

Inspirational Leadership

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It's time to work on *you*, so sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

The ability to inspire is an essential part of being a leader. In this lesson, we are going to let you in on a big secret – being able to inspire people isn't some magical power you are born with. You can practise and develop it as a skill.

Come with us now as we break down the whats, hows and whys of being an inspirational leader.

Let's kick off with some data courtesy of Harvard Business School, where they surveyed nearly 50,000 leaders [1] to learn that "the ability to inspire creates the highest levels of employee engagement and commitment."

Global consultant Bain, who conducted similar research [2], found that "inspired employees are twice as productive as satisfied employees."

This resulted in companies experiencing 21% greater profitability, a 41% reduction in absenteeism and 59% less turnover. [3]

All the big consultancies, business schools and gurus agree that the moment employees transition from satisfied to inspired is when the magic happens.

But what is the difference between a satisfied employee and an inspired one?

Let's break each term down. "Satisfy" comes from the Latin *satis*, which literally means "enough" [4]. Being "satisfied" simply means that things are okay and that one is content.

"Inspire", on the other hand, also has Latin roots but comes from "inspirare" - which means "to blow into" [5]. The word was originally used for a divine or supernatural being, in the sense of "imparting a truth or idea to someone".

Inspiration is so much more than satisfaction. With it, people achieve great things.

When you are inspired, you want to go on the journey. Failure isn't even a concern as you are driven from within by purpose and meaning, not just a desire to achieve an end result.

Those who aren't inspired need continuous motivation to keep them going. Those who are inspired have a stockpile of fuel to keep them going through difficulties and setbacks as they genuinely believe in what they are doing, which is critical.

This is why inspirational leaders are the game changers in the workplace.

But what if being an inspirational leader doesn't come naturally?

We understand this concern, and that is why we are to show you how to develop inspirational qualities so that they radiate to everyone you meet to see.

When starting your journey to becoming an inspirational leader, you must first commit to your values. A deep sense of purpose and a drive to bring about positive change is essential for any person to inspire others.

You must stick to your values in both the good and challenging times. If you stray from your values when under pressure or to achieve a result, it'll damage your integrity in the eyes of those you lead.

It may make you unpopular sometimes, but the ends will never justify the means if you give in to compromise.

Inspirational leaders are also invested in personal development.

As an inspirational leader, you must know your limits, seek feedback, and always pursue improvement and learning. Let it be known that you feed off constructive criticism and feedback - good and bad - and welcome it from anyone.

Just as you seek your own continuous improvement, as an inspirational leader, you should always look to build up those around you [6].

Publicly praise team members who perform well. Empower those who work for you. Show that you trust and believe in them to fulfil their role and make the right decisions while letting them know you are always available when they need support.

It is your job [7] to give them an example of purpose and commitment to values while providing the coaching, training and encouragement they require to succeed. It's also your job to know when to step back and let them learn from their own mistakes.

When you do need to give out some discipline, keep it private.

And when it comes to disciplining team members, it helps if you are someone that radiates authenticity. Knowing that you're not perfect and made your fair shares of

mistakes won't diminish you in the eyes of those you lead. It shows you're human and gives them something to aspire to.

None of us can look at someone who seems flawless and believe we can get there, but someone who has weaknesses and has worked on them, and continues to work on them, is a role model we can look to emulate.

Share your stories of struggle, times you embarrassed yourself, and those mistakes you made early in your career. It will bring you and your employees closer together and keep strengthening that unbreakable bond.

This bond is essential in those moments when you ask your team to follow you into the scary waters of change. Harvard Business Review found that leaders who combined inspiring people with delivering results did so by constructively disrupting established organisational behaviours [8]. That enabled employees to escape suboptimal cultural attitudes within the business.

To do this, you need to walk the talk. If your team believes in you and is inspired by your vision for the future, they will pay close attention to your actions and recreate them in their own approach to work.

Here's a real-world example of a leader walking the talk. When Howard Schultz became CEO of Starbucks for the second time after leaving eight years previous, he saw some culture changes he wasn't a fan of [9].

Starbucks had been built on a customer-focused coffee experience, but this had taken a backseat to automation and diversification. Schultz wasted little time showing what values he believed in and what he felt was the true core of Starbucks. He even closed 7,100 stores for three hours in late February to retrain their baristas in the art of the espresso [10]. This sent a company-wide message that Schultz's talk of the customer being the primary focus of Starbucks was not just lip service. It is their true mission and the cornerstone of what would make them great again.

Inspirational leaders are prepared to disrupt at the right moment to achieve their goals.

Making these kinds of changes also requires you to be a skilful communicator.

And being a communicator isn't just about your ability to speak in an impactful and inspiring way. The non-verbal areas of communication often show you are engaged with those you are talking to. Skills such as active listening, repeating for clarification, ignoring distractions, and maintaining eye contact show you value the person, what they have to say and their time.

When it comes to difficult conversations, you must be adept at delivering negative feedback so that the subject leaves the meeting energised to improve. Negative feedback should be timely, specific, calmly delivered, and behaviour-centred (rather

than person-centred). Do it wrong, and you'll leave people feeling disengaged and considering which job site to start perusing first.

And as well as how *you* communicate with your team members, you also need to encourage positive communication amongst your team to build unity.

They will all have strengths and weaknesses. By communicating, they can coach and mentor each other to share their positive attributes and improve in their weaker areas. Your team is one giant organism that should seek to make itself as strong as possible through actively sharing knowledge, ideas, experiences and even doubts.

The most inspiring leaders foster an environment of collaboration, trust and support [11]. Don't just give out orders. Work alongside your team to truly achieve things together.

This level of unity lives or dies in inclusive team culture. Everyone must feel equal, respected and listened to. Your team members should feel confident to bring all of themselves to work—an environment of psychological safety is paramount to people delivering their best.

Ditch 'I', 'me', 'mine' and replace them with 'us', 'we', 'our.' The best teams succeed together and fail together. An inspirational leader's job is to instil that attitude within everyone.

You must be empathetic. A study by Ernst & Young showed that 88% of US employees felt having a transparent and fair leader inspired positive change, leading to higher engagement and job satisfaction [12].

Show your employees that results come second to their physical, mental and emotional health. No project or financial gain is worth risking any of those three things for. Your team's well-being should always be your priority.

Finally, as an inspirational leader, you should embrace risk.

As Thomas Jefferson said, "With great risk comes great reward," and he fought pirates.

Very little change has ever been achieved without someone taking some risks. Let your team see you taking sensible, well-thought-out risks, and encourage them to do the same.

Also, show those who follow you that they should not be afraid of owning their mistakes. Never punish failure; instead, ensure your employees use it as an opportunity to learn and grow.

How many of these qualities do you feel you already exhibit? Where can you improve to move from motivating those around you to inspiring them?

It won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

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[3] *7 Powerful Characteristics Of A Truly Inspirational Leader*, Heidi Lynne Kurter (2020)
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[6] *Inspire others and support their growth. 10 ways to make it happen*, Maggie Wooll, MBA (2022)
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