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LEADING POSITIVELY -- STRATEGIES FOR EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE – At-a-Glance

There are four strategies of positive leadership: **enabling positive climate, relationships, communication and meaning**. They can be implemented by engaging in a Personal Management Interview (PMI) Program.

Enabling Positive Relationships

Leaders affect interpersonal relationships by facilitating positive energy, by modeling it and by diagnosing and building positive energy networks among others. These networks strengthen interpersonal relationships, foster coordination and collaboration, and enhance efficiency of interactions resulting in performance advantages for individuals and organizations. Leaders can identify positive energizers, then recognize reward and support them. They put high energizers in tasks and roles that allow others to interact with them and asking them to coach or mentor others.

Enabling Positive Communication

Positive communication occurs when affirmative and supportive language replaces negative and critical language. A study of communication in top management teams identifies the single most important factor in predicting organizational performance, more than twice as powerful as any other, was the ratio of positive to negative statements: 5.6 to 1. In medium performing organizations 1.85 to 1, in poor performing .36 to 1.In addition to role modeling, two specific strategies are available for facilitating positive communication in organizations: the reflected best-self feedback process and the use of supportive communication.

The reflected best-self feedback process is based on the impact of positive feedback on individual improvement. Positive information is captured that uncovers and highlights an individual's talents and highest capabilities. The result is a personal agenda for capitalizing positive attributes that are not necessarily obvious.

Additional benefits of best-self feedback are strengthened relationships with feedback givers. Best-self feedback results in higher cohesion and mutual support. (Refer to the Reflected Best Self Exercise: http://www.bus.umich.edu/Positive/POS-Teaching-and-Learning/ReflectedBestSelfExercise.htm)

Supportive communication builds and strengthens relationships even when behavior must be corrected or negative feedback must be provided. There are at least eight techniques; the first three are critical:

Congruent: Maintain congruence among words, thoughts and feelings (authentic and sincere)

Descriptive: remain objective non-evaluative (judgmental or labeling) and problem- not person-focused;

Validating - communicating that the other's perspective is worthwhile

Conjunctive - connected directly to the preceding message

Specific – refer to an actual example or behavior

Owned statement– take personal responsibility for the message

Demonstrate active listening and use appropriate response types – reflective, probing, deflecting, and advising.

Enabling Positive Meaning

When people feel that they are pursuing a profound purpose or engaging in work that is personally important, stress, depression, turnover, absenteeism, dissatisfaction are reduced; commitment, effort, engagement, empowerment, happiness satisfaction, and fulfillment are increased.

Attributes of Positive meaning	Positive Leadership Strategies
Has a positive impact on the wellbeing of humanity	Help workers see the effects of their work on others, give them opportunities to directly interact with clients and to receive feedback
Associated with an important virtue or value	Highlight connections between what is meaningful to individuals and benefits produced by the organization
Has a long term impact or creates a ripple effect	Help people see that they are creating a legacy
Builds supportive relationships or sense of community	Reinforce and sponsor contribution goals rather than self interest goals

People who define their work as a job work for material rewards. People who define their work as a career are motivated by success. People who consider their work as a calling work for the sake of the work and seek a greater good. The same work may be viewed as a job or a calling depending on the individual's perspective.

Use a Tailored PMI Program to Implement the Four Strategies

Implement these four strategies through a tailored PMI program. The four strategies have amplifying effects on one another. Diagnose current practice, then plan specific implementation actions. Research has shown that implementing a PMI can significantly improve morale, trust and engagement (subjective factors) as well as productivity and goal accomplishment (objective factors). Research has also shown that time savings is among the benefits of PMIs. On average, leaders free up almost a day per month of discretionary time because of reduced interruptions, unscheduled meetings, mistakes, and problem-solving time. It increases alignment, collaboration, improvement strategies and positive energy.

PMI has two components:

Conduct a role negotiation session – clarify expectations, responsibilities, evaluation standards, reporting relationships, culture and values. This gives people a clear idea of precisely what is expected and on what basis they will be evaluated.

Hold regular ongoing private face-to-face meetings between the leader and direct reports (or peer-to-peer or representatives). There are two purposes: provide leaders with the opportunity to coach and develop subordinates and to help them improve their own skills or job performance. They also present an opportunity to demonstrate and reinforce behaviors that enable positive climates, communication, relationships and meaning.

Allow sufficient time (45-60 minutes) to accomplish specific objectives. Generate action steps focused on performance improvement and relationship building. It is an opportunity to communicate freely, openly, and collaboratively. Agenda items include leadership and organizational issues; information sharing; interpersonal issues; obstacles to improvement; training in necessary skills; individual needs; feedback on job performance and personal capabilities; resource needs; accountability for previous commitments, targets and goals; personal concerns. Outcomes are agreements to specific actions and accountability that will be maintained.

Goals: A Key to High Performance

PMIs offer an opportunity to set and achieve difficult, difficult SMART and even Everest Goals. SMART goals are specific, measurable, aligned (or achievable), realistic (or reachable) and time bound. An Everest goal goes beyond SMART goal setting, It represents an ultimate achievement, an extraordinary accomplishment, or a positively deviant outcome. Performance is lowest if easy goals are set. It is also low if no goals are set or they are too general. Performance rises if difficult goals are set, particularly difficult SMART goals or Everest goals.

An Everest Goal is SMART, but it also possess five additional characteristics:

It represents positive deviance, or a focus on abundance gaps rather than deficit gaps, and virtuousness as the desired outcome.

It represents "goods of first intent," meaning that it possesses inherent value. The outcomes are sufficient and are not a means to obtain another end.

It possesses an affirmative bias in that it focuses on strengths, positive phenomena, and opportunities rather than problem solving, weaknesses, or obstacles.

It represents a contribution rather than merely a personal achievement, the creation of value rather than a focus on personal pay-back, and it unleashes the best of the human condition rather than focusing on personal benefit..

It creates and fosters sustainable positive energy. It is engaging and requires no external motivator for its pursuit.

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Positive Leadership Principles & Practices

Principles	Practices
Foster a positive work climate	Compassion: notice pain; share information; express care and concern; organize systematic action to enable appropriate compassionate responses Forgiveness: acknowledge the hurt, identify an optimistic purpose, maintain high expectations and standards, provide support for the harmed, let go of grudges, legitimize language that elevates thought and communicates virtuousness Frequent and public expressions of gratitude: encourage gratitude journals, letters and notes; conduct gratitude visits
Foster positive relationships among members	Model positive energy; provide opportunities for serving others. Develop and manage positive energy networks in stages: identify positive energizers and enable them to infect the organization through positive-energy networks, teams, and mentoring relations. Capitalize on employees' strengths: Spend time with strongest performers; provide opportunities for employees to do what they do best; frequently celebrate positive outcomes; focus on what they do well to help them achieve excellence in performance and in relationships. address weaknesses to build competence. Manage negative energizers in stages.
Foster positive communication	Habitually use supportive communication and encourage employees to engage in supportive communication; provide 5 positives for every negative piece of feedback, use descriptive statements in providing negative feedback, remain problem- not person-focused in providing negative feedback Collect reflected best-self feedback. Obtain information from associates on unique personal contributions, help others develop a best-self portrait, use strength recognition cards
Associate work with positive meaning	Help workers see the effects of their work on others, give them opportunities to directly interact with clients and to receive feedback Highlight connections between what is meaningful to individuals and benefits produced by the organization Clarify the long-term effects of what is being accomplished; help people see that they are creating a legacy Reinforce and sponsor contribution goals rather than self-interest and achievement goals

Reference

Kim Cameron, *Positive Leadership*, Berrett-Koehler (2008).