



EVERYTHING COUNTS

The 6 Ways To Inspire and Motivate Top Performance

by Joe Folkman

Despite all research about the nature of leaders, practitioners and scholars still acknowledge that many aspects of leadership remain a mystery. Today I would like to address one of the key mysteries that seems to consistently defy traditional analysis.

Often, leaders are identified as possessing a remarkable quality that sets them apart from others. It causes others to be attracted to them and enables them to achieve remarkable outcomes. That quality has most frequently been labeled “charisma,” a term that comes from the Greek word meaning “gift.” In ancient times people believed this quality was a divine gift bestowed upon some and not others. I, however, intend to prove the following:

1. There are different approaches to inspiring leadership that go beyond having “charisma”
2. The ability to Inspire and Motivate Others is a behavioral skill that anyone can develop.

When you tell leaders to be more inspiring, my experience is that most of time they are confused about what to do. Should they give more “high 5s”? Be perkier around the office? Stand up and give motivational speeches?

As my colleague Jack Zenger and I began a deeper analysis of what makes leaders inspiring and motivating, we fell into the seemingly logical trap of thinking that charisma, as the term is most often used, is simply a synonym for “being inspiring”. That

is no longer our view. We have concluded that being charismatic helps in a small way, for some people in some circumstances, to be perceived as inspiring and motivating. But there are countless leaders who are identified by their colleagues as highly inspiring who are definitely not charismatic.

For example, Warren Buffett is a highly inspirational leader that people trust because of his expertise. If he buys railroads, railroad stocks go up; if he sells, they go down. He definitely inspires others. So does Oprah Winfrey. However, Oprah’s style is much different. She is warm and inviting, and is probably most known as the best interviewer in the world. Two people, both inspiring, but in entirely different ways.

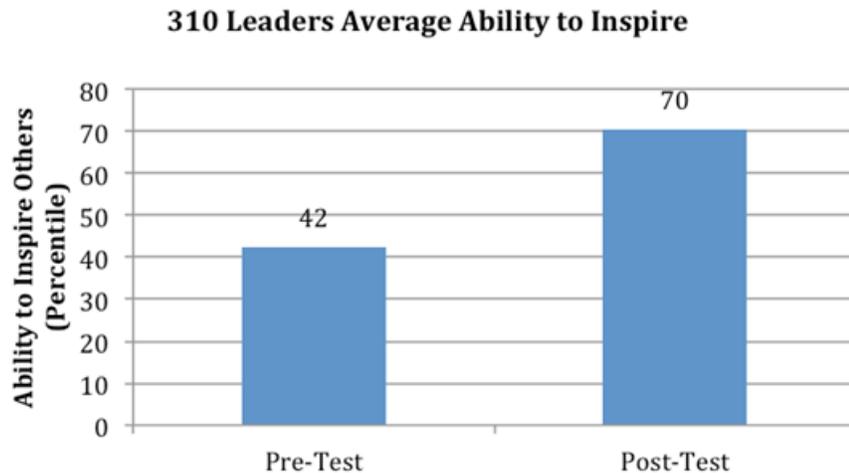
So here’s what we did. We took the 1,000 most inspiring leaders in our database and clustered them together to find out what “approach” they took to inspire those around them. This is where we applied what some might call “reverse engineering”. By finding the leaders who received the highest scores for being inspiring and motivating, we could analyze our data to find the other behaviors that reliably go hand-in-hand with that trait. We were successful in determining that there are six consistent approaches these individuals use. Most leaders tend to use one or two of the six most frequently. Each of the first four traits were used more than 20% of the time as a primary or secondary approach; and the last two are used far less frequently. Here they are:

1. **Visionary**—providing a clear picture of the future and being able to communicate that to the team.
2. **Enhancing**—creating positive one-on-one relationships along with team relationships by being a great listener and connecting emotionally with people.
3. **Driver**—displaying a focused pursuit to make the numbers and complete things on time and generally being accountable for personal and group performance.
4. **Principled**—providing a powerful role model of doing the right things in the right way.
5. **Enthusiast**—exuding passion and energy about the organization, its goals and the work itself.
6. **Expert**—providing a strong technical direction that comes from deep expertise.

The important “aha” for most who review these findings is that they have previously assumed (as we all tend to do) that being inspiring required someone to be an “enthusiast”. Most people are highly relieved to discover there are other ways to inspire, and they pleased to discover they tend to naturally gravitate toward one of the predominant first four traits. Our research also shows that leaders who use more than one of these leadership approaches are more inspiring to their subordinates than those who rely primarily on one.

Can leaders learn to become more inspiring? Next we put a group of more than 300 leaders to the test over a 18-24 month period of time. During that time they were able to improve their ability to inspire others by

10 percentile points or more, which is a statistically significant increase. Notice in the graph below that as a group, these leaders moved from below average— 42nd percentile—to the 70th percentile—a significant leap.



This evidence is clear. With awareness, good feedback and a plan of development, leaders are most definitely able to make significant improvement on this most important of all leadership competencies.

Some believe inspiration is just something leaders need to provide on big occasions. They see it as the yearly speech where leaders get up in front of the employees to get them revved up and encouraged. However, inspiration is much more than this. Everything a leader does, every day, impacts their employees. If a leader would take even a few minutes to ask people how they’re doing, thank them and encourage them to do more; that effort counts. In fact, everything counts. Likewise, everything employees do, on every level, counts within the organization’s results as a whole.

You don’t have to have “charisma” to inspire the people around you. Find your preferred methodology, and start making it count.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joe Folkman, Ph.D., is a frequent keynote speaker and conference presenter, a consultant to some of the world's most successful organizations, and the author or co-author of eight books. His research has been published in The Harvard Business Review, Wall Street Journal's National Business Employment Weekly, Training and Development, and Executive Excellence.

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