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Business Leader Magazine - September 2007

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Generating Confidence For Your Job

Business Leader Magazine - (September 2007)

Think back to a particular moment when you felt your most confident. How did you feel in that moment? People often describe those special moments with words such as strong, capable, satisfied, committed or motivated — all positive and encouraging words.

When asked what led to that feeling of confidence, people often mention a special person or mentor who has helped them believe that they were worthy, talented or capable enough to succeed.

For example, my 16-year-old son, Kevin, recently spent two weeks as a small-group enabler with middle-school students attending Massanetta Springs Youth Conference in Virginia, and returned a noticeably more confident and self-assured young man from this environment of total encouragement, energy, and support. Imagine the level of employee commitment and productivity that would result if we could duplicate that environment inside every organization.

Our world continues to move at a faster and more unpredictable pace, and this series of articles is intended to provide useful insight into some of the strategies and best practices for adapting and thriving in a more turbulent environment. Generating confidence is one of the fundamental responsibilities of effective leaders today, and the second of five key drivers of organizational agility in the AGILE Model.

Winning Organizations Generate Confidence

Whether it is a business or sports team, there is ample evidence to suggest that successful organizations share a stronger sense of confidence in their missions, leadership and team members. Rosabeth Kanter, a highly respected Harvard professor and author, describes confidence as the cornerstone of success within winning organizations and leaders from all fields in her recent book, "Confidence."

There appears to be at least three key dimensions to this notion of generating confidence that might apply to an organization: Line of sight, unconditional respect and positive optimism.

Line of sight is a clear awareness and understanding of team members' responsibilities and how what they do affects the success equation of an entire organization. It helps create a sense of connectedness for each person in the organization, and is part of the nuclear fuel that drives employee engagement, customer loyalty and ultimate profitability.

Respect is a core tenet for employee engagement and generating confidence. It is commonly known that one of the main reasons workers vote for union representation is a perceived lack of respect from management.

Unconditional respect embodies a commitment to a set of core values around unbiased fair treatment of individuals, as well as a shared accountability for the team wherein leaders set the ground rules. Bob Seelert, former CEO of Kayser-Roth and Saatchi & Saatchi, has set an example of communicating respect for all employees by actively sharing the business' vision and roadmap with all employees, and asking for their active involvement and help.

Positive optimism is a sense of possibility that drives entrepreneurs and others to accomplish great things. There is ample research demonstrating the direct value of optimism for improved organizational performance, as well as enhanced personal health and happiness.

Great leaders fuel organizational optimism with continual encouragement and support for climbing to higher levels of achievement. As an example, High Point University certainly has benefited from Nido Quebin's positive optimism. Along with optimism comes accountability. If you want to be the best, then you must expect the best.

Generating confidence often represents a leadership responsibility that cannot be delegated, especially when things become challenging. Helping organizations become more agile and resilient depends on leaders who can continuously stoke the confidence fires inside all employees. Confidence leads to a winning culture, which can lead to a legacy of success — but it begins one person at a time. How are you doing?

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