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We can't expect different behavior than what we offer as an example. "We are the message" in our companies.

Business leaders today must develop ways to thrive during times of constant change. Below are ten specific actions designed to gain peak performances from our most important resource- our employees.

Never before have we seen companies put so much pressure on their employees to work long and hard. John Hinrichs, president of the consulting firm Management Decision Systems, observes that "10 or 15 years ago we used to talk about job enrichment. Now we talk about job engorgement." Reasons for this stress-inducing tendency include:

â€¢ Corporate restructurings which have wiped out layers of managers without reducing the amount of work they used to do;

â€¢ New technologies - which eventually will lessen the need for supervision - currently are causing tough transitions for managers and employees;

â€¢ Increased competition coming from both large, efficient players and niche opportunists.

Our challenge as leader/mentors is two-fold. First we must energize our associates so they can optimize their performance now. Secondly, we need to maintain balance and perspective in our own lives in order to have a proper working relationship with our associates.

YOU ARE THE MESSAGE

Communication is based more on action than on words. If we come in Monday morning out of sorts, walk straight to our office without saying "hello" to anyone, and then shut the door - in what manner will our associates answer the phone that morning? We can't expect different behavior than what we offer as an example. "We are the message" in our companies.

Here are the ten things to think about, and then proactively implement. If you think some of these ten "energizers" need to come from the top of your organization to be successful, we remind you that leaders start where they are. Do these on your own, and then see what happens around you.

1 - Energizers set direction for their units by writing quarterly mission statements. As part of this process, the team commits to established values. Enthusiasm is generated within departments as they formulate their shared missions. Revising those statements quarterly rekindles that energy and commitment, while also providing an opportunity for each person to develop appropriate short-term goals.

Planning's value is in the process, more than in the plan itself. Once your associates have "bought in" to your shared mission, you're on your way to success!

2 - Energizers truly listen and thus are plugged in to reality. They are both open and inquisitive, and their search for ideas is never-ending and boundless. Useful suggestions come from competitors, suppliers, customers, front-line associates, trade groups, and your own mentors.

Don't assume that listening is one of the things you do best. Our booked calendars, busy travel schedules and constant phone calls don't help us become better listeners. And as an opportune occasion for listening occurs, too often we are talking. So ask yourself, "How much time did I spend truly listening?" Good listeners practice "zero-based thinking," which requires that we forget the way we've always done things, and instead look at situations in new light.

One way to judge how much we value input is to figure the amount of time we spend in our offices, sitting safely behind our own desks. But energy new ideas emanate from where things are happening. Most of us thus need to spend more time in the field. You can start this process by talking with your customers, and then acting on their suggestions.

3 - Philosopher John Gardner refers to what he terms "tough-minded optimism." Energizers possess such a spirit, which combines hope and realism as the driving forces in building a business. Again, focusing on customer needs helps make this happen. A leader is more interested in serving his customer than in worrying about what the board of directors will think.

"If it's meant to be, it's up to me" is the rallying cry for energizers who nevertheless remain prudent and balanced. They are neither foolish dreamers nor impassioned extremists. Instead, leaders are positive cheerleaders who each day provides a message of optimism for those they work with.

4 - Energizers are forever thinking about and articulating their company mission and values. At least once a year give a speech reinforcing what you and the company stands for. Nearly every successful leader relates the concern of repeating the same message too often. Yet his or her supporting team usually feels they can't hear such a message often enough. Providing an over-all mission statement helps each unit to construct its own specific mission.

Studies have shown that 74 percent of employees rank information sharing as very important, whereas only half of all executives felt this was what their associates wanted.

5 - Where procedure manuals give rules, company stories offer morals. "Storytelling's power is timeless," says author Tom Peters. "The marketplace is demanding that we burn the policy manuals and knock off the incessant memo writing; there's just no time. It also demands we empower everyone to constantly take initiatives. It turns out stories are a - if not, the - leadership answer to both issues."

Stories which in a simple manner describe "who we are and what we do" influence thinking and action more than procedure manuals do Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communication, and the energizer turns it into a powerhouse management tool which works in both large and small companies.

6 - Energizers are bureaucracy busters. "It's no wonder we manage our way to economic decline," says Stanley Davis. "Our managerial modes don't suit today's business. We are still using the model GM founder Alfred Sloan developed for organizing corporate America back in the Twenties. As a result we have industrially-modeled organizations running post-industrial businesses."

Energizers know the value of the motto, "If it's not broke, break it." They work outside normal rules, and thus stand out in the eyes of customers and their own associates. By unleashing your creativity, you can spark the energy within your organization. Even simple changes can mean a great deal to your unit or company.

7- Great benefits can be found in delegating without abdicating. Remain accountable for your group, but don't allow a decision to be made at a higher level in the organization than it needs to be. Your associates know the daily specifics of their jobs better than you do. Foster an environment in which they design their function in a framework consistent with the company mission and values.

8 - Energizers understand the Pygmalion Effect. People usually accomplish what they believe they are expected to do. If we have high expectations as leader / mentors, our associates probably will

show excellent productivity.

Ambitious expectations are built by energizers who believe in their own abilities to train and motivate their associates. Simply being demanding is insufficient. Your associates actually will rise to the level of your trust, or fall to the level of your mistrust.

9 - Energizing and leading people are more powerful than managing a process. By building trust with associates and customers, a leader / mentor puts together the team described in his or her mission statement.

Effective leaders usually are appreciated for their interpersonal skills, rather than for their managerial abilities. People care more about what's in a manger's heart than about what is in his or her head.

10- An energizer surrounds himself with associates who are positive and realistic, rather than negative.

A "can-do" attitude characterizes the energized leader / mentor it is seen in the unwillingness to take "no" or "it's never been done before" for an answer.

To make this possible, an energizer's mission statement should include minimum production standards and continual training of staff. You also should spend most of your time assisting your best producers, rather than motivating and supervising marginal performers. Good recruiting practices are the basis of a productive office.

In addition, consider hiring an administrator to handle your routine paperwork, so that most of your efforts can be given to increasing production.

The characteristic of energizers which moves organizations to their highest levels of performance is that of a dreamer. Fred Smith's college term paper was graded "impractical" - but he used it as the basis for building Federal Express. Steven Jobs acted on his dream of having personal computers in every home and classroom.

Energizers mange their dreams; and each of us has a like capacity with regard to our business. If we resist change, we will only fall further behind. If we merely go along with change, then we will just keep pace with it. But if we create change, we will be the ones who lead it.

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Jack Daly has 20 years experience in a sales training specializing in a sales coaching workshops and sales training courses.

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