

SUMMER 2015

Solutions

PRACTICAL PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES TO
DEVELOP THE BEST IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS

THIS ISSUE

REMAINING POSITIVE IN THE MIDST OF TURMOIL

And Other Strategies
To Keep You
At the Top
Of Your Game!

PLUS

MS Office Tips

DR. ALAN ZIMMERMAN'S

Comment

AND

COURAGE

From MARGIE WARRELL

Staying

UP

When You're the
LEADER

By Allan Forbis
Director, Center for Management and Professional Development

One of the most important, yet difficult jobs of any leader is being a cheerleader for your team when you're having a tough time getting fired-up yourself. Let's face it, how many times have you gotten out of bed in the morning only to find yourself looking in the mirror wondering – *"Where will I find the enthusiasm to walk through the office door today?"*

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not a doom and gloom kind of guy – really – but sometimes the old spark just isn't there. In your heart you know you're where you need to be, you still value the job and the people, but you're just not firing on all cylinders.

When I'm facing days like these, the thing I try to remember is that no two days are alike. Nothing and no one stays the same from day to day, or even moment to moment, and each new day can bring new opportunities and a fresh perspective – *if you let it*. It's like the quote from American journalist and author George Horace Lorimer:

"You've got to get up every morning with determination if you're going to go to bed with satisfaction."

When you need an extra push to be the leader your team needs, read on for some ways you might be able to meet the day with your own sense of determination.

This article continues on the next page.

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Staying UP when you're the leader

Continued from Page 1

Connect with your team.

This may sound like a “no brainer,” but because our job is to be the leader, it can be easy to forget that our team is there to help us, just as much as we are there to help them. Employees can be a continuous source of energy, excitement and amazement in helping you to recapture these same things for yourself.

Spend a few minutes talking to your employees before you settle in for the day and get stymied by calls, meetings, and paperwork. Ask them questions about their life in general, what their kids are up to, what's happening with one of their work projects, or something else to help you engage with others and take the focus off you for a while. Face-to-face communication is a rewarding (and human) way to start the day.

Work on a bright idea.

One of the things I've learned about myself is that occasionally even I come up with an idea that might have some value for my team – but I tuck it away because the daily routine is just too overwhelming. So I put off, and neglect working on something that might actually put some spark in my day.

If this is true for you, do yourself a favor – take your idea out of the box and get your creative energy flowing by talking the idea over with someone on your team, or a peer (depending upon what the idea is). You may get a new perspective, and discover something you haven't considered. Plus, when you ask someone else what they think (about anything), you're letting them know that you want and value their ideas and opinions. It makes them feel good – and it just might give you (and your idea) a boost too.

Don't be afraid to keep learning.

When we're in a slump, or feel like we're Bill Murray in the movie *Groundhog Day* – doing the same things the same way over and over again – the simple act of learning and discovery can engage and excite us. The desire to learn is also what separates great leaders from good ones. The great ones are always learning and encouraging others to do the same.

So don't throttle back when you're feeling low. Instead, step on the gas. Take a class, network and learn with others, expand your horizons, ask questions, be insatiably curious, and focus on what you can still achieve. It puts pep in your step and reminds us that we are capable of doing amazing things!

Embrace change.

To give yourself a jump start and a renewed sense of purpose, putting your energy into implementing an important change initiative can be just what the doctor ordered. It can be a little scary, and at times uncertain, but often rewarding. So if fear of change (either in general or specific terms) is one of the reasons you're stuck in neutral, accept it – and better still embrace it.

Recognize that change doesn't have to be a threat. Adapt to it, get in front of it – and yes, even lead it!

Most of all, understand one of the oldest maxims of leadership: The fastest way to lose credibility is to lose touch with what's happening – and show no interest in catching up.

Give everyone some breathing room.

It's important to lead, but at some point if you're leading correctly, and have the right people on board, you need to get out of the way and let them do their job.

If not, you're just “micromanaging,” and it can figuratively take all the air out of the room and weigh you down emotionally and physically.

If you're micromanaging the bulk of your workday, try to let go of the reigns – at least a little bit at first – to test the water with your team, and your own comfort level. Let employees take ownership of their work. Don't stand over them. Turn them loose (again, little by little until you're comfortable) to explore, test their own abilities, and learn from their mistakes and the challenges they face.

For your part, continue to ask them questions and provide support, as well as resources to keep your team moving in the right direction.

By giving employees a little space to solve issues themselves, you can prepare them to handle more complex projects; and you can breathe a little easier when you walk into the office each day knowing that the weight of the world isn't all on your shoulders.

Do your best.

Every morning when you're brushing your teeth, instead of thinking about what's wrong with your employees, the office, or the world in general, ask yourself this question: “*What can I do today to become better and make my people better?*” When you step in the office, as you say “*Good morning,*” look at the faces of the people you lead. Think about their potential and their abilities. Then think about the possibilities the day can bring for them – and for you.

And while you're at it, remember that just like you, they may fall short of the goal now and then, but with time, patience, and yes, some error, each of you can support each other and become a team that you can be proud of.

Remember that anything is possible.

And finally, while it may sound like an old cliché, if you really work at being a *glass-half-full* kind of person, it's likely that your energy and your attitude will improve, and possibly rub off on your employees too, making your job as the leader (and your life) a little better. And that's something to get excited about!

Like everything else, practice makes perfect. That's why the Center for Management and Professional Development offers so many programs designed to help you lead with purpose.

I hope you will accept my invitation to take a look at our programs, and see how they can help you.

Learn more at www.training.oa.mo.gov



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.

Fruitful conflict is conflict of ideas

“I’ve called you all together because I was deeply disappointed in what I heard yesterday afternoon. It was appalling—grown people arguing like a bunch of kids! I started to interrupt, but decided to wait and give you all a chance to cool down. Anyway, I don’t want to see anything like that ever again.”

If you’re the manager, was saying this a mistake?

Team members must be able to work together effectively. And whether we like it or not, it also means recognizing conflict within the team when it occurs, confronting it, and working through it to resolve it. In reality, though, this can’t happen if team members aren’t free to express their opinions and defend them—even if this creates heated discussion.

Most employees (and people in general) are taught not to create interpersonal conflict, because it interferes with another person’s efforts at achieving a goal or ability to function successfully at work. Few people want that, and those who do are usually labeled “troublemakers.”

However, if you’re the team leader, trying to keep conflict about work processes or functions from occurring may not give you the results you really need.

Why – because if the team gets the idea that it has to downplay or ignore conflict related to these areas, it can fall into **“group think”** – a phenomenon that occurs when a team gives in to a consensus of opinion without critical reasoning or any evaluation of potential consequences or alternatives. In other words, no one questions anything, and everyone simply “goes with the flow.” If you count on – and need – team members to express different ideas and opinions to continually ensure work processes and services are on target, the absence of these varying viewpoints could mean trouble.

Instead of giving the type of speech at the top of this article, consider what you really need your team to accomplish by working together – and then consider the following alternatives:

Conflict in and of itself isn’t bad.

Conflict becomes harmful when it becomes personal – but it shouldn’t be personal. Instead, **fruitful conflict is conflict of ideas**, without regard for whose ideas they are. Managers should make it clear to their team that conflict itself is never really the problem. The issue is learning and using the most effective ways to identify and express what the conflict is so that it can be resolved.

Teams need basic training in how to resolve conflict.

There are definite principles for identifying and resolving conflict. One such rule is “Keep personalities out of disagreements.” The good news is that you don’t need to reinvent the wheel here; training on how to resolve conflict is always available. Teams should have the opportunity to get this training instead of having to muddle through on their own. And if possible, it wouldn’t hurt for all the members of the team to take the training at the same time. This gives team members a chance to practice together in a “safe” training environment what they’ll need to do back on the job.

Teams need the support of the manager. For a team to survive and thrive in the midst of conflict, it needs a supportive manager who is willing to take the time to understand what the team needs to do to perform effectively, and to see that the team gets it.

You might volunteer to meet with the team to discuss or provide good listening techniques – or provide training to help the team learn to handle conflict. Whatever you do, what matters is that you’re taking specific action to be supportive.

It’s rewarding to operate as a closely knit, self-managing team, but it’s stressful to learn how to become one. When you clearly support the team and its learning process, you reduce the stress, both for the team and for yourself.

As a manager, you need to steer the team between two extremes. At one extreme is the total avoidance of conflict, and the temptation to “make nice” with everyone so that nothing disruptive ever happens. At the other extreme is continuing conflict, in which nothing ever seems to get settled. The closer a team moves to either extreme, the less effective it becomes.

How do you keep it away from the extremes? First, you need to be able to tolerate a degree of conflict yourself. That may sound easy to some, and just awful to others, especially if you’ve never had to do it. If you’ve worked in a typical organization, you probably handled conflict by – surprise – just getting along and not letting it happen.

For example, if you had a serious disagreement with something your boss proposed, did she invite you to express the disagreement openly, and then deal with the merits of what you said? Maybe one or two of your best managers did, but most likely they were in the minority. Instead, if you disagreed, you either swallowed the disagreement, or found some round-about way to express it. And the odds are good that most of the people on your team are probably doing the same thing with you now.

Where conflict is concerned, you need to learn a new set of tricks. Will you always continue to squash conflict, or (occasionally) invite and entertain it as a way of getting the best possible team performance? The answer does matter.



Just a thought...

Effective problem solving starts with a positive attitude!

We all know people who can blow a problem out of proportion – that’s why a good goal for any supervisor is to be a person who views problems with a positive attitude. And let’s face it – problems won’t get any easier with a negative attitude. With that being said, here are five characteristics of positive problem solving people.

Searchers. These people search for ways something can be done. They are “possibility thinkers.” They don’t use phrases like, “It can’t be done here,” “That won’t work,” or “They’ll never buy it.” Instead, possibility thinkers say things like, “Why not try it,” “Let’s give it a go,” or “Let’s try something new.” So ask yourself, who would you rather work for?

Visionaries. These people do not let problems defeat them. Negative people can become paralyzed by problems; and when problems come up, they see no other solution. Positive people see problems as minor roadblocks. Positive thinkers know that all they need is a better road map to get around the roadblock. If one path is blocked, they look for another.

Courageous. These are the risk takers. Positive people do not have a “prove it to me” attitude” before they are willing to try something new. Instead, they have the courage to try new things and the willingness to learn from mistakes.

Focused. These people tend to point out the positive possibilities change can bring while negative people usually focus on all the possible disadvantages of the change. Maybe you’ve experienced this scenario: you recommend a solution in a meeting with your team or peers, and the negative person is always the first to throw cold water on the suggestion.

Optimistic. These people know that a solution can be found – maybe not solely on their own – but by enlisting other positive people who can help them. When you don’t think you can find a solution to a problem, you are defeated before you even start. Positive thinkers believe that they are bigger than the problem, not the other way around. They remember that for most things, somehow, somewhere, there is a better way.

Do you limit yourself and others with a scarcity mindset?

Instead... **THINK ABUNDANTLY!** Replace the belief that “there’s never enough” with a new abundant mindset. For one week, assume there are plenty of rewards, credit, and recognition for everyone – with more to spare.

Today, tell someone how much you appreciate and acknowledge their contribution. If possible, do it in a public setting.

“Where there is corrosion of credit, there is erosion of spirit.”



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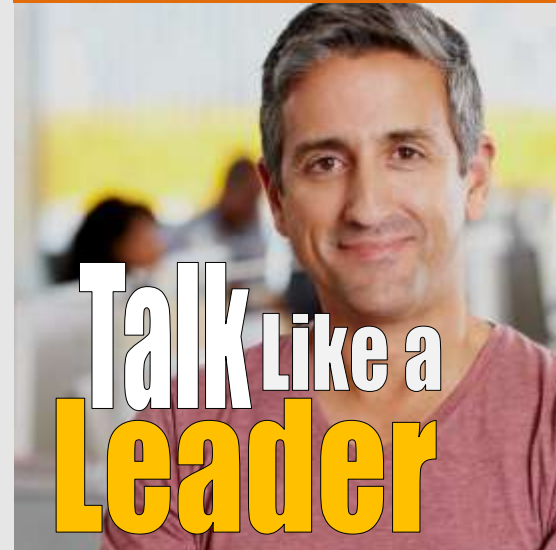
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LEADERS ARE LEARNERS!



WHAT EVERY EMPLOYEE NEEDS TO HEAR!

We all know that the best organizations – and the most enthusiastic leaders – excel at communicating with their employees. But when you are leading others, how do you know which messages are most important to communicate?

Ultimately, there are a multitude of specific messages to send, but the good news is that they can be organized into **four general categories:**

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Managing Your Emotions at Work

Ashley Brown, M.Ed.

Can you think of a time when you wish you would have exercised better control over your emotions?

Unfortunately, most of us can – and that includes yours truly.

Emotions are internal, instinctive signals that something isn't quite right. When not acknowledged and managed correctly, those emotions can make us outwardly off-center and appear that we are not in control. If your job requires that you work with others, and you want to be considered a leader among your peers, you know the importance of keeping emotions in check.

A 1997 study by Cynthia Fisher of Bond University found that some of the most common negative emotions we experience in the workplace are frustration, aggravation, worry, anxiety and embarrassment, not to mention disappointment and dislike, also high on the list.

Our responses to emotional triggers are both mental and physical, and are based on our *perception* of what that trigger means to us. It's the blend of our experiences, beliefs and personalities (i.e. glass half full/empty) that make up our perceptions.

Simply put, it really isn't the trigger causing the response; it's us. The good news is that we get

Carry your own weather

Do you allow a cloudy day to determine your mood and actions? Don't you feel better when the weather outside is great?

The same is often true about the world we live in. We feel better when we perceive that we're being treated better. We're being reactive to what the late Stephen Covey referred to as the *social weather* – or the social culture.

The amazing thing is that when you carry your own weather with you, you can choose to be consistent, regardless of how people treat you. It's all part of being *proactive*.

Proactive people pause to allow themselves the freedom to choose their response based on their own principles and desired results.

to choose how we respond or even if we respond, and all that takes is to ask ourselves "why" we are feeling the way we are feeling.

Recognizing triggers and acknowledging your internal reactions to them are the two most important steps you can take in learning to manage your emotions at work and elsewhere.

To learn more about recognizing triggers, and managing your emotions at work, please join me in Jefferson City on September 30 as I host [Managing Your Emotions at Work](#) presented by The Center for Management and Professional Development (see the ad on the right).

During this new program, we will explore the skills and strategies we need to manage our emotions, and stay effective at work.

If you have questions about the program or any other program you see on our site, please contact me at Ashley.Brown@oa.mo.gov or call 573-526-4554. I'll be happy to talk with you. See you in class!



Ashley Brown, BA, M.Ed. holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Communications, a graduate degree in Education (Curriculum and Instruction), both from William Woods University, along with certificates in Executive Leadership from The Mendoza College of Business – University of Notre Dame. Over the last 20 years, Ashley has created fundraising events, training programs, branding campaigns and grassroots initiatives for the private, public and non-profit sectors, in addition to serving as an adjunct in undergraduate Public Speaking at Columbia College. Today, Ashley serves [The Center for Management and Professional Development](#) as the Public Information and

Their freedom to choose expands as they wisely use the space between stimulus and response (i.e., what someone says or does and how you react to it).

Conversely, being *reactive* is the opposite of being *proactive*. This can happen when we see our self as a victim of our moods, or of someone who has it in for us.

The next time you feel reactive, pause, take a deep breath, and choose to respond based on what you deeply value rather than on your mood in the moment. In other words, **carry your own weather with you.**



LEADERS ARE LEARNERS!

Managing *your* Emotions At Work

Emotions guide our behavior, sometimes productively and sometimes unproductively.

And, if not expressed constructively, they can drain your energy and damage relationships.

That's why it's important to learn how to handle your emotions effectively.


You have a choice to change how you feel after the fact, but it is usually very difficult, or impossible to change your initial emotion – it simply occurs too quickly and automatically. The good news is that you can manage your second (and subsequent) thoughts and emotions about a situation when you're prepared and have the skills to do it.

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10 questions to ask yourself to stay positive when facing difficulties

By Christian Salafia
Originally published on [lifhack](#)

Everyone faces difficulties from time to time. It's a natural part of the cycle of life. Just like we can't really know hot without knowing cold, we can't really know the good times if we don't know bad times. Sometimes the difficulties we face in life come from situations out of our control, and other times our difficulties are a direct consequence of the decisions we make.

In life, we cannot change events or their outcome. We can, however, choose the emotion and meaning we attach to them. It's like the saying goes "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react." Our brains are designed to store information and then, at every single second of every day, when new information is received, our brains search for a reference memory to lay the foundation for our response.

Think about it – this is why if you have a bad experience on a roller coaster or eating a certain food, for the rest of your life you have an automatic impulse reaction whenever you come across them. We have to retrain ourselves to see the positive in even the most challenging times.

Am I still breathing? Sometimes the best we can do is breathe. During overwhelmingly difficult times, our stress levels rise, our breathing gets shallow, and our body's natural rhythm gets all out of whack. At these times it's essential to stop and ask yourself, "Am I breathing?" If you are then, hey, you live to fight another day. If you find yourself highly stressed out, take 10 minutes, find a quiet space, and just breathe deeply. Deep breathing has been shown to lower stress levels, and helps relax your automatic nervous system. One of the keys to staying positive is to be relaxed, and making sure you're breathing correctly is the best way to start.

What is my part in this? Notice this said your "part," not your "fault." There's a huge distinction in these two words. One is acknowledging and accepting your responsibility for your current situation – the other is self-defeating and simply assigns blame. Focusing on your part instead of just casting blame reduces the challenge you're facing to a more manageable size.

What is in my control? When life feels completely overwhelming, we often lose sight of those things we can change. Assess your situation honestly, and look for those things you *can* control. This will help you to feel more centered, more focused, and assist you in being able to tackle the challenge.

What is out of my control? Sometimes there are things we just cannot control. Whether it's other people, mother nature, or just plain bad timing, no matter how much we want to, we cannot control everything. Take time to look at your difficulty, identify the things that are out of your control, and then let them go. Too often we view the totality of our difficulties, and it is overwhelming. Being able to segregate what you can and cannot control makes the problem smaller, your stress levels lower, and often the path to the solution much clearer.

What is my emotional state? Making decisions when we're overcome with the emotions that are inherent in difficult times is about the worst thing we can do. We're more likely to make poor choices when we're in the wrong emotional state. Being able to

recognize that we're not "of our right mind" in the middle of our trials allows us to stop, breathe, and get ourselves in a better emotional state, allowing us to make better decisions. When we make better decisions, we're more likely to feel better about our circumstances because it gives us a sense of empowerment.

What is the most important thing I can do right now?

Sometimes the best thing we can do is nothing. Sometimes the best thing we can do is make a phone call. Focusing on and doing the best thing you can do right now when in the midst of difficult times helps center you and relax your nervous system. It also increases our confidence in ourselves that yes, we can weather this storm.

Progress is progress, no matter how small, and progress towards resolving a difficult situation will boost your self-esteem.

What can I learn from this? With every difficulty comes a lesson.

As crazy as it sounds, if we can see even the smallest lesson, the smallest purpose in the trial we're facing, it gives it positive value. It also gives us an outcome to move towards, whether it's improved health, more stability in finances, or fixing a broken relationship. Suffering without purpose leads to a feeling of helplessness.

Shifting your belief from "Why me?" to "What can I learn from this?" turns the challenge from just a random happenstance of bad luck into a problem to be solved.

Am I taking care of myself? There's an abundance of evidence that stress wreaks havoc on our physical health. There's also abundant evidence that our physical health directly impacts our mental health. When challenges arise, the most common things we do are eat less, sleep less, and get less physical activity.

Overwhelming challenges have a tendency to cause us to completely shut down. Don't. Sacrificing your physical health isn't going to make the challenge go away any faster and may actually make the challenge worse because now you're a physical wreck. Maintain a normal sleep schedule. Eat healthy. Stay hydrated. Get some physical activity. Maintaining your physical state is a key to maintaining your mental and emotional states.

What are my choices? Make a list. Write them down. Weigh the pros and cons. Creating a list of choices brings clarity to the path we need to take to overcome the difficulty. It also helps us realize that we actually have choices, which is a big thing when we feel powerless.

Will this matter 5 years from now? Don't sweat the small stuff... and really, 95% of our difficulties are all small stuff. Looking into the future and thinking about whether or not the current difficulty will matter 5 years from now often brings it into perspective. We're naturally oriented to turn molehills into mountains and imagine the worst possible outcome to every challenge. If you're having difficulty with this, try to think of a difficult time you faced 5 years ago that you thought was the 'end of the world'. Very few difficulties have the kind of impact that resonates through time. Take heart and have faith that what you are facing now isn't as bad as you're imagining it to be.

Challenges and difficulties are a natural part of life. We can stop from feeling overwhelmed by finding and focusing on the positive in our lives.

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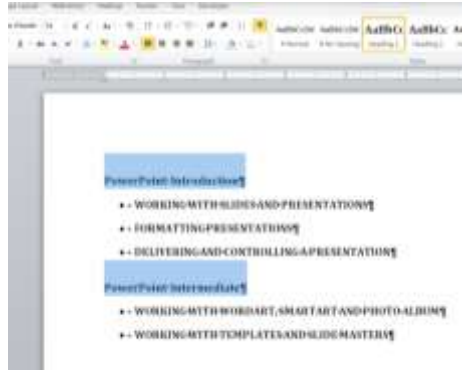
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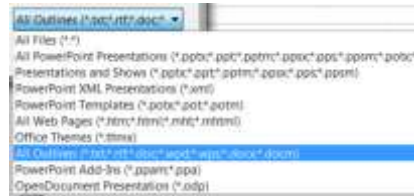
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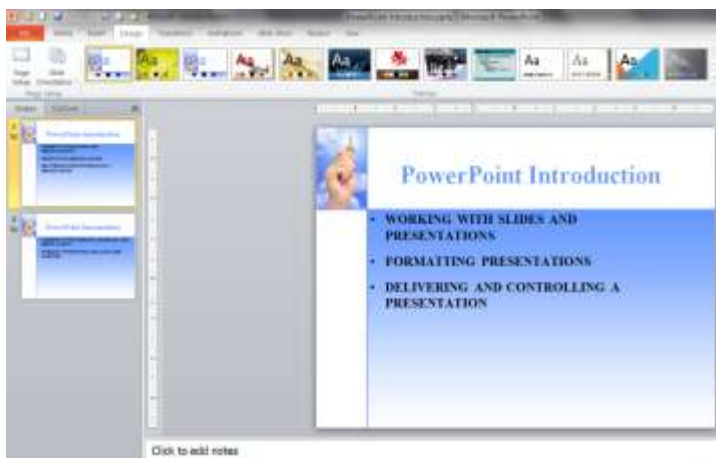
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Dr. Alan Zimmerman, author, national speaker and President of Zimmerman Communi-Care Network has spoken to more than a million people. The Center for Management and Professional Development is proud to offer Solutions readers the opportunity to benefit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



DR. ZIMMERMAN'S Comment

You're going to get through change one way or another. You're going to sail through it or stumble through it.

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I've been traveling and speaking around the world for years. So I thought I'd seen everything. Then I took a trek to the mountainous jungles of Thailand.

To get there, I drove a Jeep for 200 miles, canoed for eight hours, rode an elephant for a day, and then hiked another two days. I wanted to check out a primitive tribal village that I had read about in "National Geographic." And indeed, it was somewhat like I had expected. The village had thatched roof huts, a few smoky fires, and the people were wearing loin clothes, beads, and feathers.

Then the chief greeted me and offered me a Coca Cola. Honest to God!

It hit me like a ton of bricks. Change is EVERYWHERE.

Unfortunately, I see an awful lot of people waste an awful lot of time talking about the change. They talk about whether or not it's fair – but that's a waste of your time. You need to accept the fact that change is here, and it's your task to deal with it.

It may be your job to make sure the devastation doesn't stay. And it may be your job to refuel the commitment. You may be responsible for keeping your energies high at the same time you fire up others.

That's what I get hired to do in seminar after seminar. People keep asking me how they can survive, even prosper, in these changing times. They want to know how they can use change to bring out the best in their organization and their people.

Let me give you a few tips.

Start by demonstrating your own passionate commitment to the change. That's especially true if you're the leader. Like it or not, you set the climate. People are always watching you to see what they should do.

If you do little more than put in your time, waiting for the next early retirement program, you can't expect your people to be committed to the change. In fact, your people will never get more excited than you happen to be. So you need to show your passion. Let them see it in your actions and hear it in your words. This is no time to be shy, distant, or unavailable.

Then demonstrate unwavering commitment to your people. That's not easy. In today's rapid world of change, you can't guarantee lifetime employment. You can't even protect your people from the decisions that may hurt their careers.

However, you can be intensely committed to helping them succeed in the jobs they face. And you can make sure they are "employable" in the future. Johnsonville Foods encourages all employees to attend any class, regardless of its direct applicability to their current jobs, so they're always up to date.

Give a mighty sense of purpose. People get fired up by a cause or a dream. They work for something they believe in. And if they don't have that, they're in trouble. Even the Bible says, "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*" So don't fool yourself. Your people don't work for a "company" or someone else's organizational objective. They work for a purpose. And they'll get on board if they can see the purpose.

Give people the power to succeed. Most people want to make a difference. So if you empower people to do exactly that, they get even more committed to the change.

Unfortunately, change can make people feel helpless, especially if they have no

power to influence it. And powerlessness leads to a "what's-the-use" attitude, where people do just enough to get by.

Counteract the despair by giving each employee some power over some sector of his/her work. Help them see that they can do something to affect their circumstances and shape the future.

Give people a re-energized sense of connectedness. Change can disrupt employee work relationships. Teams may be disbanded, and colleagues may be relocated. And all of that can weaken your employee's emotional attachment to the organization and its mission.

Take time to build work relationships. Help people feel like they belong to a tightly knit group. When employees know and care for one another, they pitch in to help, and push themselves to the limit rather than let their colleagues down.

Finally, give people a piece of the process and the product. People have a hard time getting committed to a change if they see no benefit in the change for them. They've got to see some kind of reward. It's human nature.

So don't get upset if your people ask the "what's-in-it-for-me" question. They've got a right to know, and you should have a good answer.

You can't expect your employees to get excited and committed to something if they don't share in the rewards of their hard work. You can't expect their continued commitment if they see all the rewards going to someone else.

ACTION:

List 10 tools that people need to have to be successful in the midst of a major change – whether it be training, motivation, or anything else. Put a * by each tool your people already have. Then select two tools that your people do not have but need to acquire. Write out an action plan that details how you will ensure your people get the tools they need.

Seconds Count: Excerpts from

myquickcoach

Building shared enthusiasm

Dr. Terry Paulson

There are two ways to bring light to an organization. You can be the candle that provides it, or you can be the mirror that reflects the light of the individuals that are there. You see, I think too many managers try to be the motivation for people. That's a problem because if you're not there, the motivation is gone. The job is to generate enthusiasm within each individual employee throughout their entire day, wherever they are. That only happens when it's *their* authentic light and you've found ways to energize, encourage, and expand it.

One of the best ways to do that is to realize there are moments that will happen in any given day, where an employee, co-worker, colleague will come to you to talk about something exciting that has occurred. However, many times we're so focused on our computers, and on our to-do lists that we forget that five minutes being a mirror to the excitement of another person is the most powerful five minutes you can give as a leader.

Think about it. If you're the employee with exciting news that you share with your boss, and she mirrors back that excitement, all of a sudden, you're validated. You leave the day going, "My boss listened to me." And if you're the boss, you have become an important part of the energy and the passion that the employee brings to work.

So the next time somebody gets excited, ask them, "Well, tell me more about that." And while you're doing it, remember that listeners are not just asking questions, they're using energizing gestures. They're raising their eyebrows, they're nodding their heads, they're moving towards the person. They may even say, "Oh, that's interesting." Every time you do that, you're generating more energy into the conversation.

To keep the person talking, ask some targeted questions that will allow them to get even more excited. Say things like, "Wow, how did that happen?" "What was the lesson you learned?" "Tell me about some of the other people that were involved?" "How do you know it's making a difference?" The more open ended the question, the more people can expand, move into conversation and "own" the success.

Our world is so built now on talking about problems. How many of you have "pits people?" You go up and say, "How's it going?" – and the response – "It's the pits." The place is the pits...the job is the pits...the economy is the pits...you're the pits...and on and on. These people can take motivation down in a moment.

A really good listener focuses their listening not on the problems, but on the opportunities. And then, and here's the biggie, you make sure you positively gossip about the stories and the energy that is happening when you hear it.

I had a CEO once tell me, "The greatest lesson I learned from you was that when I would go into most departments within the company, I often felt like I was a verbal M&M dispenser. I didn't have any content to share. I would say, 'Good work,' and that was all – no content. And I realized if I could take five minutes with the person and get them talking about their successes and the success of the people on their team, that it would start the meeting with positive gossip."

What the CEO did was show that he was connected to what his people were doing, and secondly, he was rewarding that person for positively sharing information (the story) about what the employee or team was doing. And then the CEO increased his power and his influence by sharing that story with others.

And all of a sudden, you see, I believe life is about inventing the future; and the only way you do that is not focusing on the problems, but telling a story and energizing the successes and the best practices that are happening everyday in your organization.

So let's ask what's working. Let's use our listening skills to be a great mirror that expands and encourages others, and then let's positively gossip about the results we get when we do listen.

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COURAGE

From Margie Warrell

Your words create your reality.



A woman recently came up to me after a talk to tell me how miserable she is in her job. “But it’s been impossible for me to get a new job,” she said “There’s just nothing out there...absolutely nothing.”

While I had no way to validate her situation my strong sense was that it wasn’t impossible, and that there is something out there. She just hasn’t found it yet.

I encouraged her to stay positive and proactive. But I couldn’t help but think how easily words can create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The words you speak hold power. Power to create new possibilities, or to close them down. Power to build relationships, or to damage them. Power to lift people up, or to pull them down – yourself included.

We often don’t realize just how impactful our words are – both on ourselves and others. If we did, we’d do far less complaining! You also would never hear yourself saying things like “*It’s impossible to...*”, “*I’m totally hopeless at...*” or “*I had no choice...*” – all phrases which unintentionally undermine your own power and limit your future.

Psychologists have found that **our subconscious mind interprets what it hears very literally.** The words that come out of your mouth therefore create the reality you inhabit – for better or worse.

Unfortunately it’s often the latter as we unconsciously sabotage our success by using language that undermines our opinions, amplifies our problems and chips away at our confidence to handle them successfully.

Whatever direction your words lead, your mind, body and environment will follow. If you use positive language about yourself and your ability to learn new skills, achieve your goals and rise above difficulties, then that’s what tends to show up externally.

Likewise, if you’re continually saying things that affirm incompetence, echo hopelessness, nurture anxiety or fuel pessimism, then that will also shape your reality. It may sound fanciful, **but over time your world will morph to mirror your words.**

It’s therefore extremely important to be intentional about the words you use and speaking in ways that empower and expand rather than devalue and deflate. The truth is that we possess far more power to affect positive change than we realize.

Tapping in to that power starts with building self-awareness of where you are using what psychologists call “out of power” language.

To help you with that, I’ve outlined five ways to help you speak more powerfully – in ways that build your confidence, grow your influence and improve your ability to achieve what you want and change what you don’t.

1. Reframe to what you want. What you focus on expands. So if you’re focused on the negative aspects of your situation, what you can’t do, or what you don’t want, it only amplifies in your reality, triggering more negative emotions and diverting your energy and attention from taking positive action.

For instance:

- If you want more time, talk about the important things you will schedule into your day-week-year (not about how time poor or crazy-busy you are.)
- If you want more success, talk about your goals and what you’re doing to meet your challenges (not about how big your problems are).
- If you want more power and influence, talk about what you’ll do with the influence you already have (not about how no one takes you seriously, or railing at authority figures for abusing their power).

2. Express commitment. Use words that resonate both commitment and optimism. Instead of “*I’ll try*” say “*I will.*” If President Kennedy had said, “*Let’s try to get a man on the moon,*” we’d probably still be trying.

Committing with a confident can-do spirit totally shifts the energy you bring to a challenge and helps rally people around you in ways that trying and ‘let’s hope for the best’ wishful thinking never will.

3. Avoid “absolutes.” Words like always, never and impossible can be dangerous and disempowering. Saying that something is “impossible” guarantees you’ll never find a way. Just because you haven’t done something up until now doesn’t mean it can’t be done.

4. Don’t preface opinion with apology. Psychologists have coined the term “double voice discourse” to explain the phenomena where people preface what they have to say to avoid any negative reaction. For instance, “I know I may have this all wrong and I apologize if anyone disagrees, but I was thinking, maybe,”

It’s little surprise (to me at least) that women, who tend to doubt themselves more and back themselves less, are four times more likely to do this than men. So if you are one of them, stop it! Devaluing your opinion serves no one and deprives everyone of the value your perspective brings.

5. Limit labels. Labels can serve a purpose but they can also hem you in to only ever being a certain way, and become a self-fulfilling prophecy. For instance, just because you are sometimes lazy doesn’t mean you can’t choose not to be lazy. Just because you failed at something, doesn’t mean you’re a failure.

Of course changing habitual ways of thinking and speaking isn’t something you can do overnight. However, neuroscientists have found that with repeated practice you can rewire your brain and replace negative patterns of thought and behavior with positive ones – including how you speak.

And when you slip up, don’t beat yourself up or label yourself a ‘lost cause.’ That’s exactly the sort of thing you’ve got to stop saying. Rather, accept you’re fallibility, and refocus on whatever it is you do want, and can do.

Kick start your efforts by asking your favorite three people to call you out each time they hear you speak in ways that lack power or positivity. It could be the most powerful thing you do all year!

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An intrepid Australian, **Margie Warrell** is an [Author, Forbes Columnist & Keynote Speaker](#) who is passionate about helping people live and lead more bravely. Get her latest book **Brave** & take the [Train The Brave Challenge](#).