

# The Inspiring Leader, (Zenger, Folkman and Edinger) 2009

## A Summary

### **‘Inspiration’ is the most powerful predictor of all leadership competencies**

1. Best predictor of overall ratings of leadership effectiveness by direct reports, peers and managers
2. The quality most valued by employees
3. The factor most correlated with employee commitment and satisfaction

Inspiring leaders communicate with **more than content**. They communicate **with emotion**. The ideas are not hard to learn. They are hard to do.

### **Background**

Competent leaders get everyone to do their jobs, but inspirational leaders are able to get people to rise far above that mark and achieve more. They perform better on an individual basis and the team they work in performs better as well.

What describes your subordinates:

- do they consistently go the extra mile? (**productivity/confidence**)
- do they take complete responsibility? (**responsibility**)
- do they act with optimism and enthusiasm? (**optimism and hope**)
- do they bounce back when things go poorly? (**resilience**)
- do they act like owners rather than hired hands? (**initiative/confidence**)
- do people laugh and appear to be having a good time at work? (**enthusiasm**)

There is no big secret – **it is common sense but not common practice**. There is a chasm between knowing what you should do and doing it.

Inspiring Leaders – focused on a data set of 8110 leaders from 100 different organizations as rated by 41, 436 direct reports.

Leaders who were ineffective at inspiring/motivating others (10<sup>th</sup> percentile or lower) ended up having very dissatisfied and uncommitted employees (on average, they scored at the 26<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Employee Satisfaction/Commitment index). Clear trend to those who are effective at inspiring/motivating others (top 10 percentile) having satisfied and committed employees (70<sup>th</sup> percentile and above). Trend the same throughout different organizations and countries.

Leaders in bottom 10 percentile = 14% have highly committed employees  
Leaders in top 10 percentile = 54% highly committed employees  
(consider commitment and productivity link – therefore, this is highly likely to influence productivity).

**Productivity:** Even smaller increases of inspiring others leads to positive work group productivity (ie. perceptions of productivity in their work group - on continuous improvement, being as productive as I can be, little wasted time etc)

Percentile on Inspiring Others	% Positive Work Group Productivity	% increase
Bottom 10%	44%	
10-35%	59%	15%
35-65	76%	17%
65-90	81%	5%
Top 10%	83%	2%

Peter Drucker: *if most businesses increased the productivity of employees by only 10%, they would double their profits*

Research by Hunter, Schmidt and Judiesch:

*Low complexity jobs* (eg. clerical workers, data entry clerks) = Top person is 3 times more productive than the bottom person and 1.5 times more productive than the person at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. The person at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile is .5 times more productive than the bottom person

*Medium complexity jobs* (eg. sales clerks, mechanics, craftsmen, claims adjusters) = top person is 12 times more productive than the bottom person and 2.7 times more productive than the person at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. The person at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile is about 2 times as productive as the person at the bottom percentile.

*High complexity jobs* (eg. lawyers, software engineers, senior sales professionals) = infinite differences (in the 100's of times more productive for those in the top percentile cf bottom percentile); the person at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile is 2.27 times more productive than at the bottom percentile.

**Confidence:** People who have a strong belief in their capabilities think, feel and behave differently from those who have doubts about their capabilities. People who doubt their capabilities shy away from difficult tasks. They have low aspirations and weak commitments to the goals they choose to pursue. Failure wrecks their motivation. They give up quickly in the face of difficulties and are slow to recover their confidence following failure or setbacks. (Albert Bandura)

So unless people possess high feelings of confidence or self-efficacy, there is no performance. Confidence is critical – so what gives people that confidence?

1. Behaviour modelling – watch good examples and understand why the example was selected; clarity about the important steps being demonstrated ie. teach them to do it well, and let them know their success is the result of effort, persistence and skill – not some uncontrollable external factor
2. Mentally reviewing or rehearsing important events – leaders help here – rehearse important conversations with customers/clients
3. Build confidence by ensuring people are given challenging assignments
4. Leaders should be the main source of feedback – studies from people at every level want a good deal more feedback than they typically get (huge difference) – feedback is especially helpful when it conveys “you’ve almost got that right” or “you are 90% of the way there...just hang in there”

Self-efficacy has been shown to predict work-related performance more powerfully than more traditional performance-enhancement initiatives such as goal setting or measures of job satisfaction.

**Optimism and Hope:** Abundance of research clearly confirms that those who have higher levels of optimism are significantly happier and healthier, enjoy greater success in their occupations, have more lasting and happy relationships and make greater contributions to their communities.

**Initiative:** Leaders create a culture in which people sense that this type of initiative will be rewarded, not punished. There is an emphasis on what people can do, not just on what they can't do. Initiative is difficult to teach. What leaders can do is create a climate of freedom that allows people to experiment and also reward those who take the initiative. Those with initiative have the mentality to seek to do the most they can with their job, unlike the many who seek to do the least that is required. Leaders create the climate in which that behaviour flourishes.

**Responsible Behaviour:** Responsible people:

- monitor and obtain information about their own and their group's performance
- identify strongly with the group to which they belong
- always put organisational goals before any personal objectives
- do things for which there is no immediate personal reward but which clearly benefits the welfare of the organization

Culture of responsibility and accountability is created when leaders convey a strong message that the people at large and teams are what counts.

**Enthusiasm:** Gallup – 29% of employees are truly engaged in what they do – they enjoy their work and their colleagues and generally enthusiastic about their daily occupation; 55% are not engaged; 16% are actively disengaged.

The most promising approach to changing an emotion is to change behaviour. When people learn to act in new ways, this alters their inner feelings.

*“what we do affects how we feel just as much as how we feel affects what we do”* (George Vaillant, Grant Studies)

**Resiliency:** Ability to bounce back. Derailed execs versus others – research shows about the same number of difficult events, difference is in response to problems eg. brooding about problems, didn't talk to others, made little attempt to rectify consequences. Those who weren't derailed – flew into action, talked to people who would be affected by their mistake, did their best to rectify the problem, then moved on.

Resilient execs – have greater composure in stressful situations – did not blame others, snap at subordinates, berate others.

The stronger the emotions that are expressed by the leader and the more willing and able the leader is to convey these emotions, the more change occurs within those being led (emotions are contagious).

The more formal the 'boss-subordinate' relationship is, the more the boss's emotions will be infused into the subordinate (“role power”)

## Zenger & Folkman research on the Behaviours of Leaders

Of 200,000 assessments on almost 20,000 leaders: 16 leadership behaviours identified ('The Extraordinary Leader' Zenger & Folkman, 2002):

Character	Personal Capability	Focus on Results	Interpersonal Skills	Leading Organisational Change
1. Integrity & Honesty	2. Technical & Professional Expertise	6. Focus on Results	9. Communicate powerfully & prolifically	14. Developing Strategic Perspectives
	3. Solving Problems & Analysing Issues	7. Establish Stretch Goals	10. Inspiring & Motivating others to high performance	15. Championing Change
	4. Innovation	8. Take Responsibility for Outcomes/Initiatives	11. Building relationships	16. Connect Internal Groups with the Outside World
	5. Practicing Self Development		12. Developing Others	
			13. Collaboration & Teamwork	

What characterises extraordinary leaders is not an absence of weaknesses, but is the presence of a few profound strengths (ie. they don't have to show strengths in all of the above leadership behaviours – but they do need to be extremely strong in several). Extraordinary leaders will use a variety of mechanisms to compensate for weaknesses. A key to improvement for every person is to have a passion (and you don't usually have a passion about weaknesses).

Perceived Effectiveness (of leader)	Number of strengths at 90 <sup>th</sup> percentile ie. scoring at least 4/5 on performance feedback on the leadership behaviours
35%	0
63%	1
74%	2
80%	3
84%	4
87%	5
90%	6

(n=7195 leaders)

Leaders in general – if they score high on one competency, tend to be remarkably good at a few other competences because of an interaction effect between the competencies.

**Which of these is the *best* differentiator? Of 100,000 assessments on 8,000 leaders found that : “Inspiring and Motivating others to High Performance” is the leadership behaviour most differentiating high and low performers.**

The measurable returns are (shown by employees): greater job satisfaction; greater willingness to give effort; greater intention to stay; greater confidence in the success of the organization; and more likely to recommend the organization to others.

## **Broad Attributes Required for “Inspiring & Motivating”**

Broad attributes to create the foundation for leadership behaviours are:

### **1. Role Model**

Leaders need to model what the organization stands for, how it wants its people to behave

To do this:

- Lead through example ie. “do anything you see me doing”
- Maximise exposure
- Selectively model behaviours that need to be emphasised in the organization
- Seek feedback re. inconsistencies between leader behaviour and espoused values of the organization

### **2. Change Champion**

- Ability to persuade – to relate to others; to understand their fears and doubts; to convince people of the need to change
- Outcome orientation – it’s the results of change that matter
- Recognise those who make it happen – and they will do it again

### **3. Initiator**

- Get the ball rolling – get in front and make things happen (bottom 10% of leaders don’t do this)
- Takes more energy to get something moving than it does to keep it moving
- Delays, cancellations, needless bureaucracy make any work environment un-motivating – the one leadership skill that can be the key to solving these kinds of organisational problems is taking the initiative

### **Why is taking the initiative hard?**

*Feeling overwhelmed* – this is partly emotion and partly reality; the list of things to do will never go away; when feel victim with no control it negatively affects behaviour. When change attitude from oppressed to empowered, then initiative can begin

*Clear priorities* – critical. Leaders need to feed clear priorities and starve or delegate the others

*No-one is perfect* – accomplish what you can. Many people feel they will be judged by what they don’t accomplish. If you focus on high priority issues and accomplish them well, that is what will be remembered.

*Look for a better way* – innovation.

*Lack of confidence* – without confidence, people tend to do only what is expected and needed – they resist taking on extra work and have a tendency to sit back

### **How to take more initiative:**

- Decisiveness – planning, organization, strategic thought and action orientation
- Accountability
- Risk – take calculated risk

As well as these three broad attributes, a high level of emotional awareness is important for outstanding leaders.

## **Using Emotion**

Inspiration and emotion are linked. Many of us attend to extreme emotions. We are quick to respond when people become extremely angry, sad or joyful. What we're less effective at doing is being attentive to the more subtle, nuanced emotions that exist below our radar screen. These tip us off to impending issues. Many of us need to become more attuned to our own moods and emotions.

Need to:

1. Assess your own comfort with emotion – tune into your own moods; acknowledge when having a bad day; develop skills in focusing on the positive/what's right rather than always focusing on what's wrong.
2. Be attuned to the emotions of those about you – let them know you are aware of their reactions to situations/decisions (anger, disappointment, surprise, frustration, pride etc).
3. Become more outgoing – initiate conversations, speak loudly/confidently, reveal more of yourself, go to others offices, smile.
4. Display your emotions – express positive emotions through body language, don't hesitate to state your opinions with emphasis, step outside your comfort zone, deliver powerful messages frequently, physically act the part, begin and end conversations with positive and uplifting comments, set the tone for team meetings, improve public speaking, help the people who work with you to be happy.

## **Six Key Behaviours for developing “Inspires and Motivates”**

*(in order of the strength of their correlation with ‘inspiring and motivating’ – although not a huge difference between them)*

### **1. Set Stretch Goals**

2. **Creating Vision and Direction** – establish a clear line of sight between individual contribution and direction; align systems around this; make sure people know what *not* to do (ie. what is trivial to the vision), regularly communicate the vision and direction

### **3. Communicating powerfully:**

- *set opportunities to communicate*
- *expand the volume and frequency* – the level of people’s commitment and engagement is affected by how they are treated, and one of the key elements of that treatment is driven by the information they receive ie. people may not feel they *need* to know, but they *desire* to know
- *don’t shy away from important issues* – when leaders successfully convey that all topics are fair game for discussion, that leaders influence goes up (Zenger & Folkman)
- *keep it positive* – extensive research shows the importance of communication being positive and uplifting (even though times and place when more critical messages must be delivered)

	<b>Positive comments: Negative Comments</b>
High performing teams	5:1
Medium performing teams	2:1
Low performing teams	1:3

(source: Kim Cameron, Positive Leadership, 2008)

- *ask more questions, give fewer orders* – in high performing organizations the ratio of questions to instructions is slightly higher than 1:1; in lower performing organizations the ratio is more on the order of 20 instructions to every question asked (Losada & Heaphy, “the Role of Positivity and Connectivity in the Performance of Business Teams: A Nonlinear Dynamic Model” American Behavioral Scientist 47, 2004)
- *share the spotlight* – leaders in high performing organizations had roughly the same number of comments that were about others as about themselves; low-performing organizations had leaders making 33 times more comments about themselves than about others in the organization
- *step into the listeners shoes* – what’s in it for me
- *make it two-way communication*
- *use multiple communication techniques and opportunities*
- *tell relevant stories*
- *keep the pace brisk*
- *communicate passion and enthusiasm*

### **4. Developing People:**

- Developing and coaching people
- Working with people on development plans
- Using delegation to develop people

### **5. Being Collaborative and a Good Team Player:**

- Minimise destructive conflict – don’t pit groups against each other
- Tear down silos – remove barriers that separate groups
- Reward team effort

## 6. **Fostering Innovation:**

- Identify barriers to innovation
- Design systems to encourage innovation
- Communicate the expectation you have for innovation

## **The Top 10 Uninspirational Behaviours**

1. Lack energy or enthusiasm
2. Rarely provide clarity of direction or purpose
3. Avoid setting challenging goals or objectives
4. Have no plan for personal development
5. Provide no coaching or mentoring
6. Control/don't share information
7. Say one thing and do another
8. Encourage conflict/competition with other Groups or Individual in the Organisation
9. Have little or no interest in ideas or input from direct reports
10. Rarely provide helpful feedback on performance

## **Summary**

1. Inspiration is the most powerful of all the differentiating competencies for a leader
2. Inspiration works as a catalyst – it is not sufficient in and of itself – its power comes when it is placed in combination with other leadership attributes eg. 'drives for results' or 'strategic thinking'
3. Inspiration is seldom 'one thing' – it's a combination of behaviours (setting stretch goals, creating vision, setting clear direction, communication, teamwork, innovation) – while you can focus on each of these alone, it's the combination that is responsible for the more dramatic improvement in inspirational leadership – real impact is in combined interaction.
4. Leaders vary in the inspirational techniques they prefer to use and different techniques appeal to different colleagues – different people respond to different methods of inspiration.
5. Inspiration works best when it has an end goal or purpose
6. Inspiration is contagious
7. Because of the formal positions of leaders, their emotions have a dramatically compounded degree of influence upon their subordinates – multiplies the effect of their behaviour and their emotions.
8. Central core of inspiration is human emotion – it primarily affects how people feel inside.

## **Steps you can take:**

1. Use emotions more frequently – get excited about success; express appreciation
2. Reach out to people – initiate conversations and interactions
3. Set an aggressive target – with the involvement of your team
4. Create a vivid picture of the organization three years from now – get each person to identify how this affects their job
5. Practice lavish communication – and get feedback on this
6. Delegate tasks with the development of the other person in mind
7. Create positive consequences for having a personal development plan in place and for pursuing it
8. Schedule regular coaching sessions with your team
9. Involve more people in decision making on every important issue
10. Immediately identify and resolve conflicts within your team
11. Set the expectation for innovation from everyone
12. Shower positive attention on new ideas
13. Be the (positive) example
14. Take the first step