

THE ENERGISING LEADER

A practical guide to releasing
the energy of your people

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Foreword



“Talent is extremely important. It’s like a sports team, the team that has the best individual player will often win, but then there’s a multiplier from how those players work together and the strategy they employ.”

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ELON MUSK
Founder of Tesla and SpaceX
Business magnate and inventor

In the past, effective leadership has focused on finding and developing people with a defined list of desirable traits including charisma, decisiveness and strategic mindedness. However, this approach to leadership is dated and there is little evidence to support the claim that leaders have the same set of characteristics. There has also been a focus on developing well-rounded leaders, although the search for ‘unicorn leaders’ who can do everything equally well has been just as misguided.

In today’s hyper-competitive, complex and fast-changing environment, leaders can’t be superheroes or all-rounders. Rather, they need to optimise their unique strengths and be workplace energisers, unlocking the energy, opinions and ideas of others to deliver excellent results and value to customers/stakeholders.

Great leaders know how to identify and unlock the natural strengths of their people. At companies like Channel 4, PhotoBox, Camelot, ASOS and Facebook, leaders consciously identify and stretch people in areas of natural strength. They coach employees to discover and optimise their strengths by doing more of the work they love. Rather than expecting people to be well-rounded or over-emphasising weaker areas, they challenge them to excel in areas of strength. They don’t ignore risks and blockers to their people’s performance, helping them to reduce or mitigate these in positive and empowering ways without dwelling on them.

As Liz Wiseman pointed out in her bestselling book **Multipliers: How the best leaders make everyone smarter**, great leaders are “genius makers” who put the spotlight on their people and invest in coaching, delegating, supporting and inspiring them to be the best they can possibly be so that they can enjoy the glory of their success. At a time when people are being stretched almost to breaking point, the best leaders understand the need to regulate energy and provide people with opportunities to rest, recover and reflect. They encourage people to take time off during holidays and to disconnect insofar as possible during these periods. They organise work to ensure people are not working at full pace continuously and prioritise opportunities to reflect, plan and review work.

Just like a winning Olympic sports team, high performing workplaces are dependent on the optimisation of people’s energy, skills and ideas. To cultivate a winning team, leaders must learn to be workplace energisers, as well as effective strategists and problem-solvers. This involves identifying and developing people’s strengths and skills, ensuring alignment with the company’s purpose, maximising energy through effective removal of energy sappers and continuously regulating energy to maintain well-being and focus.

The purpose of this e-book book is to outline practical ways for leaders to optimise their own strengths and those of their people to free up the energy, ideas and excellence of the workforce. This will be a force multiplier to accelerate strategy execution, competitive advantage and innovation of the organisation.

To learn more about strengths-based leadership, we strongly suggest you read our short and engaging book called **Optimise Your Strengths. Use Your Leadership Strengths to Get the Best Out of You and Your Team**, 2016, James Brook & Dr Paul Brewerton, London: Wiley.

James Brook

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Strengths-based leadership:

Optimising your strengths and those of your people

There are lots of different approaches to leadership, many of which are highly prescriptive about the type of qualities and behaviours you need to be effective. For example, so-called 'trait-based approaches' talk about the importance of charisma, persuasiveness and decisiveness in determining leadership success.

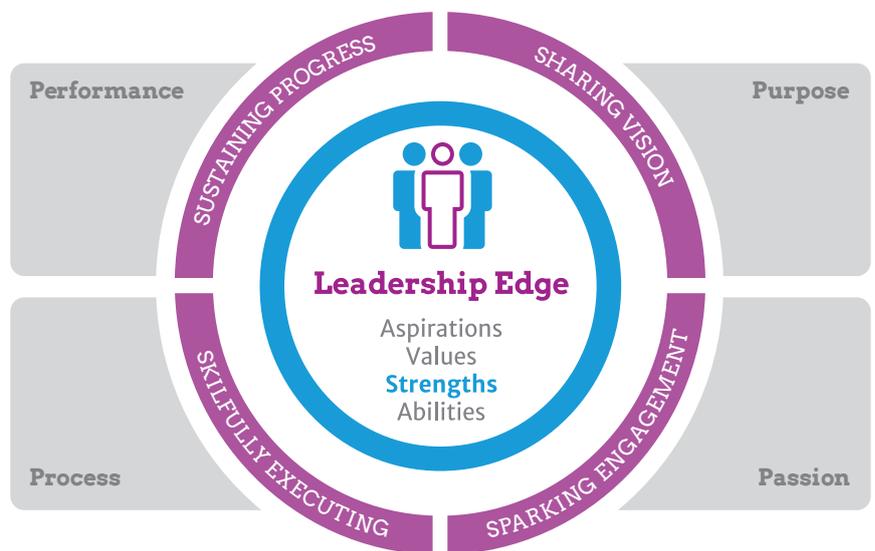
However, recent research shows that successful leaders have very different personalities and attributes to draw on to achieve their results. Leaders are not necessarily well-rounded people, nor do they all possess the same qualities and competencies. Like everyone else, they have strengths and vulnerabilities and need to discover and optimise their strengths, as well as reducing performance risk areas, in order to succeed.

In today's volatile environment, where organisations are all being challenged by fast-shifting social, political, economic and technological forces, leaders are being asked to do more with less; to work smarter and optimise the energy, ideas and morale of their workforce. They therefore need to inspire and empower individuals and teams to optimise their strengths and adapt these to ever-changing requirements. They also need to continuously stretch people to push the boundaries and achieve in the upper range of their collective strengths and capabilities.

Based on extensive research, we have identified the following principles leaders should embrace to ensure they deliver positive and peak-performing workplaces.

Optimise your leadership edge

Stretch Leadership™ Model (Figure 1)



Leadership edge



Leadership habits



Outcomes

Effective leaders know better than to try to be someone they are not. They stay true to who they are at their best, and make sure they optimise their unique mix of strengths, skill and experience.



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Adopt a 80/20
rule in your
personal
development
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Understanding your leadership edge is the first step in the journey to great leadership. Leaders need to develop good self-awareness and make the most of who they are at their best.

We refer to this as finding your ‘leadership edge’, which is derived from the unique and powerful strengths and qualities you bring to the way you lead.

Once discovered and acted upon, your leadership edge inspires those around you to perform at their best and achieve exceptional results. It has four aspects;

1. **Aspirations** – what you aspire to achieve through your leadership and contribution; the lasting legacy you wish to leave
2. **Strengths** – underlying qualities that energise you, things you are good at, or have the potential to be great at
3. **Values** – principles and guiding beliefs that are important to you and anchor your career and life decisions
4. **Abilities** – natural or acquired talents and skills where you have an opportunity to shine.

Stretch leadership habits

Self-awareness must be followed by ongoing learning and ‘stretch’; effective leaders are lifelong learners. The most successful leaders push the boundaries of thinking and possibility, looking for new and innovative ways of doing things to achieve the organisation’s goals, while advancing their own career. They never stand still and they adopt four ‘stretch leadership habits’: sharing vision; sparking engagement; skilfully executing; and sustaining progress. In doing so, they create: a clear sense of purpose; a passionate and engaged workforce; clear, scalable processes that deliver value to the customer; and a culture of peak performance and continuous improvement.

Any leader can learn these leadership habits through on-the-job experience, engaging others for coaching and support and training and education programmes.

Focus on strengths but don’t ignore performance risks

Prior to the strengths-based approach to leadership development, the emphasis on employee development in most organisations was principally centred on overcoming deficits or weaknesses. A compelling body of evidence over the past two decades shows the limitations of focusing on resolving weaknesses. This is an approach that tends to undermine engagement, performance and confidence. ‘Strengths’ practitioners recommend moving away from this deficit-orientated approach towards one that is focused on leaders’ and employees’ strengths, helping them use these to maximise performance outcomes.

However, weaknesses and other performance risks should not be ignored. These include limiting weaknesses, overdone strengths – or strengths that are overused or used in the wrong way and cause unintended negative outcomes – and sources of interference. The latter can be either internal, such as psychological blockers frustrating peak performance, self-limiting beliefs and poor self-confidence. Or they can be external, such as an incompatible corporate culture or lack of sufficient resources.

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We advocate three simple strategies for dealing with such risks: using your own strengths to compensate for risk areas, bringing in others with strengths you lack to complement you, and building new habits to mitigate areas of risk and prevent failure.

Adopt a 80/20 rule in your personal development: spend 80% of your development time discovering and building on your strengths, with the remainder allocated to overcoming risk areas, specifically limiting weaknesses and overdone strengths.

Challenge people to give their best

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The most effective leaders positively stretch themselves, their people and the organisation at multiple levels to achieve organisational goals as well as strengthen their own leadership and learning.

These leaders know there is no 'one size fits all' approach for getting the best from others. They discover their employees' strengths and create an engaging and challenging environment that allows employees to use and stretch their strengths, empowering them by providing support and coaching to ensure they have the best chance of success.

Leaders who regularly challenge their people to move outside their comfort zone and use their strengths in new and different ways can expect exceptional performance and positive employee engagement.

Invest in building complementary teams

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Effective teamwork is imperative for leaders in order to do more with less, improve collaboration, raise performance and ensure the pace and quality of innovation is high. Helping individuals identify their strengths and how these can best be deployed to contribute to team goals will create higher levels of clarity and accountability as well as promoting greater levels of autonomy.

Encouraging complementary partnering within the team, where team members support colleagues in areas where they are weaker or less developed with their standout strengths, is also a powerful way to improve team morale, trust and effectiveness.

Building a high level of strengths awareness enables the team to adapt to changing goals, stakeholder needs and processes more quickly, as well as pinpointing strength and skill areas that might be lacking to meet future requirements.

Cast a positive shadow

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Through their day-to-day actions, leaders influence their stakeholders and the organisation in different ways. Their influence can be small, moderate or powerful. It can also be positive or negative in terms of its impact on productivity, morale and well-being.

In other words, leaders can cast a strong and positive shadow on others every day, ensuring they bring about positive change and sustained performance improvement over time.

In order to build a positive, energised culture that promotes excellence, leaders need to show the way. They should be mindful and intentional about identifying, valuing and building on others' strengths and successes. This will encourage others to find their natural strengths and optimise them to deliver peak performance.



- ⚡ Developing persuasive powers to light up the organisation
- ⚡ Building a culture of passion and excellence

Developing persuasive powers to light up the organisation

The ability to persuade co-workers and other stakeholders (customers, investors, suppliers, etc.) is arguably the most important skill a leader requires to energise people and get things done in 21st century organisations. Rigid 'command and control' structures are giving way to flatter, fluid and highly matrixed organisations and this requires skilful relationship building and influencing upwards, sideways and downwards (often without formal authority) to achieve both your own and the company's goals.

Managers and leaders without good communication and influencing skills often get stuck, derail or are overlooked for promotion, regardless of their technical and functional excellence. Our extensive experience with leaders at all levels indicates that this is the skill area leaders struggle with the most, yet it is arguably the most important skill set for strong leadership. One only has to look at leaders like Elon Musk of SpaceX and Tesla to realise the enormous influence leaders have when they are good at building a case for positive change and getting diverse stakeholders on side to deliver exceptional results. Some of the most important steps to unlock your persuasive powers are:

Focus on possibilities and solutions

As we saw during both the Brexit and Trump political campaigns, fear-based persuasion can work, especially over the short-term, as it serves to motivate people to move away from the perceived threats and problems highlighted by leaders. However, while this approach may well be useful for bringing about rapid changes in focus and behaviour to deal with short-term crises and challenges, it can often lead to a sense of powerlessness, panic and loss of control. It will almost certainly lead to a focus on the short-term and undermine creative problem-solving, teamwork and innovation, which most companies rely on to sustain growth and competitiveness.

Leaders who focus primarily on solutions, strengths and possibilities are far more likely to pull people towards them and inspire people to connect with the vision and/or outcomes they are trying to achieve. As well as the example of Elon Musk mentioned above, let's not forget the powerful example provided by the late South African president, Nelson Mandela, who unified the country with his vision of a "rainbow nation" for post-apartheid South Africa.

Build trust and credibility

Trust is a vital ingredient to persuasion. If co-workers don't see their leaders as trustworthy, they are unlikely to engage with them, let alone be persuaded by their arguments. Leaders can increase their trust by:

- I. Showing they trust others in their daily interactions, including getting to know them on a personal level, asking for their help in areas of strength and listening in a non-judgemental and curious way
- II. By acting in an authentic and consistent way in accordance with their strengths, values and purpose
- III. Showing vulnerability by acknowledging weaker areas and other performance risks; in other words, not trying to come across as "superhuman"
- IV. By delivering on what they commit to and not making excuses for shortfalls
- V. By giving credit to co-workers for their efforts and contribution to achievements, as well as taking ownership for mistakes and problems arising from their decisions.

As well as cultivating high-trust relationships, building credibility also involves demonstrating your expertise to others. Several ways to do this include:

- I. Don't take your expertise for granted. Explain to your co-workers the value of your expertise in helping the team deal with day-to-day tasks and challenges
- II. Ensure you provide considered and sound advice to others. Ask for additional time to think through the problem and alternative solutions if the problem is not urgent
- III. Don't wait to be asked for help, take initiative to help others in areas where you have expertise
- IV. Volunteer for projects and assignments where your expertise will be leveraged and ideally, stretched
- V. Ensure you remain up-to-date with the latest developments in your area through ongoing training, education and building your professional network
- VI. Bringing in external experts to endorse your approach or provide additional input as required.

Focus on overall outcomes

Many leaders get caught up in defending their positions or own agendas rather than focusing on win-win outcomes for the relationship as well as the business. This is what William Ury, Harvard Fellow and author of the best-selling book *Getting to Yes*, calls "building the golden bridge". When the conversation gets hijacked by bargaining over individual interests and positions, only one party can win and in many cases, both lose. However, by identifying the overall goals and working collaboratively to achieve these, both parties will generally be better off. The questions I suggest asking to move the discussion to a win-win situation include:

- i. What outcomes are we both trying to achieve that will help the team/organisation?
- ii. Where do our goals and interest overlap?
- iii. What will it look like if we are successful?
- iv. What are the risks if we fail?
- v. How can we change the way we work together to ensure we succeed?

Tune in to their point of view

The vast majority of leaders still prefer advocacy and a 'hard-sell' approach in the mistaken belief that this is the best way to persuade others. However, the greatest influencers are experts at showing interest in others and listening to their points of view; they remain open-minded and inquisitive about their co-workers and the views they have. By doing this they build trust and an emotional connection with those they are seeking to influence. They learn the art of what we call "deep listening", which is not simply listening to the person, but tuning it to their emotions and context. Through doing this, they find mutually beneficial pathways to the best possible outcome.

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Network to boost your energy and influence

Networking is crucial to gaining broader and deeper influence in your organisation, as well as outside it. Studies show that networking is crucial to the success of leaders, managers and entrepreneurs. Networking involves not just building a good online network using professional networking sites such as LinkedIn, but also being intentional about getting to know people outside your immediate team. It involves broadening your sphere of influence in a purposeful and disciplined way with a select and diverse group of people (including superiors, customers, fellow professionals, and friends) who can help you achieve your business and personal goals. Don't overdo your network as too many connections will prove difficult to manage and leverage effectively.

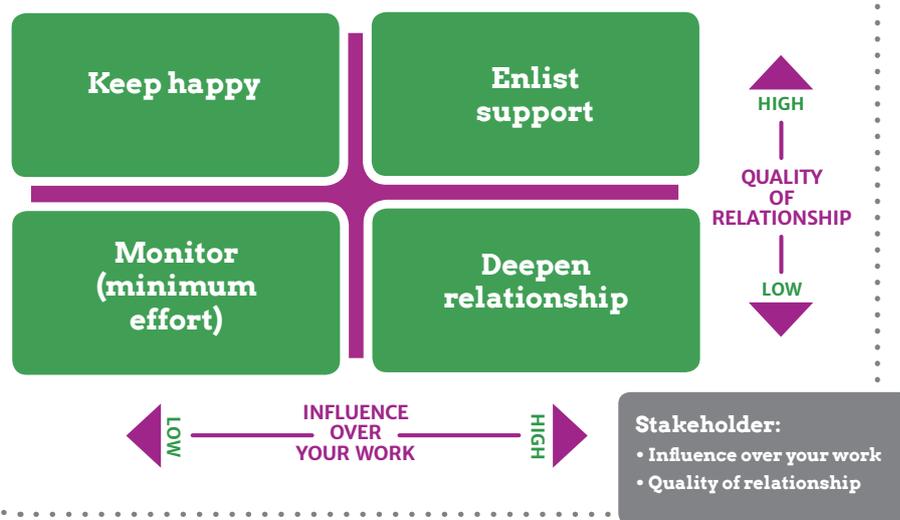
It may also lead others to conclude that you are consumed by your own sense of self-importance or wasting valuable time on pointless meetings.

Using a stakeholder mapping tool like the one below (Figure 3) will help you understand the nature of your existing relationships better, enabling you to work on improving your influence with stakeholders who are most important to your success.

Try plotting key stakeholders according to:

1. The quality of your relationship with them.
To what extent have you already got a good relationship of trust and openness?
To what extent can you rely on their support?
2. The amount of influence they have over your work and career.
In other words, the extent to which you rely on their support, contribution and guidance.

Stakeholder relationship/influence grid (Figure 3)



Identify specific actions you can take to build common ground and improve your relationships with stakeholders who have most influence over your work, especially those where your relationship with them is currently not strong.



Have the courage to speak up

There are too few leaders today who have the courage to speak their mind on tough issues that are important to others, especially where these are contrary to mainstream opinions or those held by top management. By voicing your opinions with candour and openness, rather than treading a cautious, politically correct line, you will gain credibility and respect from co-workers, even if they don't agree with your views. However, your opinions clearly need to be backed up by facts and good judgement otherwise you risk losing trust and influence so it's best not to assert your opinions in areas where you have little expertise. Courage can also be overplayed resulting in damage to performance and relationships. When courage goes into overdrive, especially when combined with self-confidence, it can come across as arrogance, recklessness and hubris. It is therefore important to balance courage with empathy and humility to ensure you don't inadvertently overpower and alienate people.

Make commitments public

Research shows that people generally honour commitments they make if these are specific and public. This is why the best sales people are highly effective at summarising and closing the deal, both verbally and in writing during the contracting period.

Similarly, leaders should ensure they find opportunities to capture commitments from co-workers once they have reached a beneficial outcome. For example, if a peer agrees to sponsor a time-consuming project, the leader can arrange for this to be communicated to the top team during a joint announcement or presentation at the earliest opportunity. The leader can also invite his/her co-worker to summarise key points of agreement and next steps verbally and in an email after tough negotiations to improve the chances of effective follow through.

Recommended Reading

Cialdini, R.B. (2007).
Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion.
New York: Harper Collins.

Conger, J.A. (1998).
The Necessary Art of Persuasion.
Harvard Business Review OnPoint, Spring 2017, 76–86.

Fisher, R., Ury, W. & Patton, B. (1991).
Getting to Yes: Negotiating an Agreement Without Giving In.
London: Century Business.

Work on your charisma

Charisma is about a leader's charm, confidence, likeability, power and personal magnetism. Like any other leadership strength, is only powerful in helping a leader and their organisation succeed if it is used in the right way and to achieve shared goals. When used with caution, charisma can be very powerful in helping the leader energise people to support his/her vision and goals. Despite what many believe, think, charisma is not fixed and can be developed by leaders. Steps to build one's likeability and charisma include:

- I. Smiling at people and being generally positive and upbeat; few people like miserable or dull co-workers
- II. Having a good sense of humour, including being able to laugh at your own mistakes and vulnerabilities
- III. Being approachable and warm, including going out of your way to help others by providing assistance, expertise or information. If people see that you care about their needs as well as your own, they are more likely to like you
- IV. Asking others for their help and showing gratitude and appreciation when this is given
- V. Inviting others to give you feedback on how you're doing and telling them how much you appreciate this when provided

VI. Learning to be confident when talking or presenting to others. Remember that being good at presenting to others is a skill and can be developed through training and practice. That's why even the best TV presenters spend so much time undergoing media training.

Your goal shouldn't be to get everyone to like you, as this is not necessary to achieve success and can actually undermine it if you become a "people pleaser". The aim is to ensure you have enough trust and respect to influence others to help you achieve goals that matter to you, the team and organisation.

The key role of leaders is to ensure organisational goals are achieved and their business contributes positively to society through unlocking and optimising the immense strengths, skills and ideas of their people. This involves persuading co-workers and other stakeholders to provide support and/or resources, even when they are initially reluctant to get involved. They therefore need to build skill in building relationships and influencing others in fast-changing, matrixed and virtual organisations using skills and techniques that are strongly people-centered, including listening, empathy, curiosity, compassion and collaboration. By ensuring they are easy to relate to and developing these skills, leaders can win others over, get things done quicker and better and fuel a positive, collaborative culture that lights up the organisation.

Building a culture of passion and excellence

Increasingly, passion is being highlighted as a key ingredient for success at the individual, team and organisational level. In today's rapidly changing and volatile business environment, companies need passionate people who can drive outstanding performance and sustained success.

Although defined in different ways, passion is best defined as a "fire in the belly" or positive energy to achieve and outperform against one's goals. Based on a lot of research over the past two decades, we know that when people are in jobs that enable them to play their strengths, they are far more likely to demonstrate higher levels of passion for what they are doing and go "above and beyond" to achieve exceptional results. Passion is also highly contagious as anyone who manages enthusiastic people knows. If people love their jobs, others in the team will soon 'catch the bug' and a virtuous cycle of success and confidence is generally created, which becomes a catalyst for even more success.

So what can companies do to recruit, develop and retain passionate people who wake up energised every morning and arrive at work wanting to do their best work?

Clarify the company's purpose and value it delivers

Companies with a clear purpose will find it easier to recruit and retain people who are wanting to make a difference by contributing to that vision. The purpose should describe the company's reason for being, the value the business will deliver to customers and how it will conduct itself. A purpose is not a financial or numerical goal, it is a combination of the company's vision, mission, and values.

One of the best operationalised statements of purpose I've ever experienced was at Danish-headquartered Novo Nordisk (www.novonordisk.com), a world leader in diabetes care, which has a stated purpose to create value for patients by improving their lives and the way diabetes is treated and viewed around the world. All employees are expected to understand the day-to-day challenges for diabetic patients as well as the company's values, operating principles and core processes.

Clarifying a simple purpose and how this helps create value for customers/ stakeholders and ensuring all employees have an opportunity to discuss and relate their own aspirations and values to this will help engage the full energy and passion of your people.

Stretch people in areas of strength

We often hear the mantra that people need to be "stretched beyond their zone of comfort". This is an incomplete picture as the wrong type of stretch can actually lead to demotivation and very high levels of turnover, absenteeism and stress-related problems. We distinguish between two very different types of stretch – positive stretch and negative stretch.

Negative stretch is too much stretch in areas of weakness. Although some of this can be good if an employee needs to improve in a particular area of weakness, too much of this type of stretch can be demotivating and undermine performance,

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particularly if this isn't balanced with opportunities for the person to optimise their strengths. Stretch can also become negative if there is no support in place from the manager, peers or others to enable the person to achieve their goal.

Positive stretch involves discovering a person's natural strengths – those underlying qualities that energise them and they are already good at or have potential to become great at. Once these have been identified, the manager can coach and support the person to stretch in these areas, ensuring the relevant support is provided should they require it. This will maintain high levels of energy and passion whilst avoiding negative stress and burn out.

Hire people who get excited about your purpose

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There is an old cliché “hire for attitude as well as skill” that appears to have stuck within HR and recruitment circles, yet few people know how to translate this into practical action. Some of the ways we help clients to do this is to ensure interviews look beyond the usual list of skills, experience and qualification in the role profile to the person's cultural fit, learning agility and unique character strengths. This is increasingly important as job roles can change at lightning speed meaning that the tasks you are wanting done today can look very different in three or six months' time. A good understanding of people's strengths enables you to quickly deploy them across a range of energising activities and tasks well beyond their initial job role. The most successful people who have high levels of passion for the company's purpose are more likely to remain positive, embrace learning opportunities and adapt to changes in the company's strategy and structure.

Encourage learning and challenge

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The quickest way to kill off passion is to stifle ideas and creativity and free exchange among your people.

Of course a flat structure and a shallow hierarchy helps, as there is a shorter communication distance between managers and employees. However, the key is not just to change the structure, but to build an open and informal culture where every employee has a voice and feels safe to disagree and challenge others, even top management, without fear of direct or indirect repercussions.

Organisations like Facebook, Novo Nordisk, Graze and Innocent encourage high levels of shared learning and open debate, building physical and virtual social platforms to give their people the time and space to initiate and evolve ideas and debate and solve problems. Simple ways to do this include changing the company's workspace to create social meeting hubs, collaborative spaces and chill-out zones. Several of our clients have also 'borrowed' a custom from Scandinavian working culture and start Fridays (or another day of the week) with an informal breakfast gathering to which everyone in the team is invited.





Reward effort

Elite sport has provided a lot of insight to business about the way to build a high performance culture and the theory of marginal gains is one of the most useful concepts to be adopted by businesses in recent times. According to this, every bit of effort and input focused on improving performance can have a multiplicative effect and help improve results, particularly if the whole team are optimising their strengths and exerting high levels of voluntary or discretionary effort beyond the minimum requirements.

This is the reason why companies should build a culture where successes, even the small ones, are appreciated and celebrated regularly, ideally everyday. Most companies only celebrate big achievements and in our experience, are not particularly good at doing even this, which undermines passion and morale. There are numerous ways companies can do this which involve no or little cost including providing simple “thank you” notes or cards, time off, vouchers, lunches with the manager, recognition in team meetings, etc.

As Warren Buffet, one of the most successful businessmen in the US and founder and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, a holding company which owns subsidiaries engaged across a diverse range of businesses stated: “Without passion, you don’t have energy. Without energy, you have nothing.” Passion will help your people go way beyond expectations to see your company’s vision fulfilled. It will be the fuel for your journey and create unstoppable energy in the business. By following these five principles, you can fast-forward a culture of passionate, confident and exceptional people.

Recommended Reading

Brook, J., & Brewerton, P (2016)

Optimise Your Strengths: Use your leadership strengths to get the best out of you and your team.

London: Wiley.

Duckworth, A. (2016).

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance.

London: Penguin.

- ⚡ **The art of inquiry: Leadership essentials**
- ⚡ **Delegation: The hard work of letting go**
- ⚡ **Why all leaders should be strengths coaches**
- ⚡ **Leading energising, peak performing teams**

The art of inquiry

The value of inquiry or powerful questioning is now well established and becoming even more relevant given today's hyper-competitive, fast changing and complex business environment.

Some of the benefits include:

- I. Inviting people to share diverse perspectives and ideas
- II. Empowering people to think for themselves and arrive at the best possible solution
- III. Influencing people using a softer "pull" rather than forceful "push" style. This builds higher levels of trust and empathy and is typically more effective in achieving win-win solutions than more adversarial approaches to persuasion.

Research shows that the majority of leaders still use far more advocacy – putting forward arguments as a means of persuasion – when interacting with direct reports and other co-workers. This behaviour is frequently reinforced by top leadership and the culture of the organisation which encourage 'tell' approaches to getting things done over active listening and questioning.

Leading management author and business psychologist, Edgar Schein, who wrote a book entitled *Humble Inquiry* several years ago defined inquiry as "the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person". This is a great definition as it underscores the importance of drawing out others' ideas and perspectives and asking open-ended questions to help tackle business challenges and create a learning, growth mindset.

In my coaching and leadership development work over several decades, I have observed many leaders make huge strides in the way they lead and influence others through focusing more time and effort on inquiry rather than advocacy in meetings, performance conversations, strategy off sites, etc.

Formulating and asking powerful questions can be learned and, if practiced regularly, can become a career-enhancing skill to help leaders and managers stand out from their peers and deliver better results.

In deciding what questions to ask, leaders will eventually build up their own arsenal of powerful questions, however the following principles are important to apply consciously at the outset:

1. Keep your question as clear and straightforward as possible; always avoid double-barrelled, long-winded and indirect questions.
2. Questions starting with "what", "when", "where" and "how" are more powerful than "why", as the latter can be interpreted as judgemental.
3. Use probing questions to explore responses in more depth.
4. Choose questions that encourage people to focus on solutions, strengths and opportunities rather than problems and weaknesses.
5. Avoid asking leading questions where you already have an answer or position you want others to support.
6. Don't be afraid to ask challenging questions provided they are constructive and focused on the decision or task being discussed.
7. Sometimes it pays to act ignorant in order to ask breakthrough questions.

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We have found that many leaders struggle with the type of questions to ask when they start making a shift towards advocacy. Therefore, I have outlined below five powerful questions leaders can use across a variety of situations they commonly face:

First 100 days in the job

1. What is already working well that we should build upon?
2. What are your expectations of me as a leader?
3. What would you like to know about me (skills, strengths, experience, interests, etc.)?
4. What priority areas would you like me to improve?
5. Do you have any ideas or recommendations to help me?

Performance conversations

1. What do you think you've done particularly well?
2. What have been the most energising aspects of the job?
And the least energising?
3. What would you like to learn to optimise your strengths and performance?
4. What are your challenges or blockers? What can you do to address these?
5. What ideas and solutions do you have to help achieve our results?

Overcoming conflict and disagreements

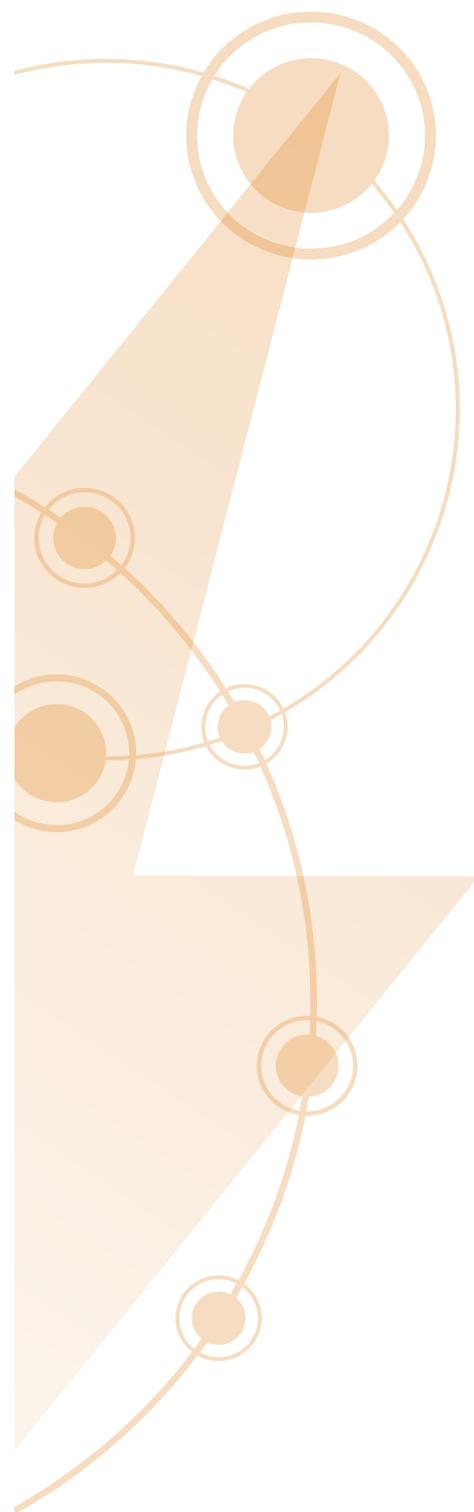
1. What are your expectations of me?
2. How would you like us to work together in future?
3. What would you see as the best possible solution to this issue?
4. What are the risks (for us, the organisation and those impacted) if we can't agree?
5. What steps can we take in the next 30 days to build a stronger relationship?

Building a new strategy

1. What is our purpose?
2. Who are our most important customers? How will they and their needs change?
3. How do we want customers to see our value and difference?
4. What are our five most important goals for the next three to five years?
5. How will we define results and measure our success?

What are the options?

1. What criteria/principles are we using to evaluate the options?
2. What data/facts do we still need in order to make a good quality decision?
3. Do we need to decide this right now?
4. How can we de-risk the decision as much as possible?





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Leading people through change

1. Why are we changing?
2. How can we best achieve the desired goal(s)?
3. Who will be impacted (directly and indirectly)?
4. What behaviours and support can you provide to achieve the desired goal(s)?
5. What can I do as your manager to support you in dealing with the change?

Managing your career (and those of others)

1. What roles and tasks energise you most?
2. What can you do well? What are your unique strengths and skills and how can you optimise these?
3. At the end of your career, what would you have liked to have achieved? Taking this into account, what goal would you like to accomplish in the next year?
4. What is the biggest risk area (weakness, overdone strength or mental barrier) you need to address to achieve your goals?
5. Who can support you to achieve your goals?

5 more thought-provoking questions to ask yourself

1. Why should anyone be led by you?
2. What are you doing for others to make their lives better?
3. What have you always wanted to do that you can start doing next week?
4. What type of work-life balance now will ensure you have no regrets in 10 years' time?
5. What three words would you like others to use to describe you when you're not in the room?

The art of inquiry is at the heart of effective leadership as it enables leaders to remain curious and unlock the ideas, perspectives and strengths of those they are seeking to inspire and influence. Without engaging people in genuine two-way conversation, leaders run the risk of paying attention only to their own thoughts and perspectives. They also stop growing as they incorrectly assume they are 'experts' who haven't got anything more to learn. This is likely to limit their effectiveness as co-workers and other stakeholders will start seeing them as forceful, arrogant and autocratic, behaviours that will ultimately derail their career if left unchecked.

Recommended Reading

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Schein, E. H. (2013).
*Humble Inquiry:
The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling.*
San Francisco: BK Publishers Inc.

Delegation: The hard work of letting go

Too many leaders hang on to tasks they should be delegating and end up working long hours and feeling overwhelmed, stressed and frustrated. They convince themselves they are indispensable and others simply cannot do the job as expertly as they can. Deep down, these leaders simply don't want to let go. This is demoralising, frustrating and confusing for employees. Our experience suggests that this is one of the biggest blockers to effective leadership and positive team morale.

So how can leaders let go whilst at the same time ensuring results and standards are maintained at a high level?

There are five steps to effective delegation:

1. Reducing limiting fears and barriers
2. Deciding what to delegate and to whom
3. Agreeing a robust delegation process
4. Building ownership and independent thinking
5. Anticipating challenges and how to respond

Step one: Reducing limiting fears and barriers

Effective delegation requires good awareness of yourself and your context, including a clear understanding of the fears and external barriers that get in the way of effective delegation. Typical fears/blockers we see playing out include:

Fear/blocker	What it sounds like
Fear of failure	"If I delegate to him/her, I might fail to achieve my results"
Fear of getting upstaged	"Perhaps he/she will do the job better than me and I'll no longer be needed"
Lack of trust	"Don't trust anyone, if you want something done it's better to do it yourself"
Need for control/power	"I need to ensure I control things around here otherwise nothing will get done"
Perfectionism	"Nobody can do it as well as I can"

Once you are more aware of your fears and blockers, you can start taking positive steps to tackle these. There is no one easy way to reduce all these barriers, however, the remaining keys should help you.

Step two: Deciding what to delegate and to whom

Match delegated tasks to individuals in your team based on a detailed understanding of their current performance as well as what they are capable of and what energises them. Delegate in a way that helps people to stretch positively (in other words, in areas of natural strength and energy) and progress towards their development goals.

Criteria to apply when observing and assessing people for delegation and stretch assignments include:

- Aspirations** What are their career development aspirations?
- Strengths** What are their natural strengths and energisers; What tasks are they passionate about?
- Skills** What skills and abilities do they have?
- Learning agility** How well do they learn and adapt to tasks outside their comfort zone?
- Performance** What outcomes and results are they currently delivering?

Step three: Agreeing a robust delegation process

Many people fail to perform delegated tasks effectively as a result of poor planning and lack of structure.

There are three main areas you need to consider to ensure clarity on both what is expected and how you will remain updated and provide support.

Clear goals and measures

Ensure the person knows what is expected and how this fits in to the overall goals of the team and organisation.

Regular check-ins

Agree regular check-ins (this should ideally be done during regular catch-up meetings you are already having) to share progress and provide input and coaching.

Feedback and support

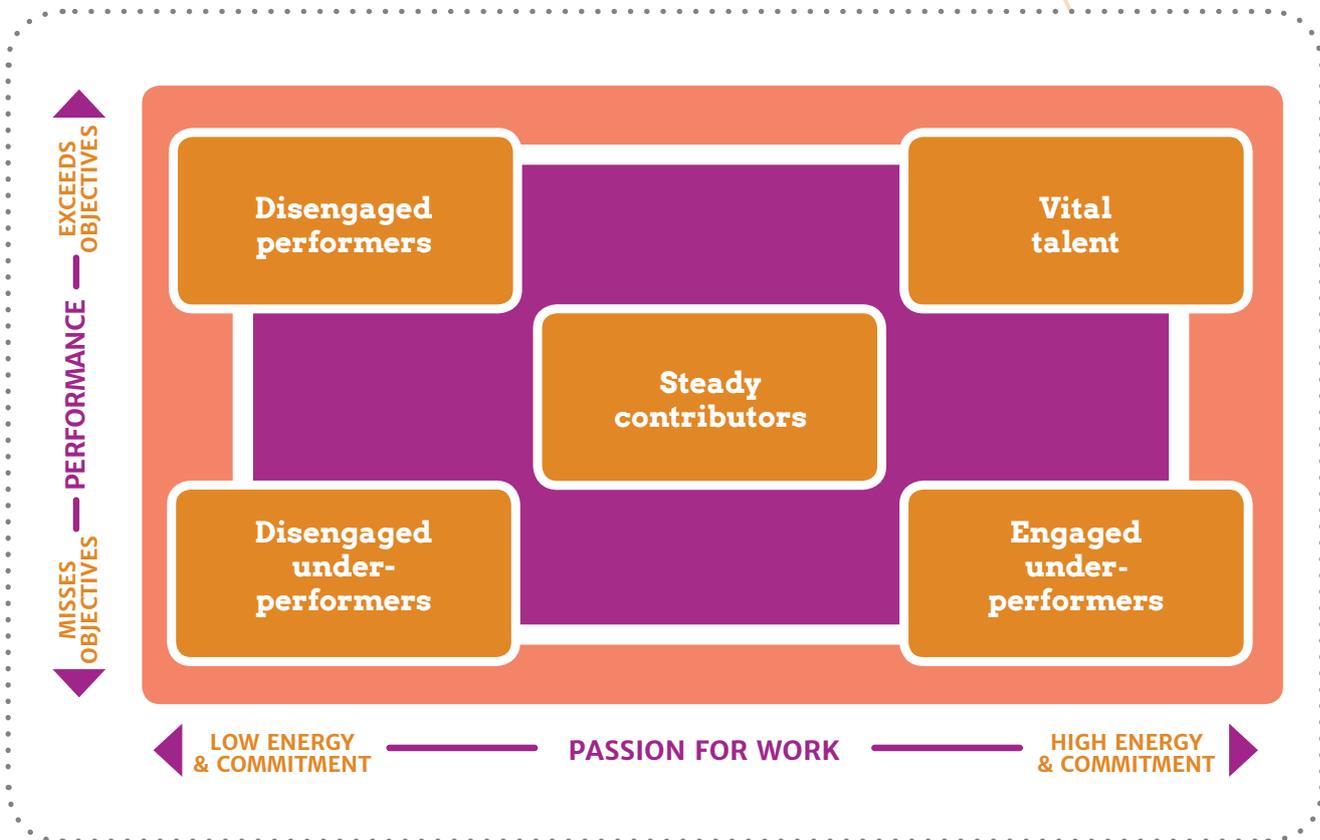
Provide regular, clear and specific feedback on progress. Specify the behaviours you want to see the person use more of the time as well as those that should be done differently to improve results. Offer support, guidance and coaching throughout the process to maximise the chances of success. Remember that delegation is not abdication!

Step four: Building ownership and independent thinking

The more the individual thinks independently and takes ownership of the tasks and outcomes, the less you will need to be directly involved. There are several ways to build ownership and independent thinking including:

- I. Coaching
- II. Encouraging solutions thinking (insist on solutions, not problems)
- III. Ensuring people have the resources and authority to solve the problem
- IV. Giving people space to do it their way (be tough on the 'what' (i.e. outcomes) but allow more experienced people to determine 'how' they will go about the work)
- V. Showing tolerance and patience when people are learning
- VI. Conducting regular check-ins to review progress.

To understand who you should delegate to, remember that employee contribution is a function of two main variables – the person's performance and the passion (energy and commitment) they have for their work. If we plot performance on the X axis and passion for work on the Y axis, we can identify five different talent categories:



1. **Vital talent** (your star performers, who will help your team to outperform)
2. **Disengaged performers** (your rising stars, who, if engaged, will also help your team to outperform)
3. **Steady contributors** (your “hidden heroes”, who, with a little encouragement, could raise their game and your team’s results)
4. **Engaged underperformers** (the toughest to manage as they are committed to the job and company, yet their performance is below the required standard)
5. **Disengaged underperformers** (your most challenging team members, who need help to engage with and perform their work, or to move on to something new)



Recommended delegation approaches to use with each of these groups are as follows:

Talent group	Delegation approach
Vital talent	Delegate stretching tasks. Provide good coaching.
Disengaged performers	Find out what energises them and delegate areas to re-motivate them. Provide good coaching.
Steady contributors	Delegate on occasion with clear direction and feedback.
Engaged underperformers	Don't delegate, find out reasons for the underperformance and take corrective action.
Disengaged underperformers	Don't delegate, take corrective action to improve performance or manage out.

Step five: Anticipating challenges and how to respond

Delegation is rarely without challenge and risk. You can easily get derailed unless you identify potential obstacles and plan for how you will deal with them.

Typical challenges include: lack of alignment of expectations, lack of confidence or skill to handle the task effectively, unwillingness to ask for help, stress and burnout, etc. I always encourage leaders to consider three different scenarios – worst case, likely case and best case and what each might look like. This will provide you with a clearer picture of the challenges that might arise with each person when you delegate to them. Planning how to deal with these challenges means you will be prepared for the most likely challenges and can prevent them turning into bigger problems.

The benefits of effective delegation to you as a leader and to the business as a whole are significant in terms of increased productivity, motivation and morale. The hardest part is letting go and overcoming your own mental barriers. By tackling some of your own fear and following the steps outlined above, it is almost certain you will become happier, healthier and more valuable to your company.

Why all leaders should be strengths coaches

“ Coaching is now regarded by leadership and business psychologists as one of the most powerful ways to help people learn and accelerate their performance and success.

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Why coaching is so powerful

When highly successful people like Microsoft's Founder, Bill Gates, and Google's ex CEO, Eric Schmidt, talk openly about the importance of coaching, you know it must be important. But why is it important and how do we coach in a way that is both effective and efficient?

Coaching is now regarded by leadership and business psychologists as one of the most powerful ways to help people learn and accelerate their performance and success. The main reasons for this are:

- I. It assumes people have the strengths and capacities to discover solutions for themselves. When a person finds his/her own answers, they are far more likely to own and implement these with vigour and in a way that works for them
- II. It is highly contextualised learning and takes account of individual differences, including their unique personality and ways they make sense of and deal with day-to-day challenges
- III. It provides an ideal opportunity for reflection and consideration of different pathways for achieving goals and the impact of these
- IV. It provides the ideal space for the leader to support, challenge and provide feedback to move the person beyond their comfort zone to greater success.

There are plenty of opportunities for a leader to have a coaching conversation. Some of the most common are: during regular catch-up meetings, in performance goal-setting and review meetings, during personal development conversations, when providing feedback, before delegating work and when someone asks for help or is struggling with a task.

A proven approach to get the most out of people in a turbulent world

One of the major shifts we are seeing in companies is a move from a weakness-based to a strengths-based people management culture. Leading companies like Facebook, Sainsbury's, Deloitte, GSK and BT all recognise the value of helping employees discover and optimise their natural strengths so they can contribute maximum value to the organisation. This approach is based on refreshingly different assumptions. The underlying belief is that personal strengths – qualities that energise us and we are great at (or have potential to become great at) – lie at the heart of performance excellence. Achieving or exceeding one's goals begins with a good understanding of one's natural strengths and pathways to optimise these while at the same time tackling any risks/blockers to peak performance.

The evidence behind the approach is extremely compelling with productivity increases up to 40% being achieved when employees are engaged at work and encouraged to play to their strengths more of the time.

Strengths coaching is therefore a particularly powerful way to accelerate learning, performance and success. It involves creating a positive and trusting relationship which helps the individual (or team) find ways to achieve success through optimising their strengths, reducing performance risk and facilitating effective learning.

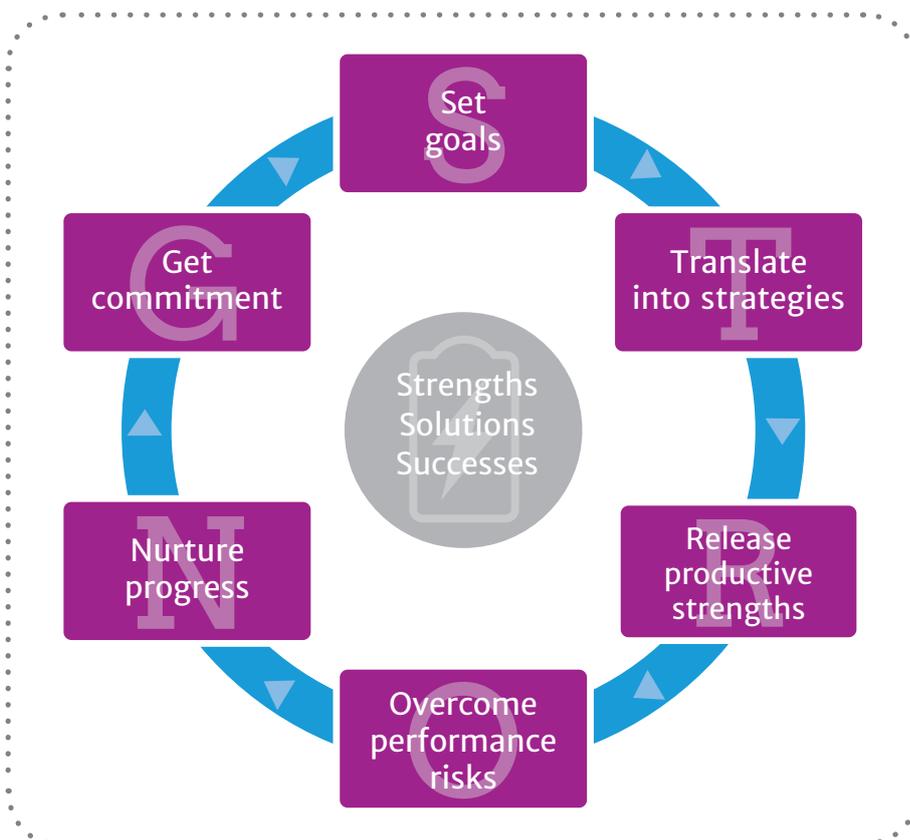
The approach offers numerous benefits including:

- I. Drives innovation and a solutions-focused team
- II. Boosts resilience, confidence and well-being
- III. Increases motivation and engagement
- IV. Reduces defensiveness and barriers to difficult behaviour change
- V. Improves self-awareness and self-management
- VI. Delivers improved results.

By helping your people to optimise their strengths, as well as developing strategies to reduce performance risks, you can help them perform better and progress towards their personal goals in an efficient and motivating way.

STRONG Business Coaching™ Process

We have developed a straightforward and powerful strengths coaching approach, STRONG Business Coaching™. This has been proven over the past decade to help leaders and employees in organisations around the world to achieve improved performance, motivation and success. Using the coaching questions below, we challenge you to try this process out by having what we call ‘water cooler’ coaching conversations in as little as a few minutes.



Stage	Purpose	Sample question
S et goals	Ensure clear and realistic learning and performance goals	What will success look like?
T ranslate into strategies	Explore different ways to achieve the person's goals, as well as stakeholders and how they can be engaged	In what ways can you get there?
R elease productive strengths	Discover and help the person optimise their strengths, and those of their co-workers/stakeholders, to develop and achieve success	How can you use your strengths (and those of others) to help achieve your goals?
O vercome performance risks	Identify and reduce areas of risk, including limiting weaknesses, strengths in overdrive and internal and external blockers that might interfere with peak performance	What might get in the way?
N urture progress	Fuel the person's natural energy for change by highlighting and reinforcing positive changes and learning	What has worked before that you can build on?
G et commitment	Ensure the person commits to specific, realistic actions and has the necessary support to achieve their goals	What action can you take tomorrow to move you closer to success?

More effective in dealing with weaknesses and other performance risks

Contrary to common misconception that the strengths approach involves focusing only on strengths, it actually involves helping people to achieve their goals through both optimising their strengths and reducing what we call “performance risks” – weaknesses, overdone strengths and psychological barriers such as low self-confidence. Overdone strengths are strengths used in the wrong way or at the wrong time that lead to poor results. Research and our own experience show that most people encounter problems with their performance and/or relationships not because of obvious weaknesses they have, but because of overdone strengths. For example, people who are too confident become arrogant and those that are too compassionate can't deal with tough situations in a firm and objective way.

Because the approach is positive and focuses on helping people discover and leverage their strengths using solutions-focused and empowering techniques, the conversation is more open and honest and some of the defensiveness we see in more traditional coaching approaches is reduced.



So what skills do I need to be an effective coach?

Leaders need to learn a number of skills to become effective coaches. However, on the plus side they can be developed with the right level of commitment and practice. The most important of these are:

1. Deep listening

Listening is at the heart of good coaching, yet most leaders don't use this skill effectively. There are different levels of listening. The first, called "everyday listening", is when people are actually listening to their own internal voice. They hear the words of the other person, but their attention is mainly on their own experiences, needs, emotions and thoughts. Many leaders never get beyond this basic level which is insufficient if you want to be an effective coach.

Deep listening is different. It involves focusing on the person and listening intently to everything they say and are communicating through their verbal and non-verbal communication – their experiences, needs, emotions and thoughts. This type of listening also involves tuning in to the person's emotional energy and being aware of how this is changing during the conversation. It also requires an understanding of the person's work and personal situation and how these are shaping their reality, feelings and behaviour. High levels of empathy and curiosity are critical for this type of listening.

Straightforward listening techniques like summarising, paraphrasing and asking clarifying questions can greatly improve your listening effectiveness.

2. Powerful questioning

Powerful questions help the client build self-awareness and perspective on their challenges and opportunities. Through powerful questioning, the leader helps the person achieve self-awareness, clarity, stretch (mental and emotional) and commitment to action. Powerful questions are generally open-ended questions that create greater possibility for expanded learning and fresh perspective.

Apply the following rules of thumb:

- I. Apply the KISS (Keep It Super Simple) principle and keep the question straightforward
- II. Use mainly "what", "when", "where" and "how" questions to open up the conversation. Be careful about using a "why" question as it can imply judgement
- III. Use probing questions to explore responses
- IV. Use questions to invite 'permission' before sharing your own ideas and opinions.

3. Challenge

Strengths coaching requires challenge and stretch. Challenge is about not accepting at face value what is being said by the person. It involves feeding back your own observations and presenting them with the opportunity for them to think more deeply about different pathways and options to improve their performance and success.

Challenge helps in a number of ways:

- I. It builds self-awareness and uncovers 'blind spots'
- II. It stretches the person beyond their self-imposed limits and beliefs
- III. It surfaces inconsistencies in what the person is saying or how they are acting
- IV. It tackles unconscious bias undermining relationships and performance.

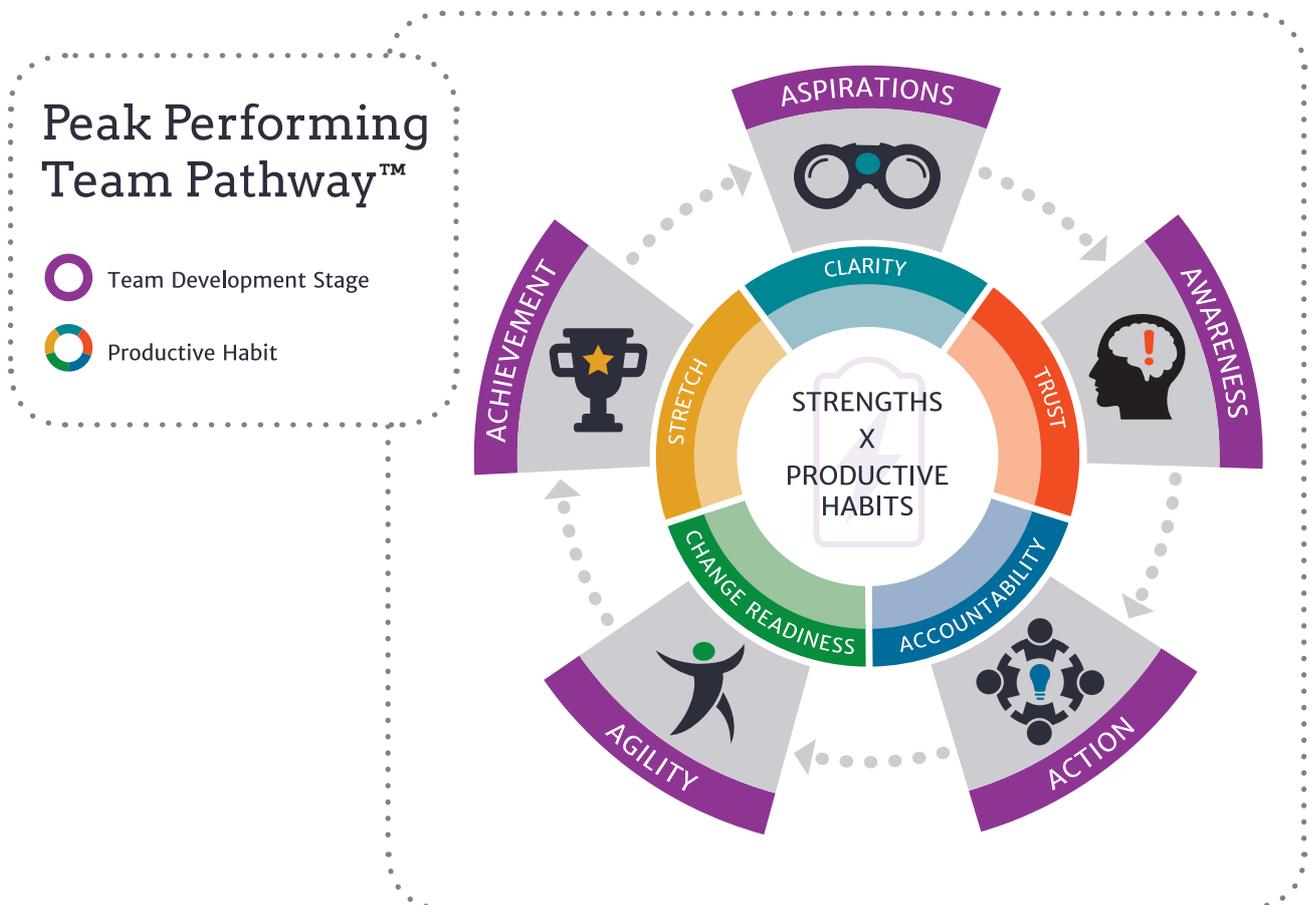
To help people perform at their best and support them through growing turbulence and stress faced in most workplaces today, leaders need to learn how to be energisers and strengths coaches. Because it is positive, empowering and stretching, strengths coaching is a proven way to help people find their own solutions to challenges so they achieve ever greater levels of success. Just as importantly, it is more effective in helping reduce performance risks and barriers that undermine peak performance and productive relationships.



Leading energising, peak performing teams

Although many organisations are still structured along functional lines, this is changing fast in recognition of the fact that exceptional delivery in every type of organisation now requires strong teamwork. This is more important today than ever, as undertaking complex knowledge work requires drawing on specialised skills from across the organisation, regardless of function, geography or level. Rapid globalisation, the accelerating pace of change and disruptive technological innovation requires highly agile and collaborative teams to gain competitive advantage and high levels of growth. Teamwork can also help attract, retain and develop talent as they provide team members with far more enjoyment, support and learning than their individual roles can offer.

So how can leaders ensure they build energising and strong teams that deliver exceptional results time and time again? Based on research and years of experience, we have identified a five stage Peak Performing Team Pathway™, see diagram below.



- In order to achieve excellence, teams need to understand and optimise the strengths and energy of all team members. However, this is insufficient for great team performance. The best teams also develop and practice productive team habits in five areas to transform strengths into effective teamwork and business results at each stage of their development, from aspirations to achievement. Let's consider the leader's role at each stage of the process.

Ensuring clarity by setting compelling aspirations

In order to succeed, teams need clarity on team goals and how these are aligned with the organisation's overall purpose and goals. There should be a sense of urgency and excitement about the purpose of the team to ensure people are energised to work hard to achieve collective outcomes. Leaders of peak performing teams set direction rather than issuing directives. They create clarity and early momentum by:

- I. Highlighting why the team's work is important to the company, customers and other stakeholders. They also take initiative to bring in senior executives and other stakeholders to reinforce why the team's work is important and how it will help create value for customers
- II. Helping people talk through their collective "picture of success" by asking questions like: "How will things be different and better if they are successful?" "What will it look like?" "What will others be saying?"
- III. Ensuring team members consider what success will mean to them and how it will help them achieve their personal needs and aspirations
- IV. Ensuring individuals' roles are clear and well understood to avoid time and energy wasting behaviours including 'turf wars' and duplication of effort.

Specific measures of success for collective outcomes should be agreed and overall plans discussed and decided to ensure goals are achievable. One challenge we often see is that team members are only measured for their individual outcomes and as a result, don't take responsibility for collective efforts.

Raising team awareness to build trust

Exceptional teams get to know one another well beyond their jobs. Members build high levels of trust and respect which form the bedrock for productive relationships and enables the team to navigate through inevitable periods of stress, frustration and tension. They understand one another's strengths, weaknesses, motivations, frustrations and aspirations. This awareness comes through spending a lot of time together and can be accelerated by the team leader in a number of ways:

- I. Picking the right people in the first instance. The right people are those who bring the necessary skills, strengths and perspectives to the team and believe strongly in the team's purpose and values. Try to hire for complementary and diverse strengths and skills to avoid building a lopsided team.
- II. Regular team building and social events, especially during the formative stages of the team's development. Social events should be arranged in consultation with the team and should be as inclusive as possible so avoid activities that are overly strenuous or exclude members.
- III. Using well-researched and accurate profiling tools such as **StrengthscopeTeam™** to help raise the team's awareness of each members' strengths, performance risks (including weaknesses and overdone strengths) and communication preferences.

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- IV. Encouraging feedback at the end of each critical meeting to provide space for team members to give and receive feedback to one another. A simple technique is to have each person share with one another feedback in response to the questions: “What I most value about xxx is...” and “One action xxx can take to improve his/her team contribution is...”
 - V. Creating an environment where diverse strengths, skills and perspectives are encouraged, optimised and appreciated.
 - VI. Ensuring the work layout is conducive to frequent and energising interactions, including socialising and down time. An open plan area with chill out zones and recreational space (table tennis, foosball, etc.) is the ideal space in which teams will be most productive.

Acting with accountability

Peak performing teams accept responsibility for delivering outputs needed to achieve team goals.

Members are clear on each other’s roles and hold one another accountable for delivering what they commit to. In addition to ensuring roles are clear, effective leaders take the following steps to drive skilful execution:

- I. Encouraging team members to focus on finding their own solutions and ideas to problems and challenges by using their strengths and those of their co-workers. This will improve their self-management, self-belief and emotional intelligence, all of which are crucial to enable them to perform at their best
- II. Delegating work to team members based on their skills and strengths, ensuring they don’t end up carrying all the team’s problems or “monkeys”
- III. Accentuating positive behaviours and progress at every opportunity to boost momentum and energise people to work hard to achieve team goals
- IV. Encouraging surfacing of interpersonal disagreements in the team. The most effective teams often have a ground rule that constructive challenge and criticism is not just OK, but need to be encouraged. Effective leaders invite the team to ‘red’ and ‘yellow card’ themselves as well as other team members if ground rules and organisational values are broken
- V. Providing support, regular feedback and good coaching, including ‘air cover’ for team members when they need to take tough decisions, make mistakes or the team faces unfair criticism
- VI. Holding people to account and ensuring there are consequences if team members fail to deliver effectively.

A common area we see many team leaders struggle with is managing underperforming team members. The leader needs to quickly identify and deal with any ‘weak links’ in the team in a firm, supportive and effective manner. If negative attitudes or poor performance are tolerated, both team performance and morale will inevitably decline. This can quickly lead to a breakdown of trust and credibility in the leader among team members and the leader’s superiors.



Developing agility and change readiness

Developing agility involves ensuring the team is ready for change when internal or external circumstances change. This is crucial given the unprecedented pace of change organisations now face as well as the unpredictable nature of this change.

The leader can develop agility in the team in a number of ways. Firstly, it is important for leaders to help team members focus more on strengths and solutions rather than on weaknesses and problems when faced with challenges and uncertainty. By helping people maintain a positive mindset and ensuring the team understands the importance of continuous learning and adaptation, team members will become more alert to changes in their operating environment and how they can best deal with these.

Leaders of agile teams don't just prepare teams for constant change. They work hard to understand and engage team members who are resisting change, supporting them to get on board so they don't get left behind. This requires a high degree of emotional intelligence including good empathy, emotional control and social skills.

Research has shown that the most productive and innovative teams are led by people who can adapt their style to be both relationship and task oriented as the situation demands. Most leaders have a preference for one or the other approach, however, the most effective leaders know when and how to adapt their style to meet the specific demands of the people and/or situation.



Recognising achievement and ensuring continuous stretch

Just like winning sports teams, great business teams take time together to recognise and share successes and milestones. As a team leader, it is important to ensure time and space for celebration and reflection is not overlooked. This time is crucial to boost the team's confidence and morale and enable them to reflect on how they've done. By putting into practice the following key principles, leaders can accelerate the team's morale and confidence:

I. Invite ideas from the team on how they wish to celebrate success, but use the 'surprise factor' on occasion.

II. Be creative in the use of no or low cost ways to recognise effort and results (e.g., going out for drinks after work or allowing the team to go home a few hours early on Friday). Remember that there are loads of alternatives to paying people for their contribution.

III. Call out outstanding contributions of individuals as well as collective efforts and outcomes to reinforce positive behaviours.

IV. Ensure the team's success is made visible to senior executives within the organisation to boost feelings of pride and purpose in the team.

V. Be inclusive in your recognition and don't forget those working remotely or stakeholders outside the team who have contributed to success.

To ensure the team continues to achieve success, the leader should look for ways to continuously stretch people beyond their comfort zones to increase their flexibility, but also to keep them motivated and enthused. The trick is to stretch, but take care not to stretch too far, so you need to know your team well and then to recognise and reward people when they meet the stretch targets.

A culture of open feedback and learning should also be cultivated. Teams rarely have all the skills they need when they are formed and the skills and behaviours required for success will change over time so building a culture open to learning and feedback is not optional, but should be expected. Feedback doesn't have to take the form of a structured and time-consuming 360-degree feedback process. It can be as simple as providing time for team members to share one strength they value in each other and one idea for improvement. The leader should ensure that learning and feedback is not simply an internally-directed exercise; feedback should also be sought from the team's most important customers/stakeholders to help the team learn and grow. This can be invited and shared directly by the leader or by team members themselves.

Recommended Reading

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- Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (1993). *The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organisation*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press.
- Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- ⚡ Setting clear expectations
- ⚡ Engaging performance conversations
- ⚡ Staying positive in tough times

Setting clear expectations

Most leaders assume they have set clear expectations, however, our experience suggests that this is one of the most poorly practiced aspects of leadership. It is arguably also the most important.

Why expectation-setting is such an essential tool

A lack of clear expectations not only undermines performance and results within a team, but also impacts negatively on engagement, relationships and teamwork.

Unclear standards can also lead to serious employee relations problems including grievances, destructive conflict and unfair dismissal claims which can be very costly for the organisation.

There are many different occasions when leaders will need to set, agree and be guided by expectations. Some of the more common situations include:

- I. Building a team
- II. Building, or rebuilding, relationships with co-workers
- III. Performance dialogues/appraisals with employees
- IV. During times of change and re-organisation
- V. When managing underperformance
- VI. When agreeing how decisions will be made

Types of expectations

Expectations fall into two main areas:

Performance expectations

This type concerns the results and outcomes that need to be achieved.

Behavioural expectations

These relate to the expected values, behaviours and attitudes that are required in the role.

Keys to effective expectation setting

There are five keys to setting clear expectations:

1. Set expectations that stretch and inspire excellence

If your expectations are high, most performers will strive to achieve these expectations and the average performance will go up. The trick is to set expectations that inspire and challenge people to stretch themselves, but are realistic and don't strain people. If you overstretch people, they will burn out and you will undermine their motivation, performance and well-being.

Stretching expectations encourage people to be the best they can be – they highlight strengths, possibilities and solutions, rather than weaknesses, threats and problems.

“
The trick is to
set expectations
that inspire and
challenge people
”

2. Ensure you are clear on what they are

This sounds obvious, however, in my experience, very few leaders actually write their expectations down together with why they are important. When leaders write down their expectations they are more likely to be able to articulate them verbally or in writing to their team. By answering why each of the expectations is important to the overall goals and strategy, the leader can also explain the purpose with confidence and clarity to employees and other stakeholders.

3. Discuss and, wherever possible, agree expectations

Share your proposed expectations with your team to get their input and feedback. This will ensure you gain their commitment and support to ensure effective implementation. However, ensure this is a consultation process and not a process of 'management-by-committee', where expectations need to be agreed by all before they are adopted. You should retain the ultimate prerogative to decide on the final set of expectations that will be applied.

4. Encourage the team to share their expectations of you

Expectation setting is a two-way process so encourage your team to share their expectations with you and be prepared to listen and take on board their feedback. This will ensure a high level of trust and mutual respect prevails.

5. Communicate your expectations relentlessly

To be an effective leader you need to consistently communicate and reinforce your intentions and expectations. These should be communicated at every opportunity including team meetings and events, 1-1 performance dialogues, coaching conversations, etc.

However, talking about your expectations is not sufficient. Leaders should also 'walk the talk' and show others what the expectation looks like in practice. For example, a leader shouldn't tell sexist jokes over drinks with the team after work if (s)he wants to reinforce a standard around inclusion and diversity in the workplace. Similarly, if a leader wants people to spend more time developing themselves to strengthen their performance, (s)he should compile, share and implement their own development plan. Regardless of whether the leader is new or has been in role for some time, it is crucial they establish and communicate clear and stretching expectations to achieve the best possible results and avoid performance and relationship problems. Great leaders set the pace by ensuring these expectations are translated into day-to-day habits to promote an environment of deliberate action, accountability and achievement. They expect the best and more often than not, deliver exceptional results and a positive, energising work environment.

Engaging performance conversations



Formulaic, time-consuming and demotivating, is it any wonder two-thirds of organisations feel the current approach to appraisals is in need of review? The bureaucracy and tedium surrounding existing processes has driven high-profile management consultancies and leading brands – such as Deloitte and Adobe – to stop using traditional appraisals altogether.

It is beyond doubt that appraisals are a disheartening experience for many managers and employees. A heavy emphasis on negative feedback means managers spend a significant amount of time criticising employees, leaving staff feeling under-valued and demotivated. Many managers dread the process, as they fear employees will have a negative reaction to particular feedback. Yet appraisals have the potential to inspire excellence by positively stretching people to optimise their strengths, reduce performance risks and achieve beyond what they thought was possible.

So, what is the true value of performance conversations and how can managers banish appraisal dread for both themselves and their employees?

1. Embrace the rule of three for setting goals

With too many tasks to focus their attention on, employees can rapidly reach burnout and fall into the deficit trap. Yet this scenario can easily be avoided by managing priorities efficiently — setting no more than three goals for each individual to complete over a three-month period in what we call the “3 x 3” approach to goal-setting.

Aligning goal-setting with the purpose and overall goals of the company is vital to ensure people have a clearer sense of meaning and understand how they will be making a valuable contribution to the purpose of the organisation.

Flexibility is paramount and managers should be careful to ensure goals are changed when business realities and market conditions shift. Irrelevant goals serve little purpose other than to distract so regular check-ins are crucial to review and, where necessary, adapt goals and priorities.

Finally, goal-setting should take account of the performance and passion of your people and should ‘stretch’ people – particularly your A-players – beyond their ‘zone of comfort’. Goals that are too easy will result in complacency and mediocre performance whilst those that are too difficult can lead to frustration and panic.

2. Abandon the outdated ‘sandwich approach’

The sandwich approach has been acknowledged as the go-to appraisal format for human resources and managers for decades. Intended to soften the impact of negative feedback by placing it between a positive opening and closing statement, all this method actually does is shift employee attention to the wrong performance areas. Strong performers will often focus on the negative aspects of the message and leave their appraisal demotivated about the areas where they need to improve. Poor performers, however, will choose to acknowledge only the positive feedback and leave their appraisal with an inaccurate view of their current level of achievement.

For steady or top performers, ensure your performance conversations are focused on strengths and on future performance rather than weaknesses and previous performance if you want to motivate them and accelerate performance.

For under-performers, be honest and direct so they understand the specific areas in which they are under-performing. Ensure you remain constructive and supportive whilst at the same time communicating what they need to improve or do differently to meet expectations.

3. Emphasise strengths to boost development

The typical appraisal is focused heavily on looking at past activity to gauge levels of performance and views weaknesses as the major focus for development. Unsurprisingly, this technique has a tendency to undermine efforts to enhance performance and motivation. To facilitate progression, appraisals must emphasise the factors that energise and inspire individuals — their strengths and successes.

For employees who meet or exceed acceptable performance standards, strengths-based appraisals can generate impressive results. According to a 2005 Corporate Leadership Council study involving 135 organisations, focusing on personality and performance strengths during performance conversations boosted performance by nearly 40%*.

To implement this approach, managers need to become workplace energisers rather than critical judges, and employees must be empowered to shape their future by highlighting what they can achieve with support and coaching.

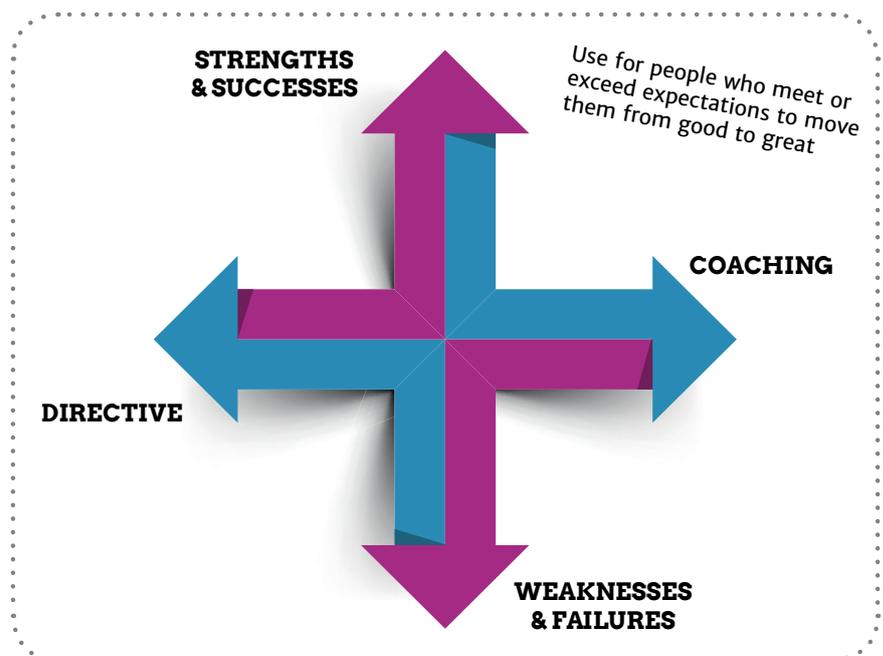
By asking the following coaching questions during regular check-ins, you will encourage a forward thinking and solutions focus:

1. What do you think you've done particularly well?
2. What have been the most energising aspects of the job? And the least energising?
3. What would you like to learn to optimise your strengths and performance?
4. What are your challenges or blockers? What can you do to address these?
5. What ideas and solutions do you have to help deliver your/team's goals?
6. Take a realistic stance on weaknesses

A focus on strengths does not mean poor performance should be overlooked. In fact, a strengths-based approach to appraisals can help overcome weaker areas more effectively, as managers and staff consider ways to deal with overdone strengths – strengths used in the wrong way or at the wrong time – which undermine performance. For example, attention to detail can become perfectionism and self-confidence can become arrogance.

These overdone strengths are frequently the most important source of performance shortfalls and correcting them can result in big performance gains. Considering ways to use strengths to overcome weaker areas and other performance blockers can also reduce defensiveness, and promote creative techniques to deal with stubborn weaknesses. For example, it may be useful for team members to collaborate with others in their department who have the strengths they lack.

Appraisals for individuals who fall short of acceptable standards must highlight areas where development is required and agree actions for improvement. Mistakes should also be treated as a learning opportunity rather than a punishable offence, thereby fostering an environment of transparency, where employees are motivated to learn and overcome challenges.



It is, however, important to acknowledge that vulnerabilities are often integral to an individual's personality and unlikely to change. Though neuroscience research has demonstrated that behaviours can be altered, attempting to embed a new skill when an individual does not have the base potential or inclination will not be successful.

Organisations should match individuals with roles that suit their natural strengths by pairing individuals with others who possess complementary skills or by using performance software solutions that reduce the impact of weaknesses.

4. The importance of feedback...and lots of it

In the same way that sports people need objective and robust feedback to improve and typically get this from multiple sources (coaches, physios, cameras, fellow athletes, etc.) employees too require high quality feedback in order to learn and improve. This should be provided by not only yourself, but also from co-workers, customers and other important stakeholders who have an opportunity to observe the person's performance. There are a growing number of apps and tech platforms that can help the person access real-time co-worker feedback, however, more basic email-driven processes can do an equally good job. We always suggest the employee (or manager) collects the following feedback on their performance before quarterly check-ins or at the end of critical projects:

- What have I done particularly well?
- What specific actions will help improve my relationships?
- What specific actions will help improve my performance?

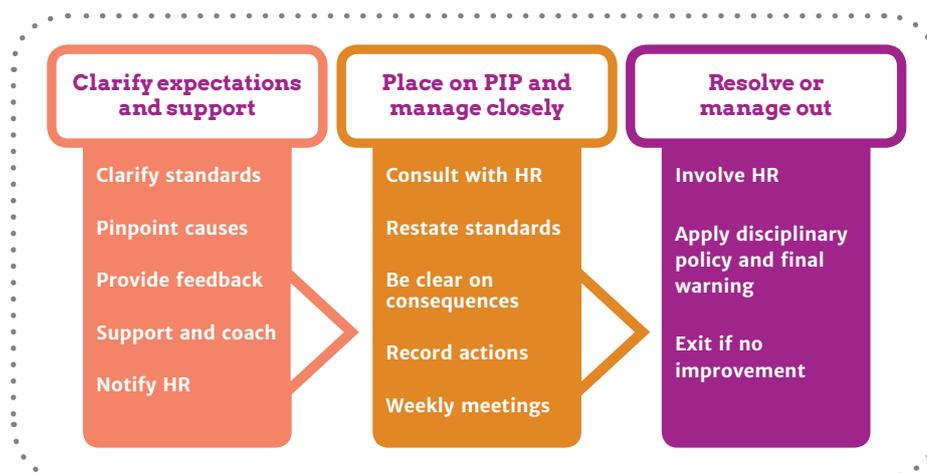
Employees should also be encouraged to collect feedback at any time and to offer others unprompted feedback, either informally or using a more formal technology-based process.

5. Deal swiftly with stubborn performance problems

The biggest mistake we see managers make when managing performance is to avoid or deal indecisively with performance problems that clearly aren't going away.

Through open and honest conversations, managers should diagnose whether an under-performer can be turned round and if not, should work with HR to bring the problem to a swift resolution using the company's relevant policies and procedures.

A brief overview of the process we recommend is outlined below:



To replace the dread of appraisals with motivating performance conversations, managers should set high performance standards and enable people to discover and optimise their strengths and full potential. This requires adopting the role and mindset of a 'workplace energiser' and practising agile goal-setting, regular coaching conversations, high quality feedback, positive stretch and where necessary, swift and decisive management of under-performers.

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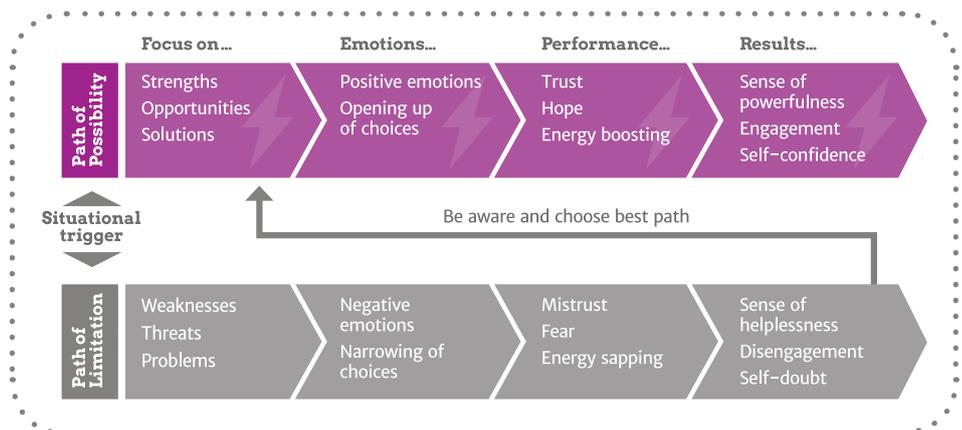
*Corporate Leadership Council (2005).
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Staying positive in tough times

Every day leaders face tough challenges and changes impacting their organisations. Choosing how to respond in any given situation provides a “moment of truth” which determines how a leader is perceived and their impact on the organisation’s results.

Most leaders find themselves alternating between the two paths outlined in the diagram below. Their assumptions, beliefs and interpretation of a situation place them at some point on either path and directly influence how they react to their circumstances. However, some leaders have a tendency to stay more on one path than the other based on their personality, background and how they perceive their circumstances.

The lower path, the ‘Path of Limitation’ drives thought and actions narrowed by a negative mindset that focuses on problems, issues, failures, weaknesses and independent action. It results in fear, mistrust and pessimism. This in turn fuels a culture of learned helplessness where individuals and teams feel isolated and unable to progress. This self-doubt leads to lower performance and undesirable and unintended consequences, such as missing business targets.



The upper path, the ‘Path of Possibility’, is more productive. Thoughts and actions are broadened and focused on strengths, successes, opportunities, solutions and building collaborative partnerships. Leadership is based on trust, hope, optimism, purpose and energy-boosting habits. This leads to a sense of powerfulness, positive energy, confidence and meaning at work, which fuels higher performance.

Most leaders don’t want to be negative and aren’t even aware when they end up spending the majority of time on the lower path. This happens for several reasons, the most common being:

1. They are naturally more pessimistic and critically-minded in nature and when these behaviours are overdone or used inappropriately, they can be perceived as too negative.
2. They experience really tough events at home and/or at work that push them into the negative zone. Even the most upbeat and optimistic leader can end up with a negative mindset if they experience cumulative events which cause distress, such as marital problems or major reorganisations creating uncertainty and insecurity. This can result in them feeling helpless, disengaged and lacking in confidence.
3. A minority of leaders might deliberately remain negative and critical to avoid taking responsibility to lead on making the situation better. It is easier and often less risky for a leader to blame others for problems, issues and weaknesses in the workplace than to lead positively to get things altered.

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So can leaders shift their mindset? By adopting these straightforward principles, leaders can become more aware of their mindset, how it impacts others and develop a more positive outlook:

Know what triggers your negativity and pivot

It is important to understand where you are at any point in time, and to understand the implications of your mindset on your performance and that of others who you work with. Identifying specific triggers (people, events, etc.) that move you to the 'Path of Limitation' will enable you to pivot and stay on the performance-enhancing positive path.

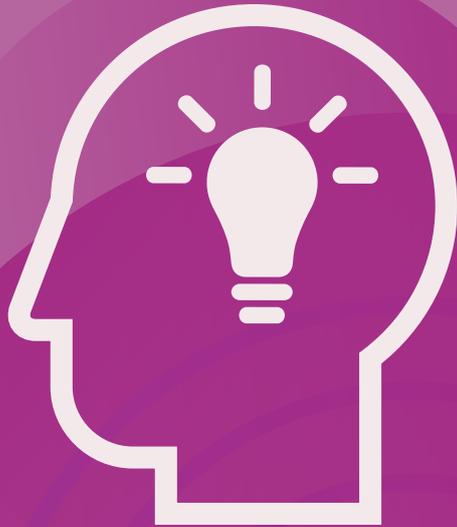
Focus more attention on strengths and solutions

Research shows that even if leaders are naturally pessimistic and critical, they can consciously choose to focus more attention on the positive aspects of performance. After a few months, new habits will develop around this more positive mindset which will feel natural to apply. Specific ideas of how leaders can shift their mindset to focus on the positive include:

- I. Keeping a diary of what went well during each day and how these successes can be built upon
- II. Discovering the strengths of their people and helping them optimise these using a strengths profiler like Strengthscope®
- III. Learning 'flip thinking' techniques to think about problems and issues using a more positive lens. The one I often recommend is POINT, a mnemonic which stands for Pluses, Opportunities, Issues, and New. When applying this technique it is important to frame issues as questions which encourages a search for new and creative solutions. So rather than saying: "Budgets have been cut by 30% so we can't deliver our sales number" it is far better to ask something like: "How can we achieve our sales targets by finding new and smarter ways to win business?"
- IV. Starting every meeting by inviting team members to share their successes as well as support they need to achieve even better results.

If you are prone to negativity, draw on positive co-workers

If you are naturally a more pessimistic and critical thinker, leverage the art of complementary partnering by bringing in positive colleagues to support you in spotting the upside and possibilities in situations. This will ensure a more balanced perspective in your team and will keep your negative excesses in check, particularly if you invite honest and regular feedback.



Be curious and inspire a positive learning culture

Great leaders are great lifelong learners. They remain curious and positive about finding innovative solutions and ways of creating value for customers. Strong leaders also inspire and stretch others to focus their strengths, skills and ideas on finding new and sometimes disruptive solutions to deliver exceptional results. They continuously ask themselves and others: “What can we do to approach this in a new or different way to achieve a better result?”. They don’t allow themselves or others to waste valuable time and energy becoming trapped by problems, issues and weaknesses for longer than is absolutely necessary.



Express negative feelings, but don’t dwell on them

Maintaining a positive mindset as a leader doesn’t mean you need to be happy and upbeat all the time. As was so well illustrated by the recent Pixar movie, *Inside Out*, every emotion – including sadness and anger – has a role to play in ensuring success, productive interpersonal relations and well-being.

A positive, strengths-based approach doesn’t encourage people to suppress emotions. It highlights the need to remain aware of them and the implications for a leader’s behaviour and results. So, if a leader is upset or angry, we encourage them to talk about these feelings in an open and constructive way and focus on finding solutions with the help of co-workers. This enables them to overcome their negative emotions more quickly and constructively.

Developing and maintaining a positive mindset is essential to great leadership. It builds a culture of hope, optimism, resilience and confidence, all of which are instrumental in helping inspire people to create a better future and achieve the organisation’s vision. What we now know from neuroscience is that almost any leader, regardless of their personality and how negative they are, can learn to become more positive in their approach and build a high-performing workplace where people optimise their strengths, deliver innovative solutions and stay focused on possibilities arising from uncertain and fast-changing times we are facing.

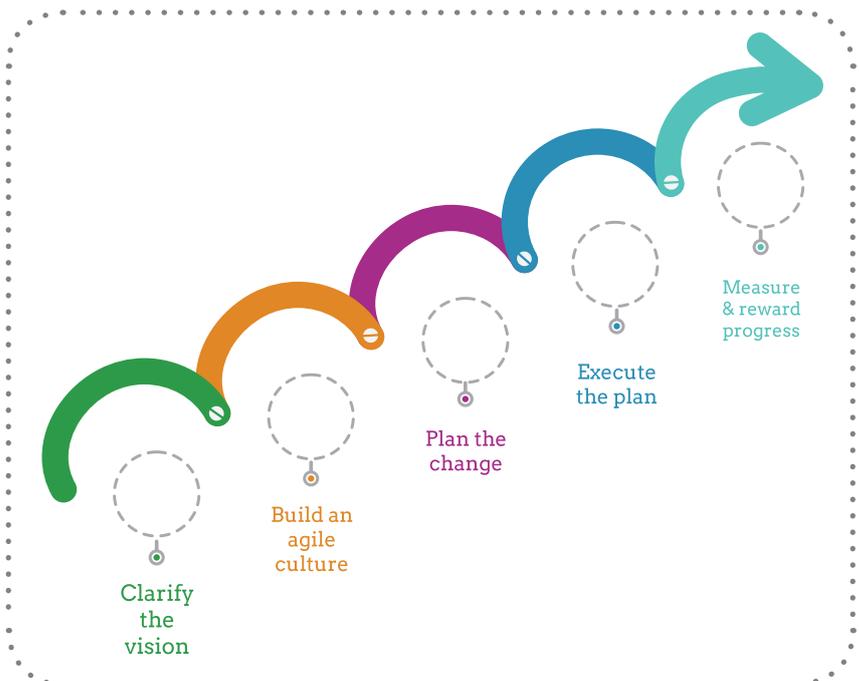
- ⚡ Leadership agility in times of change
- ⚡ Proven ways to boost your energy and productivity

Leadership agility in times of change

Today's leaders are increasingly challenged by highly volatile, changeable environments. They need to do more with less and execute with precision in environments marked by major uncertainty, flux and growing complexity. To do this they need to build agility to ensure they adapt and lead in a way that ensures the organisation is well positioned to respond to these challenges. Being agile in the face of this tsunami of change is far from easy. However, our research and decades of experience, have revealed that the following seven keys to agility will help leaders find their truth north in times of unprecedented change:

1. Be clear on the outcomes and purpose of the change

Agile leaders engage employees and other stakeholders in clarifying their 'picture of success' for the change. They also explain the rationale for the change – why it is important and how it will create value for the organisation and customers. This vision, and high level goals, will provide a roadmap for the change efforts and ensure activity, decisions and behaviours are aligned and focused. Without this clarity, change is unlikely to succeed as people won't be clear on what the end result is supposed to look like and the benefits of changing.



2. Build an agile culture

To build an agile and adaptable culture, leaders need to move their teams beyond developing their job-specific functional and technical skills.

They need to encourage people to learn to be ready to change their goals, mindset and skills as external and internal conditions change. This involves challenging old assumptions about how things work and being open to learning completely new skills and ways of applying their strengths to find smarter ways of getting results. To do this requires a curious and open-minded approach, what Stanford Professor of Psychology, Carol Dweck, calls a "growth mindset". Just like a top athlete or performing artist, this positive stretch and continuous learning will help people reach the upper limits of their potential and ensure they remain agile to adapt to whatever is thrown their way.

3. Focus on the positives

Positive energy is the fuel for successful change so leaders need to help people power their way through the challenging aspects of change by focusing on the positives. They can do this through focusing people's attention on their strengths, successes, ideas and possibilities. These are the positive change capacities that will help people feel empowered and confident enough to move forward. Pessimism and a negative mindset should be surfaced and confronted as it will only breed fear, inaction and a sense of helplessness, obstructing change efforts. Agile leaders recognise that they need to accentuate the positives and inspire others to support the vision by emphasising positive consequences and benefits of aligning around the change.

4. Support people through change

Leaders need to have the social and emotional intelligence to tune into how change impacts the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of their employees, customers and other stakeholders.

Psychologists have found that employees often get emotionally stuck in the early phases of the change process, undermining any meaningful transition. Resistance stems from a variety of sources including confusion about what to do, a perceived loss of status and control, uncertainty about the future and stress arising from increased workload. Resistance takes on many forms and can range from grumblings and passive-aggressive resistance to outright anger and hostility.

Leaders need to understand how people are feeling and offer support and encouragement to help people through the transition. Better practices include:

- I. Explaining the reasons for change and why it is important to achieving the company's vision and goals
- II. Listening with genuine empathy to the concerns, issues and challenges people face and helping them work through these
- III. Highlighting the risks of not changing and the benefits of the new situation
- IV. Offering people practical support to help them make the transition (e.g., coaching or mentoring)
- V. Acting as a role model to help people understand what the new behaviours and attitudes should look like and why they are important for success
- VI. Building a group of 'change champions' or advocates and using these people to persuade those who are slower to adapt.

However, if all these attempts fail leaders will, as a last resort, need to be directive and tell people how they need to change, especially if the need for change is urgent or resistance is stubborn and unreasonable.





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5. Improvise and experiment

Agile leaders are entrepreneurial in their mindset and approach. They don't plan every aspect of the change from beginning to end in minute detail and then implement it. Instead, they assume effective change is a zig-zag process and pilot different solutions to see which is best in the eyes of employees, customers and other stakeholders. This approach recognises the importance of "failing fast" and involves improvisation, rapid learning and iteration to continuously improve and hone plans, products, and processes. This process should be made as engaging for employees as possible and can, in many cases, be fun as well as challenging. Once the best solution has been tested and adjusted, it should be documented and shared with other people in the organisation to ensure changes are implemented across the business.

6. Leverage team strengths

Agile leaders recognise that increasingly complex problems and challenges can only be solved through more fluid, efficient and collaborative teamwork. Rather than having a stable membership, agile teams are formed around specific projects and challenges to ensure rapid turnaround of solutions, giving these organisations a significant competitive advantage. Team members are diverse and drawn from different parts of the organisation to ensure all the relevant skills, knowledge and experience to tackle the specific problem. Increasing popularity of the "hackathon", a sprint-like event lasting one day or longer in which coders and others team up to design new software or resolve problems, is an example of how agile teams can work. Other sectors could benefit from such collaborative and creative forms of teamworking.

7. Measure and reward progress

It is important for leaders to show people that the promised change outcomes and benefits are actually being delivered. Therefore, leaders need to ensure they uncover and share improvements. Even small wins should be captured as it is these small wins that will ultimately lead to bigger shifts.

Leaders should ensure these changes are shared on a regular basis during team meetings and on appropriate social networks, for example via SharePoint or a team WhatsApp group. Specific efforts and behaviours that drive change outcomes should be singled out and recognised. Monetary and non-monetary rewards (including time off, gifts and 'red letter' days) can also be used to reward significant contributions. This will encourage those who are slower to change to get out of their comfort zone and try out new ways of working. It will also speed adoption of the change by employees, creating a 'tipping point' effect where the majority push the change forward.

Ghandi famously remarked: "You must be the change you want to see in the world." Agile leaders understand and accept that their world is changing very fast. They recognise the importance of role modelling effective attitudes, behaviours and priorities that are important to tackle change positively. They move beyond vision and words, to action, experimentation and continuous improvement, ensuring they draw on and optimise the strengths of their people to create a future which is better than the past.

Proven ways to boost your energy and productivity



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You must be
the change
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world

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Many leaders we talk to are feeling overwhelmed, stressed and frustrated with their workloads and constant change. They take on too much, work too hard and end up feeling burnt out. The impact of this doesn't only damage their physical and psychological well-being, but undermines the effective functioning of their organisation and family. For example, recent research has found that erratic and disruptive behaviour at work can be caused by sleep deprivation. There are also a growing number of family breakdowns caused by overwork and absence from home. So what can leaders do to avoid feeling overwhelmed and manage themselves and their energy more effectively?

1. Avoid the busy trap

Every day, we hear people telling us just how busy they are: “manic”, “crazy busy” and “too busy to meet” are frequent responses when you ask people how they are doing. Modern society reinforces a flawed assumption that if you're busy, you are successful and are achieving a lot. However, this assumption often doesn't hold true and suggests a growing problem – we associate filling up our waking time and business with achievement and as a result, end up taking on too much. This is driven by pressures of multi-tasking and the perceived need to always be online and connected, but also by our fears of being seen as idle and non-essential, especially in an employment market characterised by constant reorganisation and job cuts.

As pointed out by Tim Kreider in a 2012 New York times article, this busyness and associated exhaustion is “...not a necessary and inevitable condition of life; it's something we've chosen, if only by our acquiescence to it.”

Leaders should therefore take time to review how they are spending their time to evaluate how much of their business actually contributes to positive results at work and their well-being and happiness outside work. By identifying time stealers and low-value activities, leaders can free up more time for high-value tasks and ensure better balance between work and home life. For example, you could ask whether spending two hours online on Facebook or LinkedIn every day is simply helping you feel busy and valued or is really moving you closer to your career and life goals.

2. Manage your energy as well as your time

With the growing pace and complexity of work, every leader needs some downtime to remain productive. A growing number of well publicised cases of executive burnout have highlighted the futility of a 'working till you drop' attitude. Like pro athletes, leaders need to be better at disconnecting and planning in breaks to re-energise and recover, especially after highly stressful periods at work. Those with an overly well-developed sense of responsibility or a resilience strength might struggle with this principle as they assume they can go on forever without a break and take on ever greater workloads and challenges. However, we are all human and need rest periods to refuel. The rule of thumb we should apply is that the more energy we expend at work, the longer the periods of rest and recovery we need. Therefore, don't be afraid to take your

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full entitlement of holidays and build in other ways to recover like protecting your lunch break, meditation, brisk walks during the day, disconnecting when you get home, etc. Creating clear boundaries around your working day and week and protecting time outside work will help you maintain high levels of energy. For example, some leaders I know have decided to boundary their weekends for family time and personal hobbies whereas others leave work on time (or even early) a couple of days a week to spend time with their family.

In a fast moving, competitive and increasingly global world, many leaders are getting by with very little sleep. However, managing your energy effectively also means getting at least seven to eight hours' sleep a night. Recent research has shown that leaders who are sleep deprived are less productive than those who get adequate sleep and are also more argumentative and less capable of solving complex problems. Sleep deprivation is also associated with increased levels of illness and accidents both on and off the job. Therefore, those working in high risk environments such as heavy manufacturing, oil and gas or construction should be particularly alert to the dangers of exhaustion and fatigue.

Finally, leaders should take time to spot actions and tasks that deplete and top up not only their own energy, but also that of their team members. By asking the team about energy 'drainers' and 'boosters' on a regular basis and taking action to manage energy better, leaders will be able to create a more energised and productive environment.

3. Plan, Do, Review

Taking control of your productive time means spending time planning and reviewing it. We recommend a simple three step approach:

- I. Plan what you intend doing by making a list of prioritised actions for the next day (and/or week) beforehand. Having specific goals and tasks will keep you focused and motivated, especially when work pressures mount. I tend to do this as a pre-bed ritual, as I am not a naturally efficient person and if I left it to the morning, it wouldn't happen. Build in some buffer time to deal with those inevitable urgent items that arise most weeks, as well as distraction-free time for complex and time-consuming tasks.
- II. Do what you have planned on your list, ensuring you prioritise the top items of your list to do first thing in the morning when you are still fresh and energy levels are higher. Try to cut down on multi-tasking as recent research shows that our brains are not good at managing simultaneous tasks at the same time; focus on one task or problem at a time.
- III. Review what you have achieved during the day every evening, including the biggest success you've had, as well as any items that need to be carried over to the following day. Reviewing your successes and achievements from the day will fuel your energy and keep you motivated during the week.

4. Keep the inbox under control

Inboxes are a bit like Pufferfish – they grow at an alarming speed and become so spiky and unmanageable that they overwhelm us and become toxic for our levels of energy.

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We suggest a simple three step process based on the excellent guidance of best-selling author and productivity guru David Allen:

- I. Dump it: a significant amount of email traffic nowadays comprises rubbish or irrelevant correspondence. I recommend deleting these items as soon as you've scanned them.
- II. Do it: emails that aren't rubbish or irrelevant should be dealt with immediately or filed into a "To Do" folder. There are a variety of online productivity tools and mobile apps to help you spot and sort these important emails including filtering out junk mail and colour coding emails from key stakeholders like customers or your manager.
- III. Delegate it: many emails can be delegated to team members (or other co-workers) who are better placed to deal with these by virtue of their natural strengths or desire to grow and progress. Challenge yourself to delegate as much as possible to stretch your team and avoid getting overwhelmed in work they could be doing.

5. Break down complex tasks

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Complex and ambiguous tasks are particularly challenging. To avoid them overwhelming you, I suggest breaking them into smaller, more manageable goals and parts. Define what you need to achieve within one week, two weeks and so on and who can help in areas where we don't have natural strengths and energy. This will boost your motivation and enable you to achieve the best possible result. If you need inspiration on how to do this, check out the inspirational climbing movie, Touching the Void, a true story set in the Andes about a climber, Joe Simpson, who falls into a deep crevasse after his climbing companion is forced to cut the climbing rope to save himself. Against all odds, Simpson manages to climb out of the crevasse with a broken leg and make his way (by crawling and hopping) back to camp across a glacier, a five mile journey which takes him three days without food and with very little water. Watch it and you'll never think complex tasks are unmanageable again!

6. Call on others for help

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"Collaboration" is becoming the latest buzz word in organisations everywhere, yet in our increasingly self-absorbed and multi-tasking society, leaders are often not executing on a fundamental principle of collaboration – calling on others for help. This is particularly ironic when there are a proliferation of online platforms and solutions designed to open up opportunities for support from a diverse range of people and communities. Leaders need to challenge any limiting assumptions they have about the benefits of being self-reliant and learn to call on others for help and support, especially in areas where work is complex and potentially overwhelming. An obvious starting point is for leaders to expand and leverage their immediate network of co-workers, friends and family better. However, leaders should also build their networks (including virtual communities like LinkedIn) in a purposeful and proactive manner. This involves going beyond simply adding contacts and endorsing people to reaching out to those that can provide help and support in areas of skills and experience where you are less strong.

7. Don't procrastinate

Procrastination of tasks we don't like doing or those we regard as very complex is a bad habit many leaders develop over time. This sub-conscious avoidance technique provides short term relief, but leaders soon realise they are only deceiving themselves as they end up with piles of work that drain their energy, making them feel even more anxious and overwhelmed. To avoid procrastination, we recommend you:

- I. Create a to-do list, ensuring you finish the complex tasks you dislike first, ideally first thing in the morning when we're feeling most alert and focused
- II. Break a task you dislike into smaller daily chunks (e.g., 15 minute 'sprints') to make them more manageable
- III. Commit to others when you will complete the task and ask them to hold you to account for on-time delivery of the work
- IV. Avoid unnecessary distractions and interruptions by blocking out time in the day to deal with tasks that require focused attention
- V. Stop looking for a perfect solution. Perfectionism is one of the biggest causes of procrastination
- VI. Call on someone who can help you, especially if the task involves something you aren't naturally energised by
- VII. Reframe the work to link it to goals that are meaningful and attractive to you. For example, if you are procrastinating a presentation you need to prepare, think about how it might help you gain more support in the business for an enjoyable project you need more funding for
- VIII. Spend time reflecting on how you feel once you've achieved your goal. Research shows that hitting a goal releases hormones in the brain that give you pleasure. You may also want to give yourself a small reward (e.g., favourite snack, items of clothing, new gadget, etc.) for particularly tough tasks to reinforce the sense of accomplishment and behaviours that helped you succeed.

8. Role model productive and responsible behaviours

Leaders are not only responsible for managing their own time, energy and productivity, but also that of their team members. They should therefore be conscious of the example they are setting for others in the organisation, ensuring they communicate the principles and techniques outlined in this chapter to their team and practice what they preach. If leaders are sending emails to staff when on holiday or working through weekends on a regular basis, team members (particularly those with less experience) will assume they are expected to do the same. However, if you are exemplifying productive work habits and good work life balance, it is likely that employees will follow suit. It is also crucial to spot early signs that staff may be feeling unhappy or overwhelmed such as increased absenteeism, procrastination, dips in productivity, etc. If you suspect that the person is feeling anxious and overly stressed, speak to them early to avoid the situation escalating.

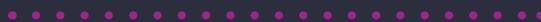
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By implementing these eight principles, leaders will ensure they are working smart and building productive and positive teams capable of delivering extraordinary results.
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Research and our decades of experience coaching and developing leaders, show that managers who learn to effectively manage their time and energy at work can be more productive, energised and happy at work and at home. They also lead teams who are happier and perform better than teams led by energy-sapping workaholics who drive people to burnout, despair and resignation. By implementing these eight principles, leaders will ensure they are working smart and building productive and positive teams capable of delivering extraordinary results.

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Strengthscope® ensures that people have honest, authentic conversations about what makes them truly unique, what they love to do, and how they can bring their best to work and to life, every single day.

