

Inspirational Leadership

An inspired and motivated workforce is essential for any business that hopes to stay ahead of the competition. But just how do you motivate people? What kind of leadership do people respond to? And how can you improve the quality of leadership in your business?

This document looks at what makes for best practice in leadership and how businesses can apply the lessons to their own organisations.

This document is for: any business that wants to improve its performance by inspiring its people.

It covers: the effects of inspiring leadership and the personal characteristics and attributes of great leaders.

It provides you with a link to The Inspirational Leadership Insight Tool to help you to identify your core skills and attributes in relation to your leadership style and tells you how you can build on those strengths.

The Inspiration Gap

In a survey of more than one and a half thousand managers, people were asked what they would most like to see in their leaders. The most popular answer, mentioned by 55% of people, was 'inspiration'.

When asked if they would describe their current leader as 'inspiring', only 11% said yes. The two attributes that people actually mentioned most often when describing their leaders were 'knowledgeable' and 'ambitious'.

Quality of leadership is critical to company performance and the competitiveness of the UK economy as a whole. Most people will, unfortunately, have worked for a poor leader at some time in their career – and their discontent and lack of productivity makes the case. Some will have worked for an average leader and perhaps wondered how their boss made it to that position. The lucky ones will have worked with a leader who has inspired them and the difference shows in their commitment to the organisation and their high level of motivation as a result of being truly valued.

This fulfilment translates directly to the bottom line and there is substantive evidence to confirm that organisations with inspiring leaders at all levels perform better.

The Sunday Times publishes an annual survey of the 'Best Companies to Work For', which is compiled from the opinions of the companies' own employees. One interesting fact is that those 'Best Companies' that are publicly quoted consistently outperform the FTSE All-Share Index. The 'Best Companies to Work For' have also performed impressively on sickness rates, absenteeism, and the ability to recruit good quality people.

What Makes an Inspiring Leader

The stereotype of the inspirational leader as someone who is extrovert and charismatic tends to be the exception rather than the rule. Looking at best practice across business suggests that, though some inspirational leaders certainly do fit this mould, a large number do not. Many are quiet, almost introverted.

The following are some of the most commonly observed characteristics of inspiring leaders:

Strong Strategic Focus

They are very good at ensuring that the business only does those things where it has the resources to do a good job and where it can add real value.

Lateral Thinkers

They are particularly adept at drawing on experiences outside their own sectors and taking a much broader view than the norm. They look at things very laterally and encourage their people to do the same.

Vision and Communication

An inspirational leader has a very strong, customer-focused vision of where the business should be going. Importantly they are also able to communicate their vision so that their people feel they own it and know where they fit into it. The best leaders are great communicators who prefer plain speaking to jargon.

Principled

They are deeply committed, courageous, demanding of themselves and their people and confident, albeit often in a quiet and under-stated way. What singles them out is an exceptionally strong set of values built on honesty, openness and true respect for their people.

Inspirational Leadership

Reflective

What distinguishes them is genuine humility and not being afraid to show vulnerability on occasions. This comes from regular periods of reflection and an unquenchable thirst for learning.

Risk Takers

They have a marked tendency to 'bend the rules', take calculated risks, and, on occasions, be guided by their gut-feelings. They also tolerate this in other people, recognising that a certain amount of flexibility is essential to adapt to circumstances and make real strides forward.

Accessible

They make time to get out and speak to people. This informal and personal contact is a very powerful motivator. Equally, when they are at their own desk, they aren't cosseted behind a wall of PAs.

Value Attitude

They value skills and training very highly, but they also focus heavily on attitude, believing that, without the right attitude and motivation, nothing will be achieved.

Why People Respond to Leaders

In the previous section, we looked at the qualities of inspiring leaders. The question is, why do these traits produce results?

Pay is only one component of job satisfaction. Other factors like respect and being valued can be tremendously important in making staff feel good about their jobs. The reason that inspiring leadership produces results is that it contributes directly to fulfilling many of people's emotional needs.

The following are some of the ways that best practice in leadership contributes to improved job satisfaction, motivation and productivity.

Being Listened To

A business where only senior managers are allowed to 'have ideas', rarely achieves great staff satisfaction. Inspirational leaders ask for, and respect, what their people tell them about how to do things better, and they provide the resources to ensure that the solutions are delivered.

Being Involved

Inspirational leaders involve their people in changes for them to be a success. They give their people the freedom and support to get on with the job. When you walk around these companies, there is an electricity in the air – you can feel the energy and buzz.

Having Fun

In successful companies, people work hard but enjoy themselves in the process. Fun is a great indicator that an organisation is innovative and is also a key innovation driver. At the 'Best Companies to Work For' you see a lot of fun at work.

Being Trusted

It's no coincidence that, when you ask people what it is like to work in an organisation run by an inspirational leader, they talk about openness, honesty, respect and trust. These firms can boast highly committed staff who have a great sense of responsibility to their work.

Being Appreciated

Recognition is an absolutely crucial element of inspiration, and few things are more powerful, or simple, than a genuine 'thank you'. Inspirational leaders know that it's vital that people feel appreciated and valued, so they show their appreciation through extensive celebration of success – both formally and informally.

Valuing and Being Valued

The best leaders promote a culture where their people value themselves, each other, the company and the customers. Everyone understands how their work makes a difference. This helps to build a commitment to higher standards where everybody is always looking to do things better.

Inspirational Leadership

Next Steps

Achieving best practice in your business is a key theme within the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils' approach to business support solutions, providing ideas and insights into how you can improve performance across your business. By showing what works in other businesses, we can help you see what can help you, and then support you in implementation.

Inspirational Leadership Insight Tool

The Inspirational Leadership Insight Tool has been developed by the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform working closely with the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils and a number of Lead Partners to help improve UK competitiveness.

It is the result of extensive in-depth research with a number of inspirational leaders, hundreds of 'followers' and leading executive search consultants.

This on-line tool enables leaders and potential leaders like you to quickly and easily obtain a profile of their inspirational and motivational strengths. You also gain an insight into your less naturally strong areas so that you can more effectively lead and positively influence others.

Critically, it provides personalised guidance on how to become a more inspirational leader and it does this by:

- Helping you to have a better understanding of your natural leadership strengths.
- Making you aware of areas of leadership that do not come to you so naturally so that you know and recognise these issues.
- Encouraging you to shape your leadership as much as possible around what you do well.

It can be used on an individual basis or with others in the team context to help enhance performance and improve your bottom-line.

So how inspirational are you?

Visit www.inspiredleadership.org.uk to find out. It will take only thirty minutes to complete your profile but it could improve your leadership performance for good.

Once you have your profile we strongly recommend that you get it put in context by an approved practitioner as you will find that this will add tremendous value and help you to put any improvements you might want to make into practice. For more information, contact nigelcrouch@f2s.com or visit <http://www.sfbn-mandl.org.uk>.