



5 Action Steps

to Get Peak Performance from Employees

BY JIM BOUCHARD

People perform at their best when, and only when, they know their leaders care, their work has meaning and they have the chance to learn, grow and develop. You've got to inspire them, empower them and guide them. Let's focus on the first discipline in this process and particularly on five action steps to inspire people to do their best.

A discipline is defined as "the development and practice of meaningful and purposeful habits." A "discipline" is not a to-do list item that you check off and move on. It is something you embrace and embed in your leadership practice on a regular and consistent basis.

"Inspire" is defined as the discipline of reaching people's hearts. Contrast that with "motivation," which is really appealing to people's heads. Rather than trying to create transient material reasons to reach expectations, focus on connecting on a deep emotional level to inspire people to blow expectations out of the water and embrace a continual process of learning, growth and higher levels of performance.



The biggest challenge encountered in guiding leaders on how to inspire others is the false assumption that to inspire, you need to do something grand. Too often you look for that uplifting speech, the compelling memo or the occasional heroic act. All of this is fine when it happens, but inspiration should be a daily practice — and it more often takes on an unassuming form and is quite often unnoticed in the moment.

Here are the action steps...

1 Lead by example.

There is nothing more inspiring to others than your example. It can mean you made a great, impactful speech or you did something amazing, but more often it is what you do every single day. It's what you do that people can count on.

Simply put, model the behavior you expect from others. Do as I say, not as I do does not work on children and certainly doesn't work with the people who look to you for leadership.

Make a list of the most important characteristics, behaviors, expectations and traits you expect from your people. Make sure you check all the boxes on that list yourself.

2 Show them you care.

And frankly, if you don't care, don't bother! Do you take the time to show a genuine interest in the people you serve?

This means understanding their personal goals, interests, challenges and concerns. Carve time into your schedule to meet with reports — not just to talk business — but to develop a deeper understanding of them as human beings.

3 Express appreciation.

How did you feel the last time someone thanked you for a job well done? On the flip side, studies show that a lack of appreciation, real or perceived, is one of the most common reasons given for disengagement or leaving a job.

Even the smallest expression of gratitude can elevate a person's mood, mindset and performance. Public recognition and acknowledgment can inspire them to unimagined levels. Too often leaders lose the opportunity to share gratitude simply because there are too many other priorities at any particular time. Again — gratitude must be a discipline. You've got to prioritize it and carve it into your leadership practice.

It's amazing how much a few words of encouragement and appreciation can inspire.





Share.

Leadership is sharing. A leader shares. Almost anything else you talk about regarding leadership centers on what you're willing to share and how.

If you want to touch people's hearts, there are some essentials you must share unconditionally: respect, trust and loyalty.

By unconditionally, it's meant with no expectation of return. Too often you'll hear something like this: "I'll show respect when that person deserves it." No — you're a leader... you go first.

First and foremost, respect, trust and loyalty are a leader's most important assets. What can you possibly accomplish without the respect, trust and loyalty of the people you serve?

Now to get these things — you've got to give. You will not always get a direct return on your investment here. But again, as you make sharing these things a discipline, you will inspire those who feel empowered by your expression of respect, trust and loyalty. And in those cases where there is no return or worse, you will inspire people with your consistency, generosity and courage.

Two other things that inspire people when you share: power and authority.

Now these may not be unconditional. You need to manage how much power and authority you share, not to be proprietary, but to assure that you don't set people up for failure if they're not yet ready to take on more.

Having said that, power and authority only expand through sharing — unless you're working all by yourself! The very act of trusting others with more power and authority is incredibly inspirational.

Make a list of what you're willing to share and with whom. Then do it!

Give them time.

Everyone knows that the most precious commodity anyone has is time. Any moment you're willing to give another person can inspire not only that person but others as they see your willingness to share your time.

Make sure it's sincere. This not just time for time's sake. Use this time to implement any or all of the other action steps on this list. More often than not, have an objective or goal in mind — though it's not bad once in a while to focus more on showing a personal interest or just see what happens in the moment.

Again, this can be pushed aside in a busy schedule. It must be a priority to meet with the people you serve on a regular basis and give them some of your time.

Long ago Lao Tzu said: "The wise man does not lay up his treasures. The more he gives to others, the more he has for his own."

This is a powerful strategy for leadership. You'll notice that every one of these action steps involves giving and sharing. What you are sharing as a leader, ultimately, is that you're sharing your "self." Sharing your true self with others is what leadership is all about. That's what will most inspire others to share in kind. And as a leader your goal is to touch the hearts of many — not just one. That's how you rally people together to advance the cause of the group.

And that's a leader's most fundamental job. 🌟



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