

Positive Effect Leadership Structured Coaching Program

Lesson 2, Assignment 1: Power of Positivity and Caring

There is a growing body of evidence on the power of positivity and caring in leadership. An increase in positivity results in an increase in productivity and efficiency. It also improves morale and reduces turnover. Those are some important results for a leader to attain.

Our own personal experience supports the research. Think of a great leader you have known. Did that person have a positive attitude? In workshops, everyone answers yes. Was that person caring? That is to say, did that leader have your best interests at heart even if he or she was tough on you? Once again, most everyone in workshops answers yes.

One of the fundamental goals of leadership is to create and maintain positive relationships. Really, maintaining positive relationships with the people at work is basic professionalism. When we have positive relationships, both parties in the relationship can focus on work. We don't take part in anything petty or negative and no one is distracted from the job at hand. That does not mean that we need to be best friends with people at work, it just means that we have relationships based on respect and kindness.

Maintaining a positive attitude and work environment is a challenge. Humans are hard-wired to notice and hold on to negative situations and events. It's part of our nature. We can change our natural tendencies, but it requires some discipline and a commitment to choosing differently. We have to wave around the Magic Wand of Destiny and CHOOSE to notice and remember the positive.

Identifying and solving problems are primary responsibilities of leaders, and we don't need to stop doing that. However, we do need to begin noticing what is going right. Fortunately, there are many more positive events in a day than negative. Think about it—we do all sorts of things right in a day and all anyone notices or comments on is the negative. It's frustrating! We want to notice and comment whenever we see someone doing something right.

Noticing and commenting positively on actions that we want to see again is powerful. It lets people know that we are paying attention to what they do, that we appreciate their efforts, and that the task itself is something worth doing. The best way to get someone to do something again is to praise them for doing it. It's an easy motivational technique that also builds the positivity of the relationship.

When we create positive relationships, we are using personal influence as opposed to positional power. In a leadership position you have power over the people who work for you. Perhaps you have some options to give awards. You definitely have the power to discipline. Positional power is bestowed on you with your job title, and it is not the best long-term motivational technique.

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Positional authority is effective as long as you are watching your employees. If we use the metaphor of the carrot and the stick, positional authority is using the stick to threaten people. It is highly effective as long as we are standing in front of the person. The carrot is positive incentive. When we create positive relationships, we are using our personal influence. People want to work for us and they keep working when we are not present.

In order to create a positive relationship, one must have a positive interaction ratio of at least five to one. That is five positive interactions for every one negative interaction. Negative interactions include developmental feedback which leaders must give. The only way to maintain the required positivity ratio is to increase the number of positive conversations. The positivity ratio is in alignment with other research that found people are most motivated by being acknowledged and appreciated for their contributions.

Not everyone who works with you will be easy to get along with. Their negative attitude and actions can make the creation of a positive relationship more difficult. We can overcome the challenge, but it takes determination, self-discipline, and some knowledge. Knowing something about people can make it easier to create a positive relationship with them. The author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni, found that just knowing each other's birth order and a childhood challenge increases trust. We can get to know one another better with something as simple as starting meetings with an ice breaker. It's also a good idea to take some time to chat with people. Short chats are not a waste of time because they increase familiarity, trust, and positivity.

Granted, there is a fine line between getting to know someone and getting too personal at work. Leadership is an art not a science. However, you cannot be an exceptional leader without knowing and caring for the people who work for you. It can be done within reasonable, professional boundaries.

Studies have shown that caring leaders are more effective and now we have some research-backed actions that we can take to increase our capacity and ability to care about others. Dr. Barbara Fredrickson found that people who participated in lovingkindness meditation became more compassionate and empathetic toward others. There were also emotional and physical health benefits and an increased tendency to see things in a good light and be more optimistic about the future. That is an impressive list of results for a meditation practice of 60 minutes a week. There are lots of guided lovingkindness meditations online.

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Dr. Fredrickson also found that shared positive moments can have positive emotional and physical results for individuals. The more positive moments we share, the easier it becomes to create more. We also increase our own positivity in the process. The shared moments of positivity don't have to be with people that we know for us to gain the benefits. Our discussion is focused on work, but you can practice engaging others in a positive way in line at the grocery store.

Being positive does not mean that you have to be Little Mary Sunshine and never offer developmental feedback. Being positive and caring does not mean that you give up maintaining standards and discipline. Leaders must give developmental feedback when needed and not shy away from tough discussions. However, it is important to intentionally create positive conversations in order to maintain the positivity ratio of at least five to one. The main behavior changes required are being pleasant, noticing what is going right, and then commenting on it in an appreciative way.

The book *FISH!* gives us an excellent example of how a group of determined people can create a positive culture. A group of fish mongers decided that they didn't want to work in a negative environment any more. They focused on four things that increased the positivity of their work environment: Play, Make Their Day, Be Present, and Choose Your Attitude. The results were amazing. Their work became more enjoyable and their business more successful.

Keep in mind, a leader's job is to help everyone else be successful. If the people around you are failing, you are failing. Your job is to create success for everyone. One of the most effective ways to help people be successful is to help them focus on work and to motivate them. Creating and maintaining positive relationships can accomplish both of those things.

You can create a more pleasant work environment, motivate people in lasting ways that are effective when you aren't watching over them, and increase productivity and efficiency just by waving around the Magic Wand of Destiny and intentionally choosing to be positive.