

WOMEN OF WITNESS

TIPS TO BETTER RELATIONSHIPS



8 Ways the Best Leaders Bring out the Best in Others

By Dr. Alan Zimmerman

For years people have repeated the phrase, “You can’t motivate anyone else — motivation has to come from within.”

Really? Think back. Haven’t you ever been inspired by someone — a boss, a coach, a parent, or a teacher — who believed in you and pushed you to do more than you thought possible?

Of course you have. Motivation can come from others. And whether you manage a team, teach a class, or raise a family, you’re already in a position of influence.

So the real question is this: How can you use your influence to bring out the best in others?

Here are eight proven ways the most respected leaders do it — on and off the job.

1. Create an Emotionally Exciting Vision. People don’t get fired up by numbers or quotas; they’re moved by a cause worth believing in. A compelling vision gives purpose to the work.

So give your employees or coworkers (or even your kids) an exciting vision. Follow the example of the great companies. They all have a vision that captures the hearts of their people. Disney’s is “to create happiness.” Patagonia’s is “to save our home planet.” Both inspire emotion, not spreadsheets.

Example: Elon Musk mobilized tens of thousands with his bold mission “to make life multiplanetary.” Love him or not, that vision moves people.

Ask yourself: What have you done to create an exciting vision that drives the people in your life and work?

2. Talk About the Vision — Often. An unspoken vision fades fast. Repeat it. Reinforce it. Wrap it in words that make people feel part of something larger.

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Example: Jacinda Ardern led New Zealand through crisis with empathy and clarity, reminding citizens of their shared purpose: “Be kind. Stay united.”

Ask yourself: When was the last time you reminded people what they’re really working toward?

3. Act with Visible Enthusiasm. People follow energy. If you look bored or burned out, don’t expect passion from anyone else. You can’t be shy, reserved, distant, or unavailable and at the same time be an effective motivator.

So show your passion. Let them see it in your actions and hear it in your words. Because people love to work with those who love what they’re doing.

As legendary author Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us, “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” It’s as true today as it was then.

Example: Oprah Winfrey radiates genuine excitement for growth and possibility — and her passion has inspired millions to pursue theirs.

4. Believe in Your People. People rise (or fall) to meet your expectations. Treat them as capable, and they’ll become capable.

It’s like the banker who often dropped a coin in the beggar’s cup. Unlike most people, the banker would insist on getting one of the pencils the beggar had with him. The banker would say, “You are a merchant and I always expect to receive good value from the merchants with whom I do business.”

One day the beggar was gone. Some years later the banker walked by a concession stand, and there was the former beggar, now a shopkeeper. The shopkeeper said, “I always hoped you might come by some day. You are largely responsible for me being here. You kept telling me I was a merchant. I started thinking of myself that way. Instead of a beggar receiving gifts, I started selling pencils, lots of them. You gave me self-respect and caused me to look at myself differently.”



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Example: Nelson Mandela believed in the humanity of those who once oppressed him. That belief transformed not just individuals, but a nation.

Ask yourself: Do you see the beggar or the merchant in the people around you?

5. Demand Excellence. Excellence shows you care. Low standards communicate indifference.

As football coach Nick Saban says, “High achievers don’t like mediocre people — and mediocre people don’t like high achievers.”

Of course, if you demand excellence, if you refuse to sanction incompetence, if you enforce high standards, you will be temporarily disliked. So be it. While doing a program with Lou Holtz, the great football coach, he said, “If you desperately need people to like you, you’ll never have their respect.”

You must be willing to tell people when they do not meet expected standards. You must be willing to correct people’s mistakes. You must demand excellence.

Example: Angela Merkel earned worldwide respect for her calm, methodical insistence on precision and preparation. She demanded excellence — and got it.

Ask yourself: Do your standards tell people, “You matter enough for me to expect your best?”

6. Remind People How Important They Are. Never let anyone say, “I’m just a clerk” or “I’m just part-time.” There’s no such thing as just anything.

Example: Howard Schultz built Starbucks by reminding employees they weren’t selling coffee — they were creating connection. That purpose turned baristas into brand ambassadors.

Ask yourself: Do the people around you know that what they do makes a difference?

7. Ask for Their Input. When you ask for ideas, you create ownership. And ownership fuels motivation.

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One of my corporate clients did exactly that ... with wonderful results. Several of their HR people traveled from office to office, holding meetings with everyone in the company, from entry level up through the executive level. The HR professionals held up one report after another and simply asked, “Do you need this report?” and listened to what their people had to say.

As a result, they eliminated six million pages of unnecessary reports ... a huge savings of time, money, and energy ... and a dramatic show of respect for the input of their employees. And morale skyrocketed.

Example: Satya Nadella revived Microsoft by shifting the culture from “know-it-all” to “learn-it-all.” Listening changed everything.

Ask yourself: When was the last time you really listened — not to reply, but to understand?

8. Keep Your Promises. Broken promises destroy trust faster than anything — because people seldom if ever forget a promise.

It is not good enough to tell someone, “I’m sorry. I forgot ... or ... I got busy.” It doesn’t build trust, and it doesn’t motivate others. Even if you have to write down every promise you make, do it, and keep that list in sight until you have followed through on every promise.

Bottom line: People can forgive mistakes but not insincerity.

Example: Abraham Lincoln was relentlessly attacked but rarely distrusted. His word was his bond — and his integrity outlived his presidency.

Ask yourself: Do people trust your word as much as your vision?

FINAL THOUGHT: Motivating others isn’t about pep talks or power — it’s about belief, integrity, and passion lived out daily.

You don’t need a title to do that. You just need influence — and you already have it.

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So this week, ask yourself:

“Who around me could become more than they are — if I simply led them like this?”

Because when you bring out the best in others, you don’t just change their performance — you change their lives.

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