

Dream Big,
work hard,
Stay Focused,
and surround
Yourself with
Good people.

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Leadership call to action: Inspire people to succeed

From strong comms skills to leading by example, what does it take to really inspire people?

Effective leadership takes many qualities, from the capacity to learn from one's mistakes to decisiveness.

One of the most crucial to spearheading business success, though, as many have noted through the years, is the ability to inspire and motivate teams and individuals - during good and not so good times.

Microsoft founder Bill Gates, for example, famously remarked "As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others." Words like this with the power to inspire others can often make all the difference when the going gets tough, and CEOs are forced to dig deep to ensure their businesses survive another day.

Simon Sinek is a renowned leadership expert who has helped many

managers in many companies hone their leadership skills. "Leadership is a skill. A learnable, practicable skill," Sinek says. "The best leaders don't consider themselves experts, they consider themselves students. They may be more advanced students, but they are students nonetheless."

"A good leader is someone who is learning and practicing the skills of leadership and starting to implement them around them. A great leader is someone who is well practiced and really understands the importance of prioritising the needs of the people..."

Sinek adds: "We call them leaders not because they are in charge, but because they are the ones willing to run head-first into the unknown or the dangerous. They are willing to risk their own resources to protect and grow their people."

Communication = key

There's no challenge greater right now than COVID-19. It's hitting the economy hard, certainly, but also severely affecting morale - with millions forced to abandon their normal ways of life for a largely unspecified period of time.

For John Readman, CEO of Leeds-based digital marketing and tech provider Modo25, the need to motivate has been magnified by the situation, which has inevitably led to new leadership challenges.

"I have found it hard to gauge how people have been feeling when on an online meeting," Readman tells The Business Briefing. "Understandably, it's not the same as feeling the atmosphere in an actual room."

The key, he stresses, is to engage more with people in times of crisis than in normal times, and to never stop giving feedback.

"Always praise and acknowledge good work publicly. Never give constructive feedback publicly - I always

do that on a one-to-one basis," he adds. "It's important to never stop giving feedback, no matter how hard it might be to deliver."

EnterpriseDB's CEO, Ed Boyajian - who had to help navigate his company through the financial crisis in 2008 - concurs that the urgency of communication is particularly heightened during times of crisis. This is because employees are experiencing their own version of fear, uncertainty and doubt (FUD) in parallel with the experiences of those at the helm.

"By over-communicating to provide clear guidance and direction for your employees, some of this uncertainty can be relieved," he says. "It's also easier for your focus to be clouded when times are tough, but the clearer you are about the business's mission, vision and strategies, the more likely you'll emerge from the difficulty as an even stronger and more dependable leader."

It's a strategy that brings to mind the views of former US national security advisor Colin Powell, who remarked: "Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand."

Celebrate the wins

Businesses also undergo turbulence during so-called normal times, so it remains critical to keep workers engaged and informed then, too.

Indeed, when Saffron Building Society relaunched a programme of a major restructuring that had previously been stalled, it was crucial for CEO Colin Field to get people on board with the changes, particularly as opinion on the changes was divided.

Field says he took time to explain why it was important for the business as a whole, and for the individuals concerned, and that it was only by doing so that everyone was able to get behind the changes and move things forward.

"Perhaps the most important role of the CEO is to define and communicate the problem such that your people are clear on what has to be achieved," Field says. "Once this has been established you are then able to provide the clarity on what it is that the business



has to do, why it is important and the role that you want people to take."

When making a divisive decision, managers must focus on the benefits - for customers and for staff - and also celebrate the wins as they happen, Field says. Failure, too, must be accepted and even celebrated, because it's hard to engender inspiration if the fear of failure is too large to contemplate, according to Field.

While many leaders may rely on incentives and bonuses to push staff, Karen Emanuel, CEO of music manufacturer Key Production, stresses that where these aren't feasible, it's important to focus on the little things that can keep morale up.

"Normally, I bring in chocolates at Easter, so this time we gave them a gift token to buy chocolate," she says.

"There are a few other things in the pipeline, too. This year it's our 30th birthday, so I'm going to give our staff members £30 to order some drink and food, and we will get online to enjoy it together. If the company comes out of this and does well, that'll incentivise them. We recognise that this year will be different, but we shall see."

Motivating everyone

Despite the great expectations placed on the shoulders of business chiefs, they shouldn't always be expected to have the answers, explains Sarah McDowell, founder of training organisation the Leader Centre.

She says that in addition to inspiring teams and individuals, leaders should help people find inspiration for

themselves.

"That way, they become more self-sufficient and more resilient," McDowell elaborates. "Help people to uncover for themselves what inspires them, ask them questions to find out about that stuff and then help them to find that in their business or in their life," McDowell adds.

Mental fitness and productivity coach Daryl Woodhouse, meanwhile, has shed light on the links between wellbeing and productivity, suggesting the best advice he could give to CEOs is to be authentically strong in their interactions with staff.

"An employee who feels well physically, mentally and emotionally will be more motivated, inspired and more productive overall," he says.

"CEOs have to lead by example, showing the value and necessity of looking after your own wellbeing for it to become culturally embedded into behaviours.

Woodhouse adds: "Through a commitment to wellbeing, effective communication, effective decision making and inclusive leadership, business leaders can improve the motivation levels of their employees and inspire staff to achieve set goals."

Motivating teams and individuals when times are tough can be arduous, especially when challenges already weigh very heavy.

Based on the principles of communication and empowerment, however, leaders can ensure people continue to feel valued and inspired to work to a set of common goals and help everyone pull through.