



ENCOURAGING THE HEART

Review by Doug Talley

Encouraging others is at the heart of effective leadership. Authors Kouzes and Posner found that 98 percent of people they surveyed said they perform at a higher level when they receive encouragement. High performers don't necessarily *need* encouragement to do their best, but when they receive it, their performance elevates. So if you want the people you lead to perform at their highest levels, then you need to understand and practice encouraging their hearts, i.e. appreciating and recognizing them for what they do and who they are.

Encouragement literally means "to give others heart." That translates into "courage when facing great challenges, hope when confronted with great difficulties, and the fortitude to reach inside and give your best even when faced with great odds." Courage also includes being generous and big-hearted. So encouraging others gives them a combination of "passion and compassion," thus motivating them to be the best they can be and to do their very best. This is more than just being likeable or nice to people and cheering. Encouraging the heart involves employing leadership principles that motivate people to press forward so that shared outcomes are accomplished.

Kouzes and Posner identify seven basic practices that will encourage those you lead:

1. Set clear Standards:

What standards do you want people in your church or organization to live up to? If you don't communicate those clearly and frequently, people won't understand the values the organization is built on and what it means to fit into the organization. When the leader believes in high standards and communicates them in a way people resonate

with them, people will develop a belief that they can live up to those standards even if they have to really stretch themselves to do so.

2. Expect The Best:

People tend to act in a way that is consistent with our expectations. When we believe in someone and expect him or her to excel, the person is far more likely to have self-confidence and actually excel. When we lead people, we are tempted to get frustrated with them when they don't immediately live up to our expectations. We often communicate this frustration in a way that creates a culture of failure because the person senses that we doubt they can measure up. We are especially prone to expect little of volunteers and assume they are going to do the minimum, and we communicate this assumption in various ways. The volunteer picks up on it and delivers what we expect. So resist this temptation by always delivering your personal best and expecting others to do the same.

3. Pay Attention:

Leadership is not about working from a corner office in which you are protected from people. It involves being in touch with people (CBWA = Caring by Walking Around) and having a purpose for interacting with them. People are encouraged when their leader pays attention to how they are doing, to what they are doing, and to how they are feeling. By wandering around and connecting with people on purpose, leaders are able to catch people modeling the organization's standards and provide affirmation. When leaders show they care about others, they're more likely to be invited into problem-solving conversations. By listening with your eyes and your heart, not just with your ears and your brain, you communicate to people how much you care.

4. Personal Recognition:

Recognition needs to be preceded by personal knowledge of the individual so that it is genuine and meaningful. When recognition makes a person feel special and valued, it motivates him to give his best. Recognition is really about being thoughtful: putting effort in thinking about the other person and what makes him feel affirmed and valued.

5. Tell The Story:

Through stories we can create organization heroes (role models) that people can relate to and seek to emulate. Stories help bring values and goals to life. They provide a stronger human connection than simply reiterating the organizational standards as facts. They also have a way of bringing people together and creating a sense of team. Tell stories that reinforce the standards and culture you want to characterize the organization.

6. celebrate Together:

Celebration nourishes the heart of an organization and motivates people to excel. It can include celebrating an organizational accomplishment or an individual achievement. It fuels unity, creates a feeling of belonging and being valued, and can generate motivation. People have a need to share life and work with each other. Especially during difficult and challenging times, celebration can kindle hope and faith. Celebration can also reinforce organization values and goals. One of the keys to celebrating well is to determine during the planning stage what the celebration will be designed to accomplish or create. If it is just a party and isn't connected to purpose or values, it becomes a distraction to what the organization seeks to be and do.

7. Set The Example:

If an organization is going to encourage the hearts of its people, then encouragement has to be a value embodied by the leader. Telling people is never as effective as modeling. When the leader personally lives the values, it enhances her credibility. Leaders go first. They motivate others to follow by setting the example. If encouraging the heart of others doesn't come naturally to you, put it on your daily list of things to do.

For most of us, encouraging the hearts of others doesn't come naturally. If it did, Kouzes and Posner probably wouldn't have written this book. Fortunately, they don't just tell us to do it. They also provide 150 ways you can encourage others as they provide multiple examples for each practice. You will raise your game and become a more effective and genuine encourager if you implement just a few of their examples.

By the way, encouraging the hearts of others will encourage your heart. Not a bad side effect.

Encouraging the Heart: A Leader's Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others

by James M. Kouzes and Barry M. Posner

Jossey-Bass, \$18.95, 224 ppg.