

## A Leader's Ultimate Goal - Connect to Engage!

It's been said many times that true leadership is measured by one's ability to motivate and influence others.

Leaders must work hard at motivating people to take action necessary to drive change and to ultimately increase results.

Even though most people would agree with the definition of leadership as the ability to motivate and influence others, most people still have trouble translating the definition of leadership into actionable and measurable steps.

The biggest obstacle faced by many leaders is simply figuring out how to effectively motivate and influence an entire team comprised of unique individuals.

Let's face it, not everyone is motivated by the same things, nor is everyone influenced to take action or change behavior based on the same factors.

So, what can leaders do to motivate and influence the ENTIRE team?

Here is the elusive one-word answer: CONNECT.

Leaders must invest the time in each and every one of their team members to, get to know them - to build a connection based on trust, honesty and respect. (Keep in mind, this personal connection must always remain professional and appropriate. Enough said on that.)

Taking this one step further, leaders must create opportunities for team members to connect.

This personal and professional connection will draw you and your team together, to work more effectively to improve efficiencies and increase production and profitability.

To help you envision the ultimate in a leader that successfully connects with his/her team members, let's look at a fictional example. Any "Trekies" out there? Don't flip the channel, this will be quick.

Even if "Star Trek" is not a TV favorite of yours, odds are you probably know enough about the long running series to appreciate our example.

Regardless of which Star Trek captain you visualize, all are terrific examples of leaders (albeit fictional) who have a unique connection to each and every member of the crew.

It's also obvious to the viewer that each team member has an unwavering allegiance to the team, the mission, and to his or her leader. (envision Captain YOU!)

Just imagine your own team having such a solid connection, both with you and with each other.

Picture you and your team facing exciting and challenging situations together, "Exploring strange new worlds!" and "Boldly going where no one has gone before!"

Maybe this means taking your team to the #1 spot in your company, and/or reaching new levels of efficiency and/or production!

The prospect of leading a team that is connected is exciting isn't it?

Ok, we've talked about connection and the importance of building a connected team. Next we see that connection is the key ingredient leaders must leverage in order to raise the level of employee engagement.

An employee that is engaged in their work will typically run circles around employees who are working simply by showing up and "going through the motions".

If an employee is engaged, it means that they feel they have a stake in the outcome - an honest desire to contribute to something greater than themselves, or even monetary gain.

The engaged employee has emotion tied to their work. Perhaps that emotion comes out of a sense of loyalty and connection to their leader or other team members.

Top leaders understand that in order to connect with their workforce, they need to leverage the power of emotion. Only by connecting with the individuals can a leader create a powerful team consisting of employees who are committed and engaged.

KEY MESSAGE: CONNECT TO ENGAGE!

Now that we now understand the concepts of connection and engagement, so let's get specific and share some examples of how a leader can achieve the connection that will inspire employee engagement:

1. Leaders must know up front where they are taking their team. They must "believe in" and "see a clear vision of the future". In order for you to know when you have achieved your vision, the vision must be measurable. Here are some examples of a vision with measurable results.

Showing most improvement quarter over quarter.

Achieving balanced performance - your team is listed in the Top 3 ranking in every key category.

Reaching the net income annual goal, or gaining market share over a key competitor!

2. Leaders must communicate their vision in a way that inspires others to "believe". Communicating change can be difficult.

Communicating a clear action plan that everyone can understand lessens anxiety. Change always creates opportunity. Turning the anxiety of change into excitement for opportunity should be the goal of the leader when communicating the new vision. Here are some examples:

Breakdown vision into individual goals so team members understand their roles and responsibilities.

Hold all team kick-off meeting to unveil overall vision and action plan. Add fun and excitement. Anticipate questions and be prepared to overcome any perceived barriers.

Implement tracking and regular progress reporting to keep team focused on achieving each step leading up to the ultimate goal.

3. Leaders must support, promote, inspire and motivate team members to realize the vision. Motivate team members by giving everyone an opportunity for personal gain, above and beyond their regular pay. For example:

Introduce a special incentive program. (This doesn't have to cost a lot of money.) Base awards on a percentage of "net" gain to the organization - not just one person's ability to achieve an individual goal.

Offer "interim" awards to key contributors once the team achieves mid-level goals.

Make a point of "celebrating" the small wins, which will ultimately lead to the BIG WIN! Use gift certificates, lottery tickets, recognition awards, etc - praise and recognize individual and team accomplishments along the way.

4. A team is only as strong as its weakest link. Leaders must hold team members accountable for their duties and responsibilities. This is only fair to those employees doing a great job. Hold accountable any team member who is not doing his/her fair share. In order to achieve great things, you must expect great things from your people. Consider these examples:

BE CONSISTENT in your counsel. Hold yourself accountable! Did you TEACH? Did you COACH? Only then can you EXPECT!

BE CONSISTENT in your counsel.

1st offense = verbal warning (ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities)

2nd offense = written warning (get signature for documentation)

3rd offense = final notice (employee must understand that you will support their choice to either improve immediately or to move on to a more rewarding opportunity.)

4th offense = termination

And finally, BE CONSISTENT in your counsel.

In wrapping up this conversation may we reiterate one last time - when you have succeeded in creating a team that is connected, you can count on each of them having a higher degree of personal engagement toward meeting the goals before them.

Still wondering if this connection thing is really that powerful of a concept? Real quick, think about the following examples of leaders who have connected with people on a broad scale, and the kinds of results that came from achieving such a powerful connection:

1. President Reagan - connected so effectively with the people of a foreign nation and around the world by effectively communicating the words "Tear down this wall!"
2. Boris Yeltsin - won support from people all across the globe as he stood on a tank and quite literally stared down the face of communism.

The final point here is that you do NOT need to be a world leader in order to be a great leader. Through the power of connection you can inspire a higher degree of employee engagement which will enable you and your team to achieve new levels of efficiency and production.

Enjoy the journey!

### About the Author

Richard Gorham is the founder and President of Leadership-Tools.com. His web site, located at <http://www.leadership-tools.com> is dedicated to providing free, low-cost tools and resources for today's aspiring leaders.

Source: <http://www.article-idea.com>