



Extraordinary Influence

How Great Leaders Bring Out the Best in Others

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Rating

8 8 Applicability
7 Innovation
8 Style

Focus

Leadership & Management

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Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Those in command often berate disengaged employees and threaten them.
- Executives should try to help their staff members become better employees and better people.
- The root of the word “affirmation” comes from the Latin *affirmationem*, which means “to make steady, to confirm and to strengthen.”
- Affirmation reinforces someone’s sense of self.
- For affirmation to work, you must address a person’s competence, style and inner core.
- In the past, wise people thought of the heart and mind as the home of someone’s core.
- Your core acts, feels and expresses itself in a process that scientists call “self-talk.”
- The core acquires knowledge, makes assessments and acts as a reference for your beliefs.
- When you speak in words that address someone’s core, you are speaking “Words of Life” rather than “Words of Death.”
- Most people evaluate others based on what they do, but they evaluate themselves based on what they intended to do.

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) How affirmation can galvanize a person's core and sense of self; and 2) How to use "extraordinary influence" and positivity to affect others for the better.

Recommendation

Be sure you're not using motivational tactics that could upset and demotivate people instead of bolstering them. Leaders should help their staff members become better employees and better people, not berate and threaten them. You can enhance your ability to bring about change in others by acknowledging and encouraging them instead of criticizing them. Tim Irwin's compassionate, wise manual explains how to head employees and yourself in a positive direction. His clarity makes his insights eminently readable. His guidance will be useful to senior executives and anyone in a position to affirm other people. His clarity makes his insights eminently readable. *getAbstract* recommends his guidance to senior executives and anyone in a position to affirm and motivate other people.

Summary

"Anyone who has raised a family, led an army, run a company or coached a team struggles to find the key to motivate an individual person to excel, to realize his or her potential, and to get an important job done well."

"How do we bring out the best in those we are responsible for leading? How do we get them to care?"

Getting Engaged

Surveys reveal that close to 70% of employees feel disengaged from their work. Close to a third do as little work as they can. And many managers aren't helping. Most often, those in command berate disengaged or underperforming employees and threaten them. Instead, managers should embrace leadership tactics that help workers become better employees and better people.

To enhance your ability to bring about change in others, acknowledge and encourage them instead of criticizing them. Taking punitive or negative measures to motivate your employees may have exactly the opposite effect from what you intend. In fact, advances in science show that many conventional management practices lack a sound foundation.

"I'm Going to Hold His Feet to the Fire"

Many senior executives use such belligerent phrases, evocative of ancient torture, to describe how they will get employees to perform. You may have heard some of these remarks, which are clear signs of "Macho Management." This approach rests on the belief that you can use your toughness to make other people do something they don't want to do. Proponents of this school of management believe employees lack drive and responsibility: They think that to get your charges to do what you want, you must monitor them constantly.

Newer findings in science teach that leaders who want to inspire people to act must look beyond the tasks they want done. If they want to foster people's best performance, they must reach each person on an "emotional and relational dimension."

Instead of hyper-vigilance and punitive criticism, offer your employees positive affirmation. The root of the word "affirmation" comes from the Latin *affirmationem*: "to make steady, to confirm and to strengthen." Affirmation reinforces someone's sense of self. Speaking words of encouragement and praise has a lasting impact on people, although "the corporate world has not well integrated the benefits of affirmation," which can be transformational. Affirmation can:

“Adversity is a primary means to develop resilience, so to insulate a child from age-appropriate adversity denies him or her the opportunity to develop this critical quality.”

“If we want to transform those we lead, our system must promote the use of affirmation.”

“Affirmation is the key to accessing the higher-order centers of our brains.”

“Affirmation changes us for the better and can even alter our appearance.”

- Protect recipients against stress and improve their ability to think and resolve difficult challenges.
- Activate the brain’s ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which governs “positive behavior change.”
- Make employees feel better about themselves, and even shape their core beliefs about themselves.
- Strengthen their ability to control their impulses.
- Help them be cheerful and efficient.
- Encourages the recipient’s brain to release hormones like oxytocin and vasopressin, which “play a role in trust and involvement.”
- Stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system – which boosts immunity, keeps the heart healthy and brings equilibrium to the hormonal system.
- Encourages innovation and helps people become more receptive to new ideas.

For affirmation to work, your words must be sincere and must transcend beyond the level of a simple compliment. To bring out other people’s talents, affirm them in three psychological dimensions daily, basing your works on their individual attributes:

1. **“Customary style”** – Your outward style manifests in how you relate to others and act toward them. It manifests in patterns that affect how others evaluate you and how open they may be to your ideas. Different styles in how you relate to others might include being a “doer,” an “advocate,” an “idealist” or a “challenger.” Each has plusses and minuses. A challenger might have clear goals, but could also intimidate others.
2. **“Competence”** – Employees’ technical know-how, skill and abilities govern how well they can do things. Employees display competence in how they carry out their day-to-day activities. When you affirm style or competence, you are practicing “tactical influence.”
3. **“Core”** – This is the inner self that thinks, develops viewpoints and makes decisions. It’s the “entity within each person that acts, feels and expresses itself through...self-talk.” The core is a person’s hidden being, his or her character.

To exercise “strategic influence” and to have a profound impact on someone’s work and emotions, affirm his or her core. The core acquires knowledge, makes assessments and acts as a reference for each person’s beliefs.

Think of the core as wise people in the past thought of the heart and mind. See the core as the foundation of a person’s nature, morality, reflections, emotions, perspectives and actions. Thinkers in the past wondered about the location and the work of the core. Science now says that behavior stems from the complex interplay of your heart, brain and body.

Ideally, leaders should adopt and act on their personal beliefs after careful, deliberate evaluation. Unfortunately, few people – and few leaders – develop their beliefs methodically. Instead, people forge their beliefs based on a number of influences, including self-reflection; feedback from people who matter in their lives (family, teachers, bosses and friends); and books, movies and celebrities. People are also susceptible to the impact of advertising and unconsciously adopt beliefs from the mass media.

If you don’t evaluate your beliefs carefully, you could easily accept erroneous views. Act as the guardian of your core to avoid embracing false beliefs. Evaluating your beliefs requires discipline, a willingness to look within and an unwillingness to accept falsehood. Discard erroneous beliefs before they entrench in your core. If your core remains whole

and harmonious, others will see you as reliable. If you let dissonance breed in your core, others will see you as egotistical and self-infatuated.

How Belief Systems Work

To affirm and motivate other people, you need to be aware of some of the building blocks people use to shape their belief systems:

- Beliefs “reside” in the core and govern how people act.
- People have a great capacity for rationalization, which may lead them to accept falsehoods that make them to act in damaging ways.
- Great wealth and power can make leaders arrogant. They can come to feel entitled, to have too much confidence in their own intelligence, and to think that the standards others must accept don’t apply to them.
- When people act on false beliefs, they incur personal damage.
- People formulate true beliefs in much the same way as they create false beliefs. For example, people who believe in integrity behave accordingly, while people who rationalize bad behavior come to believe “rational lies.”
- To formulate positive beliefs, affirm yourself and accept affirmation from others.

“Words of Life”

When you speak positively and use words that address people’s core, you speak the Words of Life, which are a gift. To use the Words of Life effectively, you need to have a healthy core. To build your core, talk truthfully and authentically.

- **“Integrity”** – Commend a colleague for deciding not to sell the company’s products to a country with a poor human rights record.
- **“Courage”** – Recognize an executive for courage.
- **“Humility”** – Praise a colleague for being humble, for instance, for giving a speech that highlighted the achievements of other members of the team.
- **“Judgment”** – Commend a colleague for using good judgment, for instance, in a dispute about earnings with a major customer.
- **“Authenticity”** – Highlight a co-worker’s ability to earn respect from the team because of his or her honesty.
- **“Self-regulation”** – Praise a colleague for restraint in dealing with a difficult situation.
- **“Wisdom”** – Extol a colleague for handling a hard confrontation wisely. For instance, you could say that you don’t think anyone else could have resolved it better.
- **“Candor”** – Commend a colleague for being forthright.
- **“Resilience”** – Acknowledge a colleague for the stamina it took to deal with and resolve a persistent problem over an extended period of time.
- **“Influence”** – Congratulate a colleague who successfully motivates others.

“Words of Death”

An ancient saying suggests that words can bring strength or diminishment, life or death. Constructive criticism rarely works because in the recipient’s mind, the negative message outweighs the intent to be helpful. Criticism’s potential harmful effects include:

- It affects a person’s amygdala – the part of the brain that governs the body’s fight-or-flight response – which reacts to any threat, including negative comments.
- Some parts of the brain shut down.
- Criticism limits reflection and stress management.
- The recipient absorbs the adverse emotions of the criticizer.

“A compliment goes skin deep. It conveys esteem and appreciation but not a deep affirmation of who we are. Compliments are...superficial social rituals.”

“When skillfully and authentically delivered, Words of Life leave the recipient momentarily speechless.”

“Additional keys to make performance feedback effective are to have a foundation of trust and to be sure that the recipient of your feedback knows that, down deep, you are really ‘for them’.”

“Savvy leaders size up whether the person has a problem or... is a problem person. Discerning this difference becomes one of the most worrisome problems we face as leaders.”

“A paraphrase of an ancient king says, ‘Do you see someone skilled in their actions; he or she will end up at the top of the organization’.”

“A strong core comprises the most important element of great leadership.”

“Like a family unit, positivity and negativity are often carried on across generations. A negative leader is more likely to groom negative leaders under his or her charge.”

- Criticism cripples employee productivity and satisfaction.
- Employees resist unwarranted feedback even when it might make sense.
- Corporate cultures characterized by harsh criticism inhibit creativity and innovation.
- People who experience harsh criticism believe it applies to their essence rather than to their deeds.
- Criticism can make people feel as if something is wrong with them.

Belonging to social groups activates an area of the brain that regulates the emission of dopamine, which makes you feel good. But if someone criticizes you, your brain could make you feel as if your group has expelled you.

“Alliance Feedback”

Many senior executives talk about the excellent role models they had when their careers began. Those same executives, for good or ill, often adopt the management style of their first boss. In turn, managers who criticize generally lead younger managers to become critical as well.

Senior managers face a significant challenge in getting people back on track without using harsh criticism. One alternative is alliance feedback. With alliance feedback, you show people in a kindly, encouraging way how their outcome fell short of their intentions.

Executives can use alliance feedback in two situations: 1) to help employees achieve their aspirations, and 2) to advance a shared mission or goal. To bring out the best in another person, form an alliance with him or her. Keep these pointers in mind:

- The amygdala is profoundly sensitive to negativity. Watch for behavior others could perceive as antagonistic.
- Effective alliance feedback takes effort and emotional investment. Show the other person that you consider him or her important.
- Ascribe good intentions to the recipient of alliance feedback. Most people evaluate others by what they do and evaluate themselves based on what they intended to do.
- When you use aspirational alliance feedback, make employees aware of how their behavior might be hampering their ability to achieve their goals.
- Make alliance feedback challenging and motivational.
- Maintain a professional tone.
- Focus on challenging issues, not the personality of the recipient.

When you give an employee alliance feedback, you activate parts of his or her brain that are linked to serenity and openness. You also increase the emission of hormones like oxytocin and vasopressin that promote trust and receptivity to new ideas and situations.

About the Author

Tim Irwin is a licensed psychologist and a University of Georgia psychology professor. A frequent speaker, he has served on the management team of a Fortune 500 company and has consulted with large corporations worldwide for more than 25 years.