

Appreciating people key to leadership

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Leading effectively requires a solid understanding of how relationships underpin all leadership efforts. As documented in the book, *Extraordinary Leadership in Australia and New Zealand: The Five Practices That Create Great Workplaces*, if you want to provide extraordinary leadership you must be willing to appreciate people, for both what they do and for who they are. The two behavioural commitments associated with this leadership practice are recognising contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence, and celebrate the values and victories by creating a sense of community.

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

Over many years, we've asked thousands of people to tell us: "Do you need encouragement to perform at your best?" We find that only about 50 per cent answer affirmatively. The rest explain: "Well, the reason I didn't say yes was because I don't need encouragement. After all, I am an adult." Or "I don't need encouragement. I'm a professional. I do my job well regardless of what others say".

Upon reflection we thought that perhaps we weren't asking the question in the right way. Reframing the question to "When you get encouragement, does it help stimulate and sustain your performance?" gets a favourable response from nearly everyone. But if this statement is true (that is, we all do find that encouragement helps us perform at our best) than isn't it also logically true that everyone needs encouragement? Of course, not everyone needs or wants the same level, frequency, or type of encouragement, but no one wants to be taken for granted or feel that their efforts are inconsequential.

In an effort to determine how significant the act of encouragement really is, we conducted a study and found that people in Australia and New Zealand rated their leader's effectiveness as a direct function of how often their leaders are seen as engaging in the leadership behaviours associated with encourage the heart as detailed in the book *The Leadership Challenge*. On average, ineffective leaders were using this leadership practice 30 per cent less often than those seen as moderately effective as a leader. The most effective leaders encourage the heart over 15 per cent times more frequently than their counterparts reported as moderately effective and about 50 per cent more often than those evaluated as ineffective. And when it comes to employee engagement levels the impact was equally dramatic. The most engaged people report that their leaders encourage the heart more than 30 per cent times more frequently than do the leaders of the least engaged people.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

This often called "soft" side of leadership is in reality the tough side. It takes a deep-rooted drive and energy to make the time to find people doing things right. Rachel Argaman, CEO of Toga Far East Hotels, is an excellent example of someone who takes seriously recognising and appreciating people.

When this Australian-based builder and manager of apartments and hotels was going through a rough patch, over a four-month period two people within a key department needed to pick up the workload of three others. One of these team members described this as the hardest experience she had ever been through. When asked what kept her going, she replied, "The little hand-written personal notes I received from Rachel. Those hand-written notes are what kept me here."

People truly appreciate knowing that their leader actually takes the time out of a busy schedule to think about people who are doing something worthy of recognition. Argaman shared with us her passion about personal gestures being so important; however the real and most dramatic proof were the number of her direct reports who spontaneously commented about the power of her actions along the line of: "A personal e-mail from Rachel, or a comment on a Christmas card, or on a bonus letter, means just as much to me as a public acknowledgement."

As one manager said: "It's powerful coming from her because she makes it personal, rather than generic. Just

recently, after I'd finished attending a two-day conference, I got a text message from her saying, "You showed over the last two days that you're an incredible leader. Thanks for being you". It was just a simple, personal text message, but those are the things you remember."

Extraordinary leaders make it a point to find ways to creatively recognise the contributions that people make. You can choose to do the same and demonstrate the confidence that you have in the ability of those you work with, which results in raising people's own levels of self-confidence and willingness to put in their best efforts. However, not everyone responds to the same types of encouragement and that is why it is essential to make recognition personal which goes a long way in inspiring team members.

DON'T BYPASS THE HEART

We maintain that leadership is not an affair of the head; it is an affair of the heart. People will not sustain high levels of energy and productivity if they don't believe that anyone really cares about the hard work they are doing. Take a self-assessment of how many times a day you thank somebody for his or her contributions to the success of your organisation, customer service, safety, or profitability. Remind yourself that doing so boosts the morale of your team as well as their performance levels.

To encourage the heart of others, however, it must come from your heart. Make sure that you genuinely care about what's going on and find ways to get personally involved. Spend the time necessary to make encouragement personal in other ways by learning about what motivates each of your team members. Get personally involved in recognising people and creatively celebrating achievements and bringing people together to celebrate the team's accomplishments. Extraordinary leaders do the soft stuff in order to make a hard difference in the lives of others and their organisations.

*[Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner](#) are the coauthors of the award-winning and bestselling book, [The Leadership Challenge](#). Michael Bunting is a co-author of *Extraordinary Leadership in Australia and New Zealand: The Five Practices That Create Great Workplaces* from which portions of this article are excerpted. Michael is also the founder of leadership development consultancy, WorkSmart Australia.*

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