

leadership instalments

The Power of Encouragement

By Dan Gaynor

WITH THIS INSTALMENT, I AM TURNING MY attention to one of my favorite leadership verbs: encourage. This act is among the simplest and most powerful of all leadership habits. The most effective leaders are great encouragers. Oxford defines it this way, “give courage, confidence or hope to” When you encourage others you are quite literally, building courage. No team was ever more effective with less courage.

While encouragement is always important, it is absolutely vital right now. I cannot think of another act that could be simpler and more important as we battle through an economic downturn that has many people worried and distracted. As I have said before and will repeat often, every team’s performance is a reflection of its leadership. And every leader’s actions are a product of his or her heart. This is true of the leader’s performance as an encourager. Many fail badly in this and their team’s performance always reflects it.

There are really three ways leaders respond to hard times: some act in ways that discourage others, some are more neutral (they don’t discourage but they don’t encourage either) and finally, the best are good encouragers.

Leaders who discourage others often have selfish hearts. They think more about their own needs than they do about their teams and their missions. The most effective leaders always put the team and its mission ahead of themselves. There are so many ways leaders discourage others. In tough times, they may become despondent and self-absorbed, or they may expect the impossible and then get angry when people don’t deliver it. I’m sure you can add several thoughts to the many ways poor leaders discourage their teams, You’ve probably worked for a few, they are common. The result is always the same - people either quit or they “stay and quit”. They put in time but not energy or quality.

The neutral ground leader may not be actively discouraging his team but she is not encouraging it either. Most often, these leaders are guilty of spending too much time in their offices. They are not mean-spirited, but they are not thinking about what their team really needs either. In tough times like we face today this response can also create problems. Without encouragement, the team wears down and their



performance becomes lackluster at the very time they need to be focused and working hard.

The ideal response is of course to provide the encouragement the team needs to recharge batteries and push on through the storm. Leaders with caring hearts do this much more naturally. Because they are focused on the team’s needs they see quickly when people are down and they reach out to pick them up. This is among the most important and fundamental roles for every leader. It is at the heart of building motivation. In staff meetings and personal discussions, these leaders help others see that victory is possible and within reach. They express confidence in their teams. People don’t like to disappoint leaders like this. You may have worked for a few of this description, they are less common.

To build more encouragement into your leadership habits you must get out to the front lines. You cannot build courage in others from behind your desk. Spend more time on the shop floor and make sure you are scheduling regular staff updates. Give yourself opportunities to be with people. Bring encouragement. You will provide the hope and energy your team needs to get through this storm and you’ll build stronger more committed relationships at the same time.

Discussion questions:

1. How much time are you spending on the front lines these days?
2. How would you have to change your routines to get more time with the people you lead?
3. Which phrases, ideas or thoughts will you express to bring hope and encouragement?

For information on a workshop or personal coaching to help you lead your team through this storm contact us for an appointment.

For other Leadership Instalments articles go to:
www.gaynorconsulting.com

Dan Gaynor can be contacted at:
tel 403.880.1780
email dan@gaynorconsulting.com