# TIME: OUR MOST VALUABLE PERSONAL RESOURCE!

BY WES FRIESEN

**S**elf-development expert Brian Tracy suggests, "Your greatest resource is your time." This same concept was articulated by another respected expert, Jim Rohn, who wrote, "Time is more valuable than money. You can get more money, but you cannot get more time." Reality is, we all get exactly 168 hours per week — nobody gets more than that (although sometimes we wish we did!).

Time management can be defined as "the ability to use time to get things done when they should be done." Managing our time well has many benefits, including:

- We complete our important tasks on time
- We provide better quality work
- We are more productive and efficient
- We experience less stress and anxiety
- Frees up time for leisure and recreation, relationship building, and personal development

Bottom line: when we manage our time well, we benefit, as do the people we serve and impact — including our team members who get our best effort.

## Principles to Manage Our Time Well

What can we do to manage our time well? Here are principles to consider:

**1. Plan and be intentional.** Henry David Thoreau said (and I agree), "It is not enough to be busy... The question is: what are we busy about?" We make the most of our time when we intentionally plan on how we use it. Tracy counsels, "Every minute you spend in planning saves 10 minutes in execution; this gives you a 1,000 percent Return on Energy." Setting goals and specific targets can help guide us and maximize our accomplishments and success. One approach that I (and others) have used is to start each year with annual goals for us and our teams. We can then follow up throughout the year with updated monthly goals. Then we can set weekly goals (task lists), ideally the Friday night before the week ahead. Final step is to have daily task lists, which we can develop at the end of the prior day.

**2. Treat our time like money.** Benjamin Franklin cut to the chase when he said, "Time is money." A tool to manage our money is to have a budget, and we can budget our time, too, starting with our most important tasks first, and then filling in with other tasks that we desire to complete. Also, just like we don't want to waste our money, we should avoid wasting time. Bruce Lee once said, "If you love life, don't waste time, for time is what life is made of."

**3. Prioritize the important over the urgent.** As we get busier and our task lists grow, we can agonize or organize by prioritizing (I suggest the latter!). Stephen Covey popularized his four-quadrant time management and prioritization model. His model reflects items that come our way that are urgent (calling our attention to do now) versus important (valuable in the big picture and long-term). To be most effective, we need to prioritize as follows:

- High Importance, High Urgency (Quadrant 1) — Examples of quadrant 1 items are important deadlines and crisis events. Prioritize and do these tasks first.
- High Importance, Low Urgency (Quadrant 2) — Examples include planning, relationship building, exercise (physical, mental, spiritual). Build time in our schedules to get these done.
- Low Importance, High Urgency (Quadrant 3) — Examples include some texts, emails, phone calls, and postal mail. Find quick, efficient ways to address with minimal personal time and involvement. If possible, delegate them.
- Low Importance, Low Urgency (Quadrant 4) — Examples may include some social media, TV, emails, texts, and phone calls. We can eliminate some of these, delegate others, and use our non-prime time to deal with the rest.

**4. Accept our limitations — we can't have it all.** Leadership expert John Maxwell recently offered this advice in *Success* magazine, "If you want to be successful as a person and a leader, you must make choices. You must narrow your list. You cannot have it all. No one can." Having a thoughtful personal value system can help us determine between two good choices when we only have time to do one (e.g., choose to excel as a spouse over excelling with our golf game).

**5. Be proactive, not reactive.** The best planners and time managers are proactive, not reactive. Being proactive involves intentionally planning and using our time to accomplish our top goals and priorities. The alternative is to be in a reactive mode where circumstances and others drive what we do, and how we spend our time.

**6. Fight procrastination.** Procrastination is perhaps the major culprit for why people do not complete their work on time (I think we all battle this at times!). Benjamin Franklin advised, "Never leave until tomorrow that which you can do today." One technique to combat procrastination is to tackle the unpleasant parts of our daily task list first — then reward ourselves in some manner (e.g., take a break and walk around; do something enjoyable like having a quick snack or peeking at our favorite social media site).

**7. Working smarter has a higher return than working harder.** We all know peo-

ple that really should be working harder to get more done and add more value. My guess is that you are not one of those — you already work hard! Finding ways to work smarter is what you and I need. Ideas include reducing our time doing Quadrant 3 and 4 activities, delegating when we can, getting better organized, and following the advice of marketing expert Dan Kennedy. He counsels, "Disciplined use of the time everybody else wastes can give you the edge." For example, I just spent 90 minutes waiting to get some work done on my car — instead of wasting time watching TV in the waiting area, I spent the time reading and preparing for future columns and university class lessons.

A big part of working smarter is to be well organized. Tips include keeping a neat work area, use daily planners and calendars, have a system to organize and handle paper and emails, develop a workable filing system (and only file papers and emails that we need for future reference), and whatever else works for us.

**8. Reduce time wasters and distractions.** Whether working in an office or working at home, the potential distractions and time wasters are many — including phones, emails, social media, personal mail, and chatty co-workers. Part of the solution is to practice self-discipline, and take to heart the wisdom shared by Alan Lakein, who said, "Time = Life; therefore waste your time and waste your life, or master your time and master your life." It is also helpful to have designated times to attend to phone messages, emails, personal mail, and the like.

**9. Don't multi-task.** Some people encourage multitasking, but reality is that it is counterproductive. The Latin writer Publius Syrus wrote, "To do two things at once is to do neither." Instead of getting many things done, we often end up getting nothing done. The best way to use our time is to tackle and complete one thing at a time, then jump to the next thing. Mozart reinforces this principle when he said, "The shorter way to do many things is to only do one thing at a time."

**10. Find our peak performance time.** The most skilled time managers tackle their most difficult projects at the time of day when they are at their best. Some of us are at our peak performance early in the morning, others mid-morning, some later in the day. Another tip is to have short bursts (e.g. 20-40 minutes) of intense, focused effort to get a jump start on important tasks.

Motivational speaker Michael Altshuler said, "The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot!" By applying proven time management principles, we can help ensure that our time doesn't just fly away, but is used to intentionally accomplish what we need to be successful! ■

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# LEADING WITH EMPATHY!

## BY WES FRIESEN

What the great philosopher Plato said many years ago is especially relevant today: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." What the people we work with need is kindness, expressing itself via empathy. According to studies carried out by Development Dimensions International (DDI), empathy is the single most important leadership skill that outshines all others.

What is empathy? Top selling author Daniel Pink defines, "Empathy is about standing in someone else's shoes, feeling with his or her heart, seeing with his or her eyes." A similar perspective comes from Daniel Goleman, who is perhaps the world's leading expert on emotional and social intelligence. Goleman defines empathy in three ways: knowing (understanding) what others are feeling; feeling (experiencing) what others are feeling; and responding compassionately (acting) to another's distress. He sums it up this way: "I notice you, I feel with you, and so I act to help you."

Developing and demonstrating empathy has many benefits, including:

▸ We build better relationships with those we lead and work with.
▸ We gain a greater awareness of the needs and problems of people.
▸ We create an environment of open communication and more effective feedback.
▸ Research by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) found that empathy is positively related to job performance (i.e., the higher the empathy, higher the performance).

Psychologists say that empathy is essentially a human trait or quality, and some have a greater propensity for empathy than others. However, the good news is that we can all increase our empathy levels.

## 12 Tips to Increase Empathy

1. **Promote a culture that embraces empathy.** Empathy is an appealing value that all of us appreciate, so why not openly promote and embrace it for your team? We can model empathy, provide training and support, and reinforce desired behaviors. When we spend time identifying key values for our team, consider adding empathy to the list.

2. **Humanize yourself.** We can model transparency and admit our own challenges, shortcomings, and concerns. We can work at being genuinely humble, admit when we mess up, and throw in some self-deprecating humor and show the ability to laugh at ourselves. By doing so, we show we are human and will build trust with people.

3. **Prioritize self-care and model well-being.** We all need to take care of ourselves to avoid burnout and bring our best selves to work and life. We can model this by blocking time in our schedules for self-care, including time for exercise, rest breaks, and taking periodic vacations and other days off. Winston Churchill embraced this concept when, in the darkest days of World War II, he often took an afternoon nap. Some criticized him for his disappearing acts, yet by prioritizing his own energy management, he was able to bring his sharpest thinking to the crisis he faced.

4. **Nurture hope and spread optimism.** Napoleon once said, "Great leaders are dealers in hope." A study by Gallup identified four core needs people look for leaders to meet in challenging times: trust, compassion, stability, and hope. We can nurture hope and optimism by helping people see that even though we are going through a tough time now, we have each other and we can overcome and see better days.

5. **Ask yourself, "What's it like to be this person?"** At its core, empathy is the ability to put yourself in another person's shoes. The tricky part is to assess how they feel in their shoes, not how *you* would feel in their shoes. We can get better at this by spending time to get to know and understand another person and learning what their life is about.

6. **Become an empathetic listener.** To listen empathically, we need to work at paying attention to both the verbal and non-verbal cues that are a part of everyday communication. Practical pointers to be a better listener include: maintaining eye contact and supportive body language, eliminating distractions, asking clarifying questions, and repeating back key thoughts to make sure we understand.

7. **Show compassion when a person discloses a personal loss.** Life happens, and we've all experienced personal loss in its various forms. So even if we can't relate to the specific loss our team member is experiencing, we can show compassion and let them know they're supported.

8. **Say, "That sounds like a real challenge" when people explain difficulties and obstacles.** Before jumping to helping a person find

solutions, start with recognizing and understanding the problem at hand. I like Stephen Covey's principle of "seeking first to understand, then to be understood."

9. **Demonstrate a willingness to help an employee with a personal problem.** Empathetic managers understand that their team members are human beings trying to shoulder personal problems while having to maintain their professional responsibilities. There are obviously some personal problems we should stay away from, but showing support for team members when they need it most is a part of showing empathy.

10. **Invest time understanding concerns – spoken and unspoken.** Being fully present for people is a very important component of showing empathy (the principle of "Be here now"). So even though there are constant pressures to be task-oriented, it is important for

us to make the time to be relationship-oriented. Taking the time to listen and understand concerns creates a psychologically safe environment and builds trust in the relationship.

11). **Acknowledge emotions, "I can see how you might feel this way."** We are all created with a variety of emotions. When a person expresses an emotion (e.g., frustration about something that happened at work), the empathetic response is to acknowledge the emotion and understand why the person feels that way. Once we first show we care and understand, we can then pursue helping the person move forward as appropriate.

12. **Show sincere interest in the needs, hopes, and dreams of others.** Part of leading with empathy involves working to understand the unique needs and goals of each team member. When we follow up our understanding with relevant work assignments, training,

and other support, we foster greater engagement and motivate people to go the extra mile.

Here is a relevant and inspiring quote from Oprah Winfrey: "Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives." Let's go and lead with empathy — the people we work with will benefit and so will we! ■

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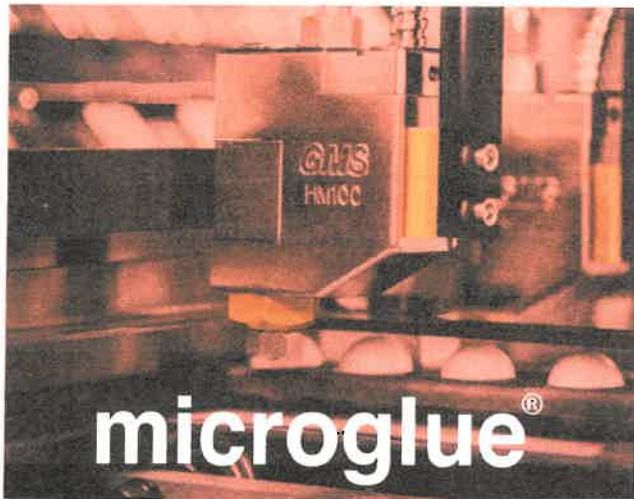
# HOPE: THE PATHWAY TO A BETTER FUTURE!

## BY WES FRIESEN

We all need hope, don't we? Both as individuals and as leaders of teams, hope is critical to our present and future success. What is hope? Dr. Shane Lopez is a university professor, Gallup senior scientist, and perhaps the leading researcher on hope. He simply defines hope as, "the belief that things could be better and that you can make them better." Multiple studies have shown that having hope has many benefits, including increased:

▶ Psychological strength
▶ Workplace performance and productivity
▶ Job satisfaction and better attendance
▶ Happiness
▶ Organizational commitment
▶ Engagement and creativity
▶ Physical and mental health (including less stress and burnout)

How can we develop greater hope within ourselves and others we work with? Let's explore what leading experts like Dr. Lopez and others have discovered as we look at 10 proven ways to develop greater hope within ourselves and our teams:

**1. Lead by example.** There is a concept called "Shadow of the Leader." People look to us in leadership roles and take cues based on what we say and what we do. As leaders, we need to nurture our own optimism and hope, and be an example for the people we influence. The Gallup organization randomly sampled a large group of people and asked them to describe a leader that had the most positive influence in their daily life. The research showed that followers want their leaders to help meet four psychological needs: stability, trust, compassion, and hope. Another Gallup research project found that when leadership didn't make them feel enthusiastic about the future, 99% of employees report feeling disengaged at work!

**2. Share the vision of a better future.** People want to believe they are part of something bigger and are making a positive difference for others. As leaders, we can embrace and share a vision of a better future that can inspire our teams and give them the hope they crave. One benefit of helping people have more hope is they will be more engaged and committed. Dr. Lopez observes, "When you think the future will be better than the present, you start working harder today." Zig Ziglar expressed similar insight when he said, "If there is hope in the future, there is literally power in the present."

**3. Focus on meaningful goals.** We are all inspired by meaningful goals, especially those that we have some input on. When we as leaders participatively set goals that our team members believe in, we have the recipe to inspire and provide hope for a better future. Meaningful goals that inspire emphasize the value we are adding to other people by the work the team does. We also need to set realistic goals that have some stretch but are also attainable. I agree with M.P. Neary's statement, "Realistic thinking is where real hope is found; helping us hit the right balance between realism and aspirations."

**4. Draw attention and celebrate progress and the positive.** One of my favorite principles is "success breeds success." We need to communicate when progress has been made (even when small) and celebrate the positives when they occur. Highlighting progress builds positive momentum and builds upon itself. Our goal is to help people feel good about themselves and the team, and realize that by working together, we have the realistic hope of a better future – no matter what challenges lie before us!

**5. Provide perspective.** Leaders need to provide perspective in at least a couple of ways. First, we need to communicate the value of the work the team does. We need to share how we benefit our key stakeholders (investors, customers, employees, community) and the overall organization we are a part of. Second, when going through challenging times (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic), we need to help people see the bigger picture and the longer term outcomes (e.g., the pandemic is improving and will come to an end). We can embrace and communicate the sentiment expressed by Roy T. Bennett when he said, "Never lose hope. Storms make people stronger and never last forever."

**6. Work to remove obstacles.** Effective leaders need to have high expectations for the future, and a clear-eyed view of the obstacles that we need to overcome in order to get there. A major responsibility we have then is to remove the obstacles that prevent our people from excelling. Obstacles can include: economic fluctuations; changes in personnel; inadequate "tools" (e.g., equipment, hardware, software, etc.); overly restrictive policies; faulty processes; challenges with work-life balance; or unresolved conflicts with people from other departments.

**7. Prepare for contingencies ("what ifs").** Life brings a mix of positive and negative experiences as well as planned and unplanned events. One approach to potential negative future events is to

focus on worry. But I like the wisdom expressed by Winston Churchill when he said, "Let our advance worrying become advance thinking and planning." That is where Contingency Planning, which primarily focuses on the potential negative, unplanned events that come our way, is helpful. We can proactively prepare for many potential contingencies — such as economic fluctuations, bad weather events, changes in staffing, supply chain disruptions and others. We can make time to brainstorm with our teams, key support staff, and vendors about potential contingencies, then partner together to develop plans if needed. Having contingency plans in place ahead of time can be a source of hope when the unexpected happens.

**8. Build "pathways thinking."** Pathways thinking refers to the ability to generate various routes (paths) from the present to the desired future. We can help people and our teams generate options and possibilities and not get stuck on only one route, which may be blocked. The reality is there are often multiple routes to accomplish our individual and team goals. Being able to identify these different routes, and having plans to deal with the potential obstacles that might arise, is critical to being hopeful. As author Gil Frondau has commented, "Just highlighting possibilities and listing them down can be a helpful way of promoting pathways thinking."

**9. Be a sounding board.** Bennett once said, "Sometimes all a person wants is an empathetic ear; all he or she needs is to talk it out. Just offering a listening ear and an understanding heart for his or her challenges can be a big comfort." We can be both a listening ear and a sounding board to help people work through uncertainty and be open to new possibilities. We can create a psychologically safe environment where people can be transparent and candidly share their concerns and not be judged. This is where embracing the servant leader mindset is helpful — as leaders, we are here to serve the people we lead.

**10. Demonstrate confidence in people.** When we demonstrate confidence and trust in people, most people will live up to those expectations (i.e., "Pygmalion effect"). We all want to be treated with respect, and empowering people to make decisions they feel comfortable with shows respect and builds confidence and a sense of hope.

Leadership expert and bestselling author John Maxwell makes a key point, "When there is no hope in the future, there is no power in the present". As leaders, let's be "dealers in hope" and help our teams experience both a better present AND a better future! ■

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# QUALITY IS JOB ONE!

## BY WES FRIESEN

**M**ost of us likely remember the well-publicized Ford tagline, "Quality is Job One!" (which Ford used in advertising for nearly 20 years, and their latest CEO recently brought back for internal purposes). No matter what operations we are involved with, pursuing high quality is essential.

What is quality? A simple definition is, "quality is providing products or services that customers need, and that are free from deficiencies and errors." Studies have shown (and experts agree) that high quality has many benefits, including increased:
- Customer value
- Customer satisfaction
- Customer loyalty
- Repeat business
- Employee pride

Another motivation to pursue quality is for us to avoid the costs of poor quality, which include:
- Excess scrap and waste material
- Repairs and rework on defective or damaged products
- Overtime costs
- Machine downtime
- Decreased employee engagement
- Brand (reputation) damage

### Principles to Improve Quality and Performance

How can we improve our quality and performance? I suggest we need to consider the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) key principles to improve quality and performance, which are summarized in the ISO 9001:2015 Statement. Included are:

**1. Customer Focus.** Sam Walton wisely said, "There is only one boss. The customer." The primary focus of quality management is to meet and strive to exceed customer expectations for our products and services. This principle applies to whatever internal or external customers we are privileged to serve. We need to understand what our customer needs and wants are, then create value for them (and us!) by delivering on those needs. How do we know what customers need and expect? Ask them. We can better understand our customers by using tools like customer surveys, focus groups, 1-1 meetings, and reviewing unsolicited customer feedback (e.g., emails, letters/notes, phone calls).

**2. Leadership.** John Maxwell's key principle that, "Everything rises or falls based on the quality of leadership" rings true. Leaders should establish unity of purpose and direction, and create a culture where our team members are actively pursuing our quality objectives. Creating a culture of quality is huge, as quality guru Philip Crosby emphasized by saying, "Quality is the result of a carefully constructed cultural environment. It has to be the fabric of the organization, not part of the fabric." W. Edwards Deming is considered the father of the Quality movement. One of his key sayings is, "Quality is everyone's responsibility". The best leaders create a culture where every person believes this and takes personal responsibility for the quality of our products and services.

**3. People Involvement.** A key principle that I teach and try to follow is, "Change imposed is change opposed." We need to involve our team members and support staff, and empower and engage them in making quality a priority. Frankly, most of the best ideas to improve the quality in our processes and our products and services come from the people doing the work — so let's ask them for their ideas and input! We also need to help our team members understand and own the quality goals and the why beneath them. I resonate with Elon Musk's quote that, "People work better when they know what the goal is and why. It is important that people look forward to coming to work in the morning and enjoy working." One of my favorite management memories was when one of my teams, on their own initiative, developed their team tagline, "Pride and Quality!". The team took ownership for their quality and took pride in providing exceptional customer service!

**4. Process Approach.** We need to understand and manage all our processes, and collaboratively work with our teams and support staff to seek ongoing improvements. Deming once stated, "Eight-five percent of the reasons for failure and deficiency are in the systems and processes rather than the employee. The role of management is to change the process rather than badgering individuals to do better."

One idea to better understand processes is to pursue earning belts from Six Sigma. To get started, you can Google for inexpensive online training that can lead to earning the first level white belt (later belts include yellow, green, black, and master black). One Six Sigma process improvement tool we can use is the DMAIC approach. The components include:

**D - Define the Problem.** In the first phase, various problems that need to be addressed are clearly defined. Feedbacks are taken from customers as to what they feel about a particular product or service. Feedbacks are carefully monitored to understand problem areas and their root causes.

**M - Measure and find out the key points of the current process.** Once the problem is identified, employees collect relevant data that would give an insight into current processes.

**A - Analyze the data.** The information collected in the second stage is thoroughly verified. The root cause of the defects is carefully studied and investi-

gated to find out how they are affecting the entire process.

**I - Improve the current processes** based on the research and analysis done in the previous stage. Efforts are made to create new projects that would ensure superior quality.

**C - Control the processes** so that they do not lead to defects.

Other practical tools that are valuable include checklists and flowcharts.

**5. Continual Improvement.** Successful organizations and teams embrace the Continuous Improvement mindset — which means to avoid complacency and continually seek ways to make improvements in how we do our work. We can support this continuous improvement mindset by educating and training people on the benefits and practical tools. Tracking mutually agreed upon performance measures can help build accountability and provide the opportunity to celebrate and recognize progress. To sum up, quality is a continuous race to improvement with no finish line!

**6. Factual Approach to Decision Making.** There is a place for "gut instincts"

and qualitative assessments on how our teams are performing and for making decisions. That being said, the best-performing organizations and teams use data and information to help assess performance and make better reasoned decisions. We can pursue the ability to track and then analyze customer and operational performance data and information gathered from performance reports, surveys, meetings, and other helpful sources. Charts like Control and Pareto can be helpful too.

**7. Supplier Relationship Management.** For sustained success, we need to have positive working relationships with our suppliers and vendors. Some key ways to develop good relationships with suppliers are to treat them as valued business partners, look for wins-wins, think long-term not just short-term, share information and expertise, encourage and recognize improvements by them, and regularly express appreciation. One idea to consider is to collaboratively develop vendor scorecards, then meet on a periodic basis to discuss what is going well and where improvement opportunities exist.

William A. Foster said, "Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives." I agree. Let's intentionally pursue quality and enjoy the benefits to our teams and the customers we serve! ■

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# THE PYGMALION EFFECT: WE GET WHAT WE EXPECT!

## BY WES FRIESEN

Henry Ford once said, "Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right." His quote illustrates the power of self-fulfilling prophecies, which is at the core of something called the Pygmalion Effect. Researchers and practitioners have found that people tend to perform up (or down) to the level that others expect of them. If the leader of a team conveys positive belief and expectations in her team, positive results will likely occur (that is the Pygmalion Effect). The opposite is also true: if the leader projects a lack of belief and negative expectations in her team, negative results are likely to occur (that is called the Golem Effect). Understanding and applying the Pygmalion Effect is very important to our success and the success of our teams!

### It Starts with the Manager

Managers and leaders need to believe in ourselves that we have the ability to inspire, develop, and positively influence our teams (the effect of believing in yourself is called the Galatea Effect). Harvard professor J. Sterling Livingston explains: "What managers believe about themselves subtly influences what they believe about their subordinates, what they expect of them, and how they will treat them. If they have confidence in their ability to develop and stimulate subordinates to high levels of performance, they will expect much of them and treat them with confidence that their expectations will be met. But if they have doubts about their ability to stimulate subordi-

nates, they will expect less of them and will treat them with less confidence."

We also need to make sure we believe in the potential of our teams and the individual members. Consider questions such as, "Do I believe that team member skills and performance can be improved with effort? Do I believe that team members can be inspired to make that effort?" I would suggest that virtually all people have untapped potential and can be even more successful. Author Brad Smith put it this way, "A leader's job is not to put greatness into people, but rather to recognize that it already exists, and to create an environment where the greatness can emerge and grow."

The first significant research on the Pygmalion Effect was completed by Harvard researcher Robert Rosenthal in educational settings. He found (and subsequent researchers validated) that, "When we expect certain behaviors of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behavior more likely to occur." As leaders, we get what we expect and will consciously and subconsciously act in ways to help make the expectations happen.

### Strategies to Apply the Pygmalion Effect

How can we use the Pygmalion Effect to improve the confidence and performance of our teams?

**1. Set high expectations, but not too high.** Business expert Charles Kettering emphasized, "High achievement always

takes place in the framework of high expectations." Our job as leaders is to clarify and set expectations so our teams know what success looks like. When we set high expectations that our teams buy into, everybody can work together to meet those expectations and feel good about the results that come. Research has shown that it is important for the expectations to have some stretch, but at the same time be realistic. Specifically, research by Harvard University and the University of Michigan found that the degree of motivation and effort rises until the expectancy of success reaches 50%, then begins to fall after that even though the expectancy of success continues to increase. The key to maximizing motivation, effort, and performance is to have goals that are neither too easy nor are considered too hard (unrealistic) to attain.

**2. Give people a great reputation to live up to.** In *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie recommends, "Giving others a great reputation to live up to." As leaders, we can cast a vision of our teams being high-performing and excelling, then actively work to help our teams own the vision and build a reputation they can be proud of.

**3. Use confident language.** We can express our confidence to our teams that we believe they are qualified and able to meet the goals and expectations we have agreed upon. I'm sure you have had experiences like mine when a boss or someone we respect expresses confidence in us, and we rise to the occasion. Norman Vincent Peale once said, "People become really quite remarkable when they start thinking they can do things. When they believe in themselves, they have the first secret of success." We have the privilege to help people believe in themselves!

**4. Provide positive feedback and reinforcement.** Esteemed management expert Michael LeBoeuf has identified what he terms the Greatest Management Principle in the World. The principle? "Things that get rewarded get done." This is similar to what psychologists like BF Skinner have found and named "positive reinforcement" – if a behavior gets a favorable outcome or reward, that behavior will likely be repeated. As leaders, when we see individuals and teams meet or exceed expectations, let's positively reinforce

and reward with our words and our actions. Sincere words of praise cost little but can have great value. Adding positive actions (rewards) further reinforces the desired outcomes and behaviors. Rewards can be as simple as bringing in pizza or more substantive such as handing out gift cards or bonuses.

**5. Celebrate achievements.** One of my favorite principles is that "success breeds success." When we take the time to celebrate achievements of our individuals and teams, it reinforces the accomplishment, builds confidence, and motivates people to want more of that success.

**6. Promote positive gatherings.** We can set a positive example by using team meeting time to compliment and build the confidence of our folks. During team meetings, we can make time for people to share positive accomplishments they are proud of. We can also encourage team members to compliment and express appreciation to others — both privately and in team meetings.

**7. Wipe the slate clean.** Do any of you ever make mistakes? Me, too. Mistakes

can provide great learning opportunities. I like the sentiment expressed by Michael Alter (President of SurePayroll) when he stated, "Mistakes are the tuition you pay for success." And the great basketball coach John Wooden said, "If you're not making mistakes, then you're not doing anything. I'm positive that a doer makes mistakes." Repeated careless mistakes need to be dealt with, but proactive mistakes should be used as learning opportunities, and then forgiven and slates wiped clean.

**8. Train and coach.** To help our teams reach the expectations we are striving for, we need to ensure that our folks have the skills and abilities needed. It's up to us to proactively get the training our folks need and provide encouraging coaching along the way. I resonate with this quote from Virgin CEO Richard Branson, "Train your people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to." We can tap into available training provided by our company's HR departments and supplement with additional training as needed. It's also valuable to cover technical and "hard skill" training, along with "soft

skill" training, covering topics like effectiveness, relationship building, and time management.

Pygmalion expert and University professor Dov Eden sums up by saying, "Leaders get the performance they expect". Let's expect great things from our teams and enjoy the success that follows! ∎

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*His book, Your Team Can Soar!, has 42 valuable lessons that will inspire you and give you practical pointers to help you — and your team — soar to new heights of performance. Your Team Can Soar! can be ordered from Xulonpress.com/bookstore or wesfriesen.com (under Book) or an online retailer. Wes can be contacted at wesmfriesen@gmail.com or at 971.806.0812.*

# ARE YOU UP TO THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE?

BY WES FRIESEN

love leadership because when done well, it can truly make the world a better place. As I write this, I am in the midst of teaching a university course on leadership. The primary book we are using is a superb primer on leadership entitled, *The Leadership Challenge*, and it is based on over 30 years of research by James Kouzes and Barry Posner from Santa Clara University. Their study of what practices the best leaders do has included input from over one million people! *The Leadership Challenge* is about leaders mobilizing others to want to achieve extraordinary things in an organization. I say, let's rise up to the leadership challenge and help make positive differences in the workplaces and the world we engage in!

Kouzes and Posner have identified five key practices (what they call "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership") that, when done consistently, will lead to great results — for the leader and her team members, and the stakeholders that the team serves. In fact, the leaders that consistently perform the five practices have 95.8% of their direct reports that are highly engaged, compared to only 4.2% of direct reports that are highly engaged when their leaders only use the five practices occasionally. Using these five practices can increase high engagement 23 times compared to not using regularly! My experiences, as well as the experiences of my students and other managers, are certainly in line with these statistics.

Before looking at these five important practices, let's discuss the four most desired characteristics that people look for in their leaders. Keep in mind John Maxwell's statement that, "People buy into the leaders before they buy into the vision." After 30 years of research and after a million-plus surveys, these four characteristics consistently rise to the top of what people desire:

▶ *Honest* (aka integrity, authenticity). First and foremost, people want a leader who is honest, authentic, and acts with integrity.
▶ *Competent.* People want a leader who has a track record and ability to get things done.
▶ *Inspiring.* People desire a leader who is enthusiastic, passionate, and positive about future possibilities.
▶ *Forward-looking.* People expect leaders to have a sense of direction and concern for the future. Leaders must know where they are going if they want others to join them on the journey.

Kouzes and Posner suggest that credibility is the foundation of leadership, and I agree! I teach the 3 Cs approach to being a successful leader: Character, Competence, and Chemistry. The four characteristics above speak to character; the five practices below speak to leadership competence, and chemistry involves pursuing positive relationships and leading with love. Leaders inspire and mobilize others to want to act because of the credibility we have.

## The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

*Model the Way.* The starting place for modeling the way is for us to clarify our own key values and leadership philosophy. I aspire to be a servant leader, which, in a nutshell, emphasizes that leaders are here to serve others, and not have the traditional perspective that others are here to serve us. Along with clarifying our personal values, we need to identify and affirm shared values within our team(s). Once values are clarified, the next key commitment we need is to set a positive example. This includes consistently following the identified values, and when we occasionally fall short, being humble and transparent and admitting our shortcomings. Remember, people desire honest, authentic leaders who lead and act with integrity.

*Inspire a Shared Vision.* To be an exemplary leader that inspires people, we must be able to imagine a positive future. The best leaders are forward-looking and envision a future that excites people and motivates them to want to pursue it. But the vision of a better future can't belong only to the leader — it must be owned and shared by the team members. As leaders, we must develop and inspire a shared vision. Ken Blanchard counseled, "The greatest leaders mobilize others by coalescing people around a shared vision."

To develop a shared vision, we must listen carefully to what people have to say and how they feel. When we involve people in developing a future vision and related goals, we get two main benefits: 1) buy-in (sense of ownership) and 2) a higher quality product compared to us as leaders developing a vision and goals in a vacuum. When promoting the vision, we need to not only appeal to people's "heads," we also need to appeal to people's "hearts" (emotions). Explaining how the vision benefits others is one way to appeal to hearts and build more enthusiasm among our team members.

*Challenge the Process.* We need to look for opportunities to make positive changes to improve our processes and better serve our stakeholders. Many of the best ideas to make improvements can come from our front-line team members that are doing the bulk of the work. How do we get these ideas? Ask them. We also should be looking for ideas outside our organization. We have multiple sources we can utilize: trade journals

(like this one!), professional organizations like PCCs and MSMA, conferences like National Postal Forum and MAILCOM, and books (like *Your Team Can Soar!* Sorry for the shameless plug!). We also need to experiment and take risks. My philosophy is to "be reasonably leading edge, but not bleeding edge." Another tip: generate small wins and celebrate them when they come. Small improvements that are recognized can build momentum and lead to bigger successes down the road.

*Enable Others to Act.* Great success is never achieved through the actions of a single person. Achieving greatness requires a team effort. We need to foster a culture of collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. Remember the saying, "there is no I in team!" Or, as Andrew Carnegie stated, "No man will be a great leader who wants to do it all himself, or to get all the credit for doing it."

We can build trust by extending trust to others, showing concern for people, sharing knowledge and information, being honest, and doing what we say we will do. We can build better relationships by practicing the Golden Rule (treating others

positively like we appreciate) and practicing the 3 Rs (Recognize people for who they are and the value they bring; Reward people in ways they appreciate; and show Respect). We also need to strengthen others by providing helpful training and development opportunities, and by positive coaching that builds competence and confidence.

*Encourage the Heart.* Genuine acts of caring draw people forward. People want to feel valued and esteemed by their leaders. I agree with Sam Walton's statement, "Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it's amazing what they can accomplish." One way to help people feel valued is to recognize their contributions. And to make recognition valued, we should personalize it whenever possible, and be specific, timely, and sincere. A common complaint about recognition is that it's often mundane, impersonal, and not sincere. Let's avoid falling into that trap! People also want to feel they are part of a winning team, so let's make sure we take time to celebrate the victories and accomplishments along the way.

The closing statement by Kouzes and Posner really resonates with me: "The best-kept secret of successful leaders is love: staying in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations provide, and with those who honor the organization by using its products and services." ∎

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