So too are my kids who've become 'stereotyping' police in our family! I don't always enjoy it, but having them shine a spotlight on my labeling and logic is always helpful!

The truth is that your brain is not wired to keep you happy. It's wired to keep you safe. So if you want to create richer relationships, advance your career or change aspects of your life that simply aren't working for you, you'll need to challenge your 'default' way of perceiving and engaging in the world and embrace the probability that sometimes your initial reaction isn't the best one. So promise me this – that you'll be extra vigilant about not letting the unconscious biases wired into your psychological DNA derail your decisions or keep you playing too safe!