

CHAPTER ONE

The Heart of Leadership

Really believe in your heart of hearts that your fundamental purpose, the reason for being, is to enlarge the lives of others. Your life will be enlarged also. And all of the other things we have been taught to concentrate on will take care of themselves.

—PETE THIGPEN, Executive Reserves

Ask yourself this question: Do I need encouragement to perform at my best?

We've asked our leadership classes, and at first the answers surprised us. We knew from our previous research that performance was higher when people were led by individuals who gave more encouragement,¹ so we naturally expected that almost everyone would answer yes.

We were wrong. Only about 60 percent reported that they needed encouragement to do their best. Puzzled, we asked them to tell us why.

They told us that they didn't *need* encouragement. They *could* do their best without it. The majority believed themselves to be individuals with lots of personal initiative and responsibility, and that needing encouragement implied they couldn't perform well unless someone was around to cheer them on and tell them they were doing a good job.

Their responses made us intensely curious. How could it be that performance was higher among leaders who were

more encouraging of others, but almost half were telling us they didn't need it?

So we reframed the question: "When you get encouragement, does it help you perform at a higher level?" This time about 98 percent said yes, and only 2 percent said no. These responses are in line with a study by the training and development company Kepner-Tregoe, in which researchers found that 96 percent of the North American workers they studied agreed with the statement "I get a lot of satisfaction out of knowing I've done a good job."²

STARVED FOR RECOGNITION

So we get a lot of satisfaction from positive feedback, and encouragement helps if we get it. Why, then, do we *think* we don't need much positive affirmation?

Perhaps it's because we don't experience enough encouragement to realize how important it is. Most workers don't get much recognition for a job well done, and most managers don't give it, according to the Kepner-Tregoe study. Only about 40 percent of North American workers say they receive any recognition for a job well done, and about the same percentage report they *never* get recognized for outstanding individual performance.³

Think about this for a moment. You bust your butt to get that shipment out early, or make that customer feel really special, or invent a way to fix that troublesome glitch in the product, and you *never* get even a thank-you. Apparently, this happens to too many of us—or perhaps all of us at one time or another.

No wonder. Only 50 percent of managers say they give recognition for high-performance.⁴ Evidently, most assume that getting extraordinary things done is just part of the job.

Paul Moran certainly felt this way at one time in his managerial career. “In the past,” he explained, “I usually neglected to celebrate my team’s accomplishments (and my own accomplishments) because I personally never placed much importance on this aspect of the job for myself, and I tended to forget about recognizing the accomplishments of others. Rather, I treated their accomplishments as part of their normal job, which required no unique recognition.”⁵

When Moran went to work at Pacific Bell, however, he took another look at the importance he gave to recognizing others and celebrating successes. He found, in fact, that it did make a difference to others, so he decided to change his leadership practices. To remind himself of the importance of overt recognition, he developed a priority list of ways to recognize others. When his team achieved a key milestone, he would go around and personally shake the hand of each and every member of the project team. He would take several key team members out to lunch and make phone calls to all members to thank them personally for their efforts in the project. He’d invite people to a small office party where cake and coffee were served.

Soon after putting a more encouraging leadership approach into place, Moran saw productivity increase, absenteeism decrease, and a stronger human bond developing between coworkers. Furthermore, his own job became easier, as individuals working with him began taking greater initiative. The more cooperative environment led to better communications, with fewer conflicts between staff members. Though there was a great deal of hoopla around the celebrations and recognitions Moran put together, he felt that he should have done even more.

We can all do a lot more. We *must* do a lot more. As the authors of the Kepner-Tregoe study put it, “Unless this issue is addressed, the goal of achieving a high-performance workplace will remain unattainable.”⁶

OPENING OURSELVES UP

There's more to the explanation of why we don't give and receive more encouragement than the basic assumption that it's part of the job. That's too easy an answer; it doesn't get at the root problem.

Expressing genuine appreciation for the efforts and successes of others means we have to show our emotions. We have to talk about our feelings in public. We have to make ourselves vulnerable to others. For many of us—perhaps most of us—this can be tough, even terrifying.

Take the case of Joan Nicolo, a general manager at a financial services company. For her, encouraging the heart was particularly challenging. She was uncomfortable praising people in public. Yet she knew her direct reports deserved and needed to be acknowledged for the work they were doing. Being a conscientious person, and recognizing that acknowledging others was an important leadership skill, she started asking herself what was holding her back. On the surface, it seemed such a simple task. So what was the big deal?

After considerable soul-searching, she came up with some theories about what she saw as shortcomings in her leadership abilities. For one, she was afraid that if she praised one person, others would think she was playing favorites. She also felt that praising and encouraging activities took too much time. It was just another item to add to her already burgeoning list of responsibilities. But the more she thought about it, the more she realized that her associates really did deserve to be recognized; it was high time to come to terms with her own resistance. She was determined to break through the resistance and give it a try.

A few days later, during a presentation, she made a special point of thanking people publicly for fostering the collab-

orative spirit of the project they were working on. It felt great, both to her and to others. She said, “I found that my spirit was lifted. They felt appreciated, and I felt that they had received the credit they deserved.”

Nicolo felt vulnerable opening herself up like that to thank the group. But she knew for sure that she’d established a human connection with her colleagues that hadn’t been there before and would prove to be highly beneficial in the months ahead. Communication was more open after that, and she felt far less guarded than ever before. This was a real turning point for her.

In the following weeks, she brought much more of herself to her work relationships, and people responded with a new level of enthusiasm for her leadership. Indeed, she began to see her coworkers in a different light. She could focus on getting the job done as well as enjoy a human bond with everyone around her. She felt more energetic than ever as she came to work, and when she went home she felt increasing satisfaction with what she’d accomplished. At first it wasn’t clear how these changes were going to affect productivity. Would they translate into anything that benefited the company? In a short time, she saw that this new way of relating brought her group together as never before, fueling an esprit de corps that spurred them on to give their personal best whenever an extraordinary effort was required.

Contrary to her worst fears, nobody got jealous when she praised one person or another, and the time it took to show her appreciation was well worth it. Summing up the experience, she said, “I learned that openly celebrating successes is essential to building and sustaining a unified team. Never again will I underrate the importance of encouraging the heart, of visibly appreciating others and their efforts in my future leadership experiences.”

A SECRET REVEALED

We've been misleading ourselves for years, operating according to myths about leadership and management that have kept us from seeing the truth.

First, there's the myth of rugged individualism. There's this belief that individualistic achievement gets us the best results. "If you want something done right," we hear, "do it yourself." We seem content to believe that we really don't need other people to perform at our best.

The fact is, we don't do our best in isolation. We don't get extraordinary things done by working alone with no support, encouragement, expressions of confidence, or help from others. That's not how we make the best decisions, get the best grades, run faster, achieve the highest levels of sales, invent breakthrough products, or live longer.

We've also operated under the myth that leaders ought to be cool, aloof, and analytical; they ought to separate emotion from work. We're told that real leaders don't need love, affection, and friendship. "It's not a popularity contest" is a phrase we've all heard often. "I don't care if people like me. I just want them to respect me."

Nonsense.

One of the most uplifting interviews we conducted in the course of writing this book was with Tony Codianni, director of the Training and Dealer Development Group for Toshiba America Information Systems. Codianni told us that "encouraging the heart is *the* most important leadership practice, because it's the most personal." Codianni believes leadership is all about people, and if you're going to lead people you have to care about them.

Codianni is right.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Colorado Springs has taken a look at the process of executive selection, and their results support Codianni's observation. Jodi Taylor, vice president of CCL, told us that in examining the critical variables for success for the top three jobs in large organizations, they found that the number one success factor is "relationships with subordinates."⁷

In an even more startling study, CCL found something that should forever put to rest the myth of the purely rational manager. Using a battery of measurement instruments,⁸ CCL researchers looked at a number of factors that could account for a manager's success. CCL found that one, and *only* one, factor significantly differentiated the top quartile of managers from the bottom quartile. (They found it on an assessment instrument called FIRO-B, developed by William C. Schutz. The FIRO-B measures two aspects of three basic interpersonal needs: the extent to which we express and we want inclusion, control, and affection.⁹)

What was the factor that distinguished highest-performing managers from lowest-performing? The popular assumption about managers is that they have a high need to express control. So you might think that's the factor that distinguishes highest- from lowest-performing managers. But that's *not* what CCL found. Rather, the single factor that differentiated the top from the bottom was higher scores on *affection*—both expressed and wanted. Contrary to the myth of the cold-hearted boss who cares very little about people's feelings, the highest-performing managers show more warmth and fondness toward others than do the bottom 25 percent. They get closer to people, and they're significantly more open in sharing thoughts and feelings than their lower-performing counterparts.

Now, these managers were not without their rational sides. In fact, on another measure administered by CCL they

all scored high on “thinking,” and on their need to have power and influence over others. It’s just that these factors didn’t explain why managers were higher performers.

When the CCL researchers examined their findings more closely, they found that the highest-performing managers’ subordinates *two levels down* in the organization were significantly more satisfied overall with their coworkers, supervision, top leaders, organization planning, ethics, and quality. Clearly, openness and affection pay off.

The CCL study adds to the growing body of evidence that *emotional intelligence* can be more important than IQ in predicting success in organizations—or in life, for that matter. Daniel Goleman, in his groundbreaking book on the subject, refers to *emotional intelligence* (EQ) as “a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them.”¹⁰ Elsewhere, Goleman says that of the five dimensions of EQ, empathy is “the fundamental skill of management.”¹¹

Even more intriguing in the CCL study is the finding that the highest-performing managers also had higher-than-average scores on *wanted affection*. In fact, the average *wanted affection* score on the FIRO-B is the highest of all the scores!

Yet, as CCL’s Jodi Taylor related it to us, in all the years she’s been collecting data on leaders—there are more than thirty thousand leaders in its database—she’s “never had a group that expressed more affection than it wanted.” It seems we all want more affection than we give. Reflecting on this finding, she comments that “everybody is waiting for someone else to show them affection.” The question is, what are we waiting for? What are *you* waiting for?

We’ve all heard the dismissing comment made by many in the managerial ranks that “I don’t care what people think of

me.” Well, it may indeed be true for them, but it’s not true of the best leaders. The best leaders want to be liked, and they want openness from other people. Not caring how others feel and think about what we do and say is an attitude for losers—an attitude that can only lead to less and less effectiveness.

The evidence tells us that expressing affection is important to success, *and* we have high needs for it; it’s as if we’re all trying to hide something that we all want. We have a secret we’re afraid to reveal because it might make us look soft or wimpy or who knows what. *The secret is this: we all really do want to be loved.*

Some years back, when we interviewed former chief executive officer and now venture capitalist Irwin Federman, his remarks foreshadowed what we now know from the data. He spoke an important truth about the *chemistry* that exists between great leaders and those who follow them. He spoke of love as a necessary ingredient, one that is rarely appreciated, in part because we underrate the role of our feelings.

Reflecting on our love for our leaders, Federman said: “You don’t love someone because of who they are; you love them because of the way they make you feel. This axiom applies equally in a company setting. It may seem inappropriate to use words such as *love* and *affection* in relation to business. Conventional wisdom has it that management is not a popularity contest. . . . I contend, however, that all things being equal, we will work harder and more effectively for people we like. And we like them in direct proportion to how they make us feel.”¹²

It is impossible to escape the message here that if people work with leaders who encourage the heart, they feel better about themselves. Their self-esteem goes up. These leaders set people’s spirits free, often inspiring them to become more than

they ever thought possible. This, indeed, may be our ultimate mission as leaders.

In his book *The Heart Aroused*, David Whyte talks a great deal about the “vital side of our self that is repressed and sometimes strangled” by the corporate world.¹³ He says that in banishing this vital part of ourselves in the name of “safety and good sense,” we find that “our capacity for vitality and enthusiasm is lost.” It’s this vitality and enthusiasm that leaders can awaken in people. But to awaken it in others, they must first awaken their own enthusiasm in the workplace and express it openly.

To awaken vitality in others, Whyte points out, leaders have to cross a certain boundary between themselves and their associates. Sometimes it’s not easy, because most of us have been raised to believe that it’s important to maintain a buffer of “safety and good sense” between ourselves and the people who choose to follow our leadership. Perhaps the greatest risk we take as leaders is losing the interpersonal safety zone. If we don’t open up to others and express our affection and appreciation, then we stay safe behind the wall of rationality. But as the CCL folks have learned, it’s not an either-or. We have minds *and* hearts. Both are meant to be used at work. When we use them both, we’re more effective. To use our minds and not our hearts is to deny ourselves greater success.

JUST SAY THANK-YOU

Opening up is harder for some people than for others, but major psychotherapy is not required here. It starts with what Robert Fulghum pointed out some years ago in his book *Everything I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*¹⁴: the little reminder pinned to the wall where you’re sure to see it

every morning when you come to work: “Remember to say thank you!”

Study after study points out just how fundamental all this really is. For example, one survey examining employee turnover found that the chief reason people give for leaving is that they get “limited praise and recognition.”¹⁵ When asked what skills their managers might develop to be more effective, employees place at the top of the list “the ability to recognize and acknowledge the contributions of others.”

This is not new news. In 1949, a famous study by Lawrence Lindahl asked employees to rank the intangible rewards of their jobs. Then their managers were asked to rank what they believed the employees wanted.¹⁶

Highest on the employees’ lists were (1) feeling appreciated, and (2) feeling that they were being informed about things that were happening. They wanted to be listened to. And what did their managers think this same group of employees wanted? They believed their employees would put good wages, job security, and advancement opportunities first. In fact, most managers had no idea how highly their employees valued being appreciated and feeling that they were informed and listened to.

You might say, “Well, that was 1949; a lot has changed since then.” We would certainly agree with you; a lot has changed. But a lot has not. Lindahl repeated his study of employees and managers in the 1980s, and again in the 1990s. The results? Each time, the findings came out the same.

What about the managers themselves? How did they rank these intangible rewards of the workplace? Like the employees they supervised, managers ranked being appreciated, informed, and listened to highest on their lists. But why should this surprise us? Managers, leaders, employees: everyone is human. We all have these needs to feel that we matter, to feel that those with

whom we work appreciate what we have to give and that they value us enough to let us know what's going on.

In preparing this book, we did our own survey and asked people to identify the most important nonfinancial reward they receive at work. The most common answer was a simple thank-you. Author Gerald H. Graham reports that personal congratulations rank at the top of the most powerful nonfinancial motivators identified by employees.¹⁷ Harvard Business School professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter reports that in the most innovative companies there is a significantly higher volume of thank-yous than in companies of low innovation.¹⁸

Appreciation, acknowledgment, praise, thank-yous, some simple gesture that says, "I care about you and what you do." That's how we start. Whether in the form of a simple thank-you or an elaborate celebration, encouragement is feedback—positive feedback. It's information that communicates "You're on the right track. You're doing really well. Thanks." To deny each other this gift of positive feedback is to deny increased opportunities for success.

Of course, there's more to it than this. In the next chapter, we take a look at a classic case of one leader as a way of teaching us the rudiments of encouraging the heart. We also learn the fundamental principles that are essential to offering genuine encouragement to others.

As you read further, though, keep in mind the basic message of this chapter: at the heart of effective leadership is genuinely caring for people.