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LEADERSHIP AND MOTIVATION: Challenging Your People to Succeed

By John Baldoni

Nothing fuels the human spirit so much as a challenge. Whether it is an athlete seeking to overcome the odds, or a CEO trying to reinvigorate his company, nothing motivates people more than having a goal. For individuals, goals emerge from inside; they are formed around what makes us happy, which may be recognition of our efforts, increased financial rewards, or the inner glow that emerges when we do a good turn for someone. For organizations, goals emerge from a combination of circumstance and leadership. The circumstance is the situation in which the organization operates; it is shaped by market, social and competitive factors. Leaders of those organizations size up their organization and decide *where* it must go and *how* it must get there. But leaders do not do this by themselves; they do it with the collective energy of the people in the organization.

Make the challenge clear. The secret to issuing a challenge is to make it clear and then demonstrate how people can attain it. When you keep things simple, not simple-minded, you can ensure that the mission remains clear, coherent, and compelling. Leaders must make the challenge real and tangible for everyone in the organization.

Identify opportunities. Every child is asked what do you want to be when you grow up? Leaders of organizations need to ask themselves the very same question. Entrepreneurs excel at these questions because it is those questions that give rise to the business. For example, Fred Smith thought it would be possible to create a direct shipping network that could offer next day delivery. Michael Dell wondered how he might apply the direct-selling model to personal computers. Jeff Bezos conceived the possibility of a global online bookstore. Such thinking spawned Federal Express, Dell Computer, and Amazon respectively.

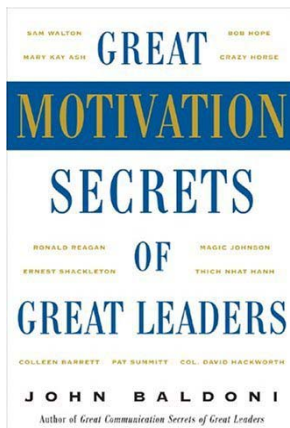
Frame the challenge. Once an opportunity is selected the leader needs to bring others into the act. They must frame the organizational challenge as an opportunity for personal growth. One of the best ways to motivate people is to give them a challenge. The

challenge may be in the form of a new project, such as developing a new marketing plan, or it may be a process, discovering new ways of doing things. Some organizations call them “stretch goals,” meaning they expand an individual’s capability. At pharmaceutical companies, challenges are a way of life – discovering new compounds to use for next generation drugs. It is a high risk and high reward enterprise but it fosters a strong culture of creativity and innovation. In short people are motivated to succeed because conditions around them foster their own innate desires to achieve. Managers who seek the right challenges for their people will achieve good success if support those challenges with the right blend of delegation and support.

Make the challenge real but attainable. Every challenge needs to reach for the sky, otherwise it will fail to capture the imagination of those who can make it happen. Ari Weinzweig and Paul Saginaw of Zingerman’s have found a terrific way to make entrepreneurial dreams come true for their employees by giving them a stake in new business opportunities. That is how they company expanded from a delicatessen into other food related businesses. They turned the challenge of keeping good people into a business opportunity and supported them along the way. By contrast, if the challenge is too far out there, instead of inspiring people you only frustrate them.

The creative organization

Identifying, framing and supporting challenges is in essence a balancing act, but one way to keep people focused is to engage their creative spirit. Creativity complements the challenge. All too often we tend to think of creativity as something reserved for college students who don’t have a clue about what to do or to artists who hover in a zone between reality and fantasy. That misconception is costly. The human condition has evolved because of man’s perpetual striving for new, different and better ways of doing things. If this were not the case, our toolbox would consist of nothing more than a single hammer. Creativity is the pursuit of ideas. It spurs innovation, which you may consider as the application of an idea into an action, e.g. moving from electronic scanning to television, voice over wire to telephony, or Internet to e-commerce. Managers play an essential role in stimulating creativity by encouraging their people to think for themselves, peppering their minds with new ideas, and finding ways to stimulate creative juices through a free exchange of ideas.



There is an innate desire in all of us to succeed. It falls to the leader to unlock that desire and channel to the organization’s best purpose. In doing so, she weaves the individual’s need for success with the organization’s need to achieve results for its customers and constituents. When challenges are issued and then managed and supported with concern a creativity much can be accomplished. Conditions for motivation flourish and people and organizations flourish.

Note: This article is adapted from ideas expressed in John Baldoni’s newly published *Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders*, McGraw-Hill, 2005. He can be reached at john@johnbaldoni.com or through his website [here](#).