

PART ONE

EXPLORING
POSITIVE ACADEMIC
LEADERSHIP

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

CHAPTER 1

WHAT POSITIVE LEADERSHIP MEANS

Very few administrators begin their positions as confirmed cynics or pessimists, although some of them end up that way. It's just human nature. When most people are offered their first leadership position, they're enthusiastic about the opportunity, excited by the possibilities, and eager to make a real difference in the world. They want to help shape a program, guide students and faculty members toward achieving their goals, and leave their college or university better than they found it. So why is it that this initial optimism all too often gets stifled by the reality of the job, and day after day gets spent on countless vexing problems, those petty little details we know collectively as "administrivia"? Here's how Frederick L. Ahearn, a former dean at the Catholic University of America, describes his work in his essay "A Day in the Life of a Dean":

Another day begins, and my agenda, as usual, is full. Sometimes I wonder if my life has become one long meeting. Fitting things into my schedule is becoming a juggling act—so much to do in so little time . . . An angry student complains that she is not able to register for an elective course that her faculty adviser has recommended she take: "With the high tuition that students must pay today, the school should have extra sections of the important courses that students need for their professional training." . . . As I walk back to my office, I think about how much more difficult it is to be a dean when you have to cut a budget that is already inadequate, and when the AVP [academic vice president] has little regard for the school. I have always tried to emphasize how the school contributes to the university and its mission, but I feel that the AVP does not understand the school or its mission . . . The five members of the school's Committee on Appointment and Promotion (CAP), all senior faculty, enter as I finish

my phone call. As dean, I am an ex officio member of this committee, and I chair the meetings. However, I do not vote with the CAP; I express my vote separately on each matter that comes before the committee . . . I finally end the meeting knowing that this split will continue to interfere with other business in the school. How will I be able to manage these differences? How can I breach the differences and negotiate a compromise? I will have to end up siding with one group over the other. I am disgusted! . . . Driving home this night, I feel tired. I am not happy with my meetings with the academic vice president and the senior faculty on the Committee on Appointment and Promotion. (Ahearn, 1997, pp. 9, 10, 13, 17, 18, 20)

Who in the world would ever want a job like *that*? One problem to be solved after another. Angry or apathetic stakeholders. A feeling of exhaustion, disgust, and disappointment at the end of the day. There are probably lots of department chairs, deans, vice presidents, provosts, presidents, and chancellors who can sympathize with the situation Ahearn describes. We come to our positions with the impression that we'll be dealing with major issues and key decisions, but we often find our days weighed down by one crisis after another. Once we've spent a year or two on the job, we discover that we've become so focused on solving problems that we hardly have any time left to achieve all the goals we had when we started.

Part of the problem stems from the way in which administrative positions have been designed at most colleges and universities. If you do an Internet search on such phrases as "job description department chair" or "responsibilities university dean," you'll find numerous listings where administrative duties are fragmented, ill defined, and occasionally even contradictory. For example, visionary assignments like "provides leadership in all areas of the discipline" or "recruits, retains, and develops a faculty recognized for excellence in both instruction and research" often stand side by side with paper pushing: "ensures that all book orders are submitted in a timely manner," "verifies the accuracy of catalogue information," "requisitions supplies as needed," and so on. It's no wonder that some academic leaders find their energy sapped by minutiae. Is there any way to improve this situation?

New Models for Leadership

The USA Network series *Royal Pains* brought fresh attention to the practice known as "concierge medicine": a type of care in which a patient pays a special fee to a physician for an expanded array of services. The

additional service provided varies from doctor to doctor, but it often includes house calls, longer appointments, 24/7 telephone access, no copays on routine medical procedures, and similar privileges. “In addition, wellness care and preventative care are often provided. A comprehensive approach to healthcare allows time to address the unique needs of the individual” (Knope, 2008, p. 9). What concierge medicine illustrates is a different way of thinking about the relationship between doctor and patient. Rather than assuming that offices and hospitals have to be run the way they are because “that’s just how we’ve always done things,” it demonstrates an innovative approach that provides improved service, reorganizes the relationship between the doctor and patient, and is extremely cost effective. What if we were to rethink how colleges and universities are administered in an equally radical way?

It may initially shock academic leaders to think so, but in many ways, what highly innovative college administrators are trying to do is bring a kind of concierge service to their programs. Like concierge doctors, university administrators tend to be on call outside normal business hours, strive to match their efforts to the specific needs of their constituents, and often go wherever their stakeholders happen to be instead of always expecting their stakeholders to come to them. Even more important, both administrators and physicians prefer to prevent problems before they arise. Yet despite this preference, they end up spending 90 percent of their time or more treating existing conditions or problems rather than planning for the future. To change metaphors for a moment, although both groups try extremely hard to make a real and positive difference, they still end up putting out a lot of fires.

For this reason, an approach known as the P4 Medicine Institute (2010) has attempted to give the contributions of concierge doctors even greater impact. The program receives its name from its four primary goals of developing a holistic approach to health care that is

Predictive, using genomics and molecular biomarkers to assess the unique risk factors of each patient

Preventative, developing therapies to forestall illnesses before they occur rather than just treat them once they have already developed

Personalized, creating therapeutic and wellness plans tailored to the patient’s specific history, needs, and prognosis

Participatory, transforming patients from passive consumers of health care into active contributors to their own well-being.

“This approach,” notes the institute (P4 Medicine Institute, 2010), “will result in healthcare that predicts and prevents illness, focuses on health and wellness, and considers the consumer as the central figure in care.” Concierge medicine and the P4 initiative represent significant changes from what we might call the surgeon model of health care in which patients often felt treated as problems to be solved or as collections of parts to be fixed and replaced rather than as organic, three-dimensional people with distinctive personalities, needs, social situations, and dreams.

In both cases, what these doctors are doing is to combine their traditional healing role with a new role centered on training and coaching. We’ll examine coaching in greater detail in chapter 7, but for now, suffice it to say that coaches and personal trainers aren’t in the business of fixing something that’s broken but rather in improving something that’s already working well. Benign neglect and the old adage that “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” can’t really be applied to coaching and training. The fundamental principle of a trainer is that improvement is always possible, and so a program is custom-designed for the individual athlete that will best achieve his or her desired goals. Trainers and coaches start at whatever level a person happens to have reached and seek to build on existing strengths. While physicians have traditionally had patients, the new concept of the physician as trainer or coach means that they now have clients. The goal isn’t simply to solve problems but to increase success. As the author and entrepreneur Timothy Ferriss (2009) notes:

It is far more lucrative and fun to leverage your strengths instead of attempting to fix all the chinks in your armor. The choice is between multiplication of results using strengths or incremental improvement fixing weaknesses that will, at best, become mediocre. Focus on better use of your best weapons instead of constant repair. (p. 34)

In the expression made famous by Jim Collins (2001), doctors as trainers help their clients advance from “good to great”; their focus remains on possibilities for the future, not on the problems of the past. So if we extrapolate from the major differences between what we might call the surgeon model of medicine and the newer model that incorporates concierge medicine, the goals of the P4 Institute, and the personal trainer approach to health and wellness, we notice three important factors:

1. The latter three approaches represent a movement away from merely asking, “What is wrong?” to also asking, “What is possible?”

2. They represent a personalized and customized approach that takes into account the unique history, needs, situation, and potentialities of each individual.
3. They represent a future-oriented strategy that assumes importance equal to, if not greater than, the strategy of repairing the damage resulting from past mistakes and problems.

Those same three factors can also be found in one other major approach that has revolutionized concepts of health, wellness, and personal success: positive psychology.

The Models of Traditional Psychology and Positive Psychology

Martin Seligman and Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (2000), two of the founding members of the positive psychology movement, suggest that what's now regarded as the traditional approach to psychology—essentially the behaviorist school that dominated American universities for half a century after World War II—produced many great advances:

In the 50 years since psychology and psychiatry became healing disciplines, they have developed a highly transferable science of mental illness. They developed a usable taxonomy, as well as reliable and valid ways of measuring such fuzzy concepts as schizophrenia, anger, and depression. They developed sophisticated methods—both experimental and longitudinal—for understanding the causal pathways that lead to such undesirable outcomes. Most important, they developed pharmacological and psychological interventions that have allowed many untreatable mental disorders to become highly treatable and, in a couple of cases, even curable. (p. 13)

The ability to treat, even cure, these troubling and life-altering diseases must be regarded as a major accomplishment of psychology by any standard. In addition, the behaviorist method contributed a great deal to make psychology a genuine science and to amass a body of data that vastly improved our understanding of mental illness. At the same time, however, there were consequences of the scientific, clinical, behaviorist approach to psychology—what we'll now refer to as the traditional approach—that were both unintentional and undesirable:

[Psychologists] came to see themselves as part of a mere subfield of the health professions, and psychology became a victimology.

Psychologists saw human beings as passive foci: Stimuli came on and elicited responses (what an extraordinarily passive word!). External reinforcements weakened or strengthened responses. Drive, tissue needs, instincts, and conflicts from childhood pushed each of us around. (Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000, p. 6)

In other words, when you view the field of mental health primarily as the study of mental illness and consider the most significant subjects for research to be diseases and behavioral problems, you can produce significant benefits in alleviating suffering. But you also ultimately come to view human beings from a very limited perspective. You start to see people as collections of symptoms rather than as complete persons, and the goal of the psychologist is reduced to eliminating misery rather than increasing happiness.

That realization led Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, along with such other pioneers as Ed Diener, Nancy Etcoff, and Daniel Gilbert, to adopt an expression originally coined by Abraham Maslow (1954) to designate a significant new emphasis within their discipline:

If we are interested in the psychology of the human species we should limit ourselves to the use of the self-actualizing, the psychologically healthy, the mature, the fulfilled, for they are more truly representative of the human species than the usual average or normal group. The *psychology generated by the study of healthy people could fairly be called positive* by contrast with the negative psychology we now have, which has been generated by the study of sick or average people. (p. 361, emphasis added)

This new approach, positive psychology, has a great deal in common with the other health care models we've been discussing. For one thing, its focus is less on curing illness than it is on increasing well-being (e.g., Carr, 2004; Snyder and Lopez, 2007). Whereas the traditional psychological approach sought to reduce misery and unhappiness in those who had problems, the model of positive psychology aims to increase happiness and well-being in people who are generally content. As Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi (2000) have concluded, "Psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best" (p. 7).

For this reason, we might outline the differences between traditional and positive psychology in the following way:

TRADITIONAL APPROACH

Focuses on disease
 Repairs what is wrong
 Addresses weaknesses, often ignoring strengths
 Eliminates sadness
 Seeks to transform mental states from bad to good
 Reactive
 Treats people as patients who suffer from things that happen to them

POSITIVE APPROACH

Focuses on health
 Improves what is right
 Addresses strengths and recognizes weaknesses
 Increases happiness
 Seeks to transform mental states from good to excellent
 Proactive
 Treats people as clients who make rational choices and are active participants in their own well-being

Since the inception of positive psychology, a number of critics have charged that it's based on assumptions about human nature and happiness that are solely Eurocentric in focus, fails to provide a sufficient challenge to the methods and approaches it criticizes, and doesn't give adequate attention to the interplay between the individual and his or her social environment (see Becker and Marecek, 2008; Richardson and Guignon, 2008; Christopher and Hickenbottom, 2008). Yet despite these objections, positive psychology remains a significant and influential corrective to the view that strategies that cure diseases are somehow more legitimate than those that boost existing fitness. It replaces the outdated perspective that the counselor or therapist has little to offer people who aren't suffering from an abnormal condition.

The Positive Approach to Leadership

In a similar way, it seems likely that many people in leadership roles feel frustrated by their positions today because they've been trained in management strategies that emphasize fixing what's broken, not nurturing what's best. Despite their good intentions, bosses of all kinds are faced each day with a growing list of problems to solve: interpersonal disputes, complaints from dissatisfied customers, delayed shipments, network breakdowns, insufficient resources, inconsistency in the quality of production, unexpected areas of competition, rivalry with other managers, and a host of other issues. Even the influx of information that arrives on a daily basis can often seem like an insurmountable problem. There are e-mails to be answered, items to check off on the to-do list, and new tasks imposed by the manager's own supervisor, all of which can make leaders today feel as though they're running an endless race. They clear this hurdle, then that hurdle, then still another, with no end in sight. Perhaps the problem isn't the nature of the work

itself but rather the strategy we bring to our responsibilities. We see our roles as surgeons repairing damage and excising unhealthy tissue rather than as genuine leaders who build on strengths, create a shared sense of constructive energy, and develop what's positive in our organizations. But if we were to change our overall approach to how we supervise others and adopt some of the lessons learned from concierge medicine, the P4 Institute, personal training, and positive psychology, an entirely new type of leadership would result. What would this new form of leadership look like?

In his book *Positive Leadership: Strategies for Effective Performance* (2008), Kim Cameron, the William Russell Professor of Management and Organizations at the University of Michigan, summarizes several decades of research on positive leadership and finds that it depends on four key strategies:

1. *Positive climate*, demonstrated through compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude
2. *Positive relationships*, demonstrated through the reinforcement of strength and the creation of “energy networks” (the types of interactions we have that make us feel more motivated and optimistic)
3. *Positive communication*, demonstrated through supportive collaborations and emphasizing what others see as their strengths and major contributions
4. *Positive meaning*, demonstrated through building a sense of community, recognizing what people see as their calling, and grounding actions in a set of core values

This perspective, which Cameron presents in both *Positive Leadership* and *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline* (2003, coauthored with Jane Dutton and Robert Quinn), will guide our discussion in the chapters that follow. I'll rely on Cameron's works to provide a foundation for what *positive leadership* means and how it benefits the organizations that adopt it.

At the same time, I also provide a set of criteria by which we can recognize positive leadership in ourselves and others. So building outward from Cameron's four strategies, here are ten principles that we might describe as the indicators of genuinely positive leadership:

1. *Positive leaders place greater emphasis on developing what's already working than on correcting what's flawed.* No one would deny that in order for organizations to change, they have to be aware of anything

that's not working properly and address those problems through new techniques, ideas, or strategies. But if leaders come to see their roles solely as spotting the flaws in what people do, an atmosphere of distrust and anxiety often arises. Employees become reluctant to share bad news with their supervisors because they fear being blamed for the problem. Creativity becomes stifled, since no one wants to be held responsible for a new idea that doesn't work. As Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson (1982) noted long ago, "the most important thing in training somebody to be a winner is to catch them doing something right" (p. 81). For this reason, positive leaders identify what's already working, support and reward those who are responsible, and don't become preoccupied with blaming those who have made mistakes.

2. *Positive leaders encourage everyone in a supervisory position to devote time to their best performers rather than having their energy drained by troublemakers, chronically dissatisfied employees, or squeaky wheels.* Everyone is familiar with the type of employee who acts almost like a black hole for all the optimism and satisfaction in the organization. Frequently these are the same people who can consume a disproportionate amount of the leader's time presenting their complaints, tattling on coworkers, and expressing their discontent with everything from the salaries they're paid to the choice of coffee in the break room. The Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) once articulated what has come to be known as the Pareto principle or 80/20 rule: in any system of unequal distribution, 20 percent of the people tend to control 80 percent of the resources. In its original formulation, the Pareto principle was concerned with land ownership in Italy, where the wealthiest 20 percent of the population came to own 80 percent of the land. (The Occupy Wall Street movement replaced this formula with an even more pessimistic view: the 1 percent versus the 99 percent.) But managers often apply the same rule to problematic employees: they find that 20 percent of the people they supervise take up 80 percent of their time. The negativity of this troublesome fifth can be contagious, and morale often plummets as a result. The positive leader tries to avoid this situation by systematically spending as much time as possible with his or her best colleagues. The leader learns from these superior performers, encourages them, and guides them to becoming even better.

3. *Positive leaders personalize the type of guidance they give to each employee rather than assuming that a single leadership style works equally well for all people.* We already know that each person we work with is unique. Our colleagues all have their own goals,

hopes, fears, plans, dreams, and histories. What motivates one person quite successfully sometimes proves to be a disincentive for someone else. Recognizing this diversity, positive leaders tailor their leadership approach to the individual or group they're working with. While a traditional leader may describe his or her management style as consistently participatory, visionary, or transformational, the positive leader sees all of these approaches as simply different tools in a toolbox, each useful in its own way. As Tony Alessandra and Michael O'Connor (1996) have observed, the golden rule—Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you—goes only so far. The other person may not want to be treated as you'd like to be. For this reason, Alessandra and O'Connor have proposed what they call the platinum rule: "Do unto others as they'd like done unto them" (p. 3). This type of personalized motivation and reward need not always involve salary increases or significant expenditures. Bob Nelson's books, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* (2005) and *1001 Ways to Energize Employees* (1997), are great resources for ideas about how to motivate employees in a way that's meaningful to them and costs little or nothing at all. Positive leaders can thus select from a wide variety of morale-building approaches in order to adopt those that are most appropriate to the person and situation.

4. *Positive leaders adopt a systems approach, emphasizing the efficient operation of the group as well as the unique contributions of each member.* As we'll see in greater detail in chapter 9, systems—such as ecosystems, computer systems, and organ systems of the body—generally share two features. First, they're composed of distinct individual members. In other words, a monitor has a different function from a CPU, just as the heart has a different function from the arteries. Second, these individual elements work together in an interrelated and interconnected manner, or at least they simultaneously affect and are affected by other elements in the system. The pieces of an ecosystem may not be described as working together in the same way that the brain interacts with the nerves, but they ultimately depend on one another and develop a type of balance. Positive leaders recognize both that employees are individuals with individual needs, talents, and operating styles and that the unit gains strengths from this type of diversity operating together. A synergy is produced by the system that wouldn't occur if all the employees were identical. Positive leadership thus tries to make the best use of different individuals' strongest assets, creating work groups and task forces, taking full advantage of opportunities as they arise, and using the gifts of one person to compensate for the challenges of another.

5. *Positive leaders are future oriented and proactive, constantly exploring what's possible instead of being bound by past decisions and disappointments.* Since it doesn't merely focus on problems and mistakes, positive leadership is free to emphasize what might be rather than what has been. For the unit as a whole, the positive leader considers ways to take full advantage of opportunities as they occur and how to remain agile and versatile enough to adapt to even unexpected occurrences. Positive leadership includes the recognition that although you can't plan for everything, you can prepare for anything. In this way, the leader gets locked into neither the habit of always responding to the latest setback nor the rigidity of highly detailed strategic plans that, contrary to the intentions behind them, limit rather than increase the options available. Positive leaders also understand that just as their entire units must prepare for the future, so must each member of the team prepare for his or her own future. They encourage the professional and personal growth of their colleagues and always provide them with opportunities for training, not only in how to do their current jobs more effectively but also in how they can succeed in assuming greater responsibility—or even in obtaining their next jobs. Positive leaders don't measure success by how irreplaceable they are to the organization. They measure success by how well their unit can function without them.

6. *Positive leaders emphasize rewards and recognitions over punishments and penalties.* One of the pioneering contributions to the understanding of how people learn was made by Edward Thorndike (1874–1949), who observed that punishments and penalties only teach people what not to do, while positive reinforcements such as rewards and recognitions encourage people to engage in more of what they should do (Thorndike, 1932; see also Jones and Page, 1993; Martin and Pear, 1999; Flora, 2004; and Bernstein, 2010). Positive leaders understand the full implication of Thorndike's observation. It's not that positive leaders never see the need for penalties. Certain behaviors—sexual harassment, misappropriation of funds, insubordination, and the like—can't be ignored and call for sanctions. In these cases, penalties are appropriate because the supervisor wants the employee to refrain from engaging in a specific undesirable behavior. But positive leaders know that these occurrences are relatively rare, while situations that call for rewards or recognitions occur daily, even hourly. By acknowledging desirable behavior in a positive and constructive manner, the leader increases the likelihood that this type of behavior will be repeated by both the employee who's being acknowledged and anyone else who happens to witness the

supervisor's response. As the minister and author Victor Parachin (2006) puts it,

Express appreciation; accept responsibility. Catherine the Great said, "I praise loudly, I blame softly." Sadly, some leaders are quick to accept credit and even quicker to assign blame. The best leaders reverse that pattern. They give credit to subordinates for work well done and they do that both privately and publicly. (pp. 17–18)

7. *Positive leaders are at least as people oriented as they are goal oriented.* After studying numerous cases of businesses and other organizations that flourished during times of change while others failed, Ian Macdonald, Catherine Burke, and Karl Stewart (2006) concluded that the very first principle for success is:

People are not machines. This "common sense" statement is nevertheless central to understanding change processes. Change processes are often described as "organisational change", "culture change", "re-engineering". We look for "efficiency improvement", "performance enhancement" and "productivity gains" . . . If we really can be disciplined about not treating people as machines or objects then we can try to understand how people view the world. We need to understand not only what "the organisation" needs, but what people need and what they value. Only then can we be really effective in introducing change and begin building a positive organization. (pp. 11, 14).

Even our professional language sometimes dehumanizes our colleagues and employees when we begin to look at an organization as not a network of people but as engines of productivity that we can reengineer if things aren't going well. Of course, no organization can be successful if it doesn't adhere to its mission and achieve its ultimate goals. But too many organizations (and too many leaders) view success only in terms of the goals achieved and the increases in productivity that can be documented. They confuse being data driven with becoming data obsessed and fail to realize that information consists of more than just numbers alone.

In much the same way as positive psychology regards happiness as a worthy object of study and pursuit, so does positive leadership regard the morale, job satisfaction, and personal growth of employees as a worthwhile aspiration. From a practical perspective, a high level of employee contentment frequently translates into better productivity, lower turnover, and improved customer relations (Taylor, 2011; Karl, Harland, Peluchette, and Rodie, 2010; Liao, Hu, and Chung, 2009). From the perspective of

sound leadership, it's desirable to promote collegiality and mutual support within the team for its own sake. Groups that are optimistic and have good working relationships are more willing to share information and step in when help is needed. Groups that are immersed in fear or distrust—whether of one another or of their supervisor—are more likely to become fragmented and limit their communication. In other words, all members of the work group function better when it's clear that their supervisor values them as three-dimensional human beings with diverse goals, problems, and personal situations rather than as human machines that create whatever product they've been assigned to manufacture.

8. *Positive leaders prefer team-based and collaborative approaches to rigid hierarchies and chains of command.* In a top-down management system, decisions can often be made and implemented very quickly since only a few people are in a position of authority. But that greater speed—and some might say greater efficiency—comes at a very high cost. Employees further down the institutional ladder may have insights that could avoid costly problems or provide greater effectiveness in the long run. Moreover, people tend to develop very little buy-in when decisions are made without their consultation and advice. For this reason, positive leadership avoids rigid hierarchies as much as possible and includes a broader range of the organization when decisions are made. Adopting a modified version of the quality circles pioneered by William Edwards Deming (1900–1993) and Kaoru Ishikawa (1915–1989), positive leadership regards all members of a unit as full partners in the activities vital to the mission of the organization. Even when responsibility for a decision must rest with an individual, positive leadership fosters an atmosphere of consultation and the free exchange of ideas in order that the final decision will be made on the basis of a well-informed consensus.

9. *Positive leaders treat each member of a group as a rational, capable member of the team, not as someone who needs to be led or manipulated.* Many management books treat employees as though they were problems to be solved or mindless robots needing to be directed when performing their tasks. In fact, the very word *management* conveys the idea that everyone in an organization, except those in supervisory positions, are challenges to “manage.” Since positive leadership prefers people-oriented approaches and alternatives to inflexible chains of command, it also tends to treat employees with greater respect, valuing their ability to make reasonable decisions. For instance, rather than demonstrating to someone every step of a process and expecting that person to follow the procedure in precisely the way it was demonstrated, positive leaders will (except in cases where safety is at stake) illustrate the end result that's

desired and trust the employee to find a rational, creative, and efficient way to accomplish that goal.

10. *Positive leaders rely on a subtle, at times nearly invisible type of guidance rather than the “my way or the highway” style of management that authoritarian leaders adopt.* Perhaps the biggest difference between positive leadership and more traditional forms of organizational management is that its leaders don't always appear to be leading—at least not in an obvious manner. In other words, rather than telling people to do this or that, positive leaders spend much of their time creating environments that increase the likelihood of a successful result. They often work behind the scenes, not creating secret cliques and cabals but helping others form the connections they need in order to exercise their own originality. They eliminate the obstacles that can prevent employees from putting forth their best efforts. The effectiveness of positive leaders can't be judged by the number of memos they produce, meetings they call, or reprimands they issue but by the overall success of their organizations. They lead without making the people they work with continually feel that they are constantly being led, even though everyone senses the energy and progress that results from the collective efforts.

In this way, positive leadership provides a viable alternative to organizational models based on hierarchy, fear of penalties for honest mistakes, and other factors that inhibit creativity and destroy initiative. As Cameron (2008) observes:

Positive leadership . . . refers to an *affirmative bias*—or a focus on strengths and capabilities and on affirming human potential. Its orientation is toward enabling thriving and flourishing rather than toward addressing obstacles and impediments . . . Positive leadership does not ignore negative events but builds on them to develop positive outcomes . . . In sum, *positive leadership* refers to an emphasis on what elevates individuals and organizations (in addition to what challenges them), what goes right in organizations (in addition to what goes wrong), . . . what is experienced as good (in addition to what is objectionable), [and] what is extraordinary (in addition to what is merely effective). (pp. 2–3)

What Positive Leadership Is Not

When they hear the term *positive leadership*, many people immediately think of those cheerful motivational posters that are all too often found on the walls of conference rooms, supervisors who are so far removed

from reality that they remain unnaturally optimistic even in the face of disastrous news, or efforts adopted by upper management to make employees exhibit false fronts of exuberance no matter what their own feelings, challenges, and preferences may be. This sort of manipulative optimism has little lasting effect in most work environments and is often counterproductive (Grandey, Fisk, and Steiner, 2005; Butler, Egloff, Wilhelm, Smith, Erickson, and Gross, 2003; Snee, 2006). For this reason, let's eliminate immediately the following false impressions of what positive leadership might be:

1. *Positive leadership doesn't consist of motivational speaking or filling the workplace with inspirational messages.* Every good supervisor has to be a bit of a cheerleader from time to time, encouraging people to try harder when their energy is flagging or restoring confidence when it is lost. But many workers find an endless barrage of motivational messages to be ineffectual, even irritating. Positive leadership is about shaping work environments and the supervisor's perspective, not trying to fit all workers into the same cheery mold.

2. *Positive leadership isn't a matter of simply going along to get along and suppression of one's own feelings.* Some people associate positive leadership with forcing everyone to be nice to everyone else. While positive leadership, like all other effective approaches to success in organizational situations, certainly insists on collegial and professional interaction in the workplace, it doesn't require people to act like happy automatons at work or pretend that there's never such a thing as a bad day. Positive leadership is based on the principle that employees don't always have to like one another, but they do have to work effectively together. In order to achieve this result, positive leadership seeks strategies intended to make that collegiality and professionalism easier to achieve.

3. *Positive leadership doesn't require supervisors to provide life coaching to employees.* Life coaching, the practice of counseling others to identify and achieve their personal goals, can be highly beneficial for many people, even for many supervisors. But it's morally (and often legally) wrong to practice counseling without a license, and the supervisor who becomes too involved in the personal lives and goals of employees has entered a dangerous area. Positive leadership respects the rights of colleagues to set and pursue their own objectives in their private lives, while seeking more effective ways of attaining professional objectives at work.

4. *Positive leadership doesn't provide an excuse for supervisors to impose their religious or political views on others.* Some supervisors derive their motivation and positive outlook from their belief in a certain set of religious or political principles. While that source of support may

be extremely valuable for that person, positive leadership doesn't open the door to imposing those convictions on others or creating environments in which advocates of certain creeds or beliefs feel disenfranchised. The strategies that are discussed in this book are not limited to a single religious tradition or political philosophy, and, in fact, they should help to create environments in which everyone feels more valued and respected for the contribution that he or she is making to the overall enterprise.

5. *Positive leadership isn't blind optimism, the power of positive thinking, or simply hoping that things will eventually get better.* Ignoring a problem isn't the same as solving it. But to take the other side of the issue for a moment, becoming fixated on problems—and seeking to root out every possible imperfection before moving forward—can create an environment where everyone feels that supervisors distrust their workers and where morale (and productivity) quickly suffer. Martin Seligman (2006) discusses what he calls *learned optimism* as a strategy that even naturally pessimistic people can adopt in order to create positive outcomes in largely negative situations. Learned optimism is the rational conviction that regardless of how troubling the situation is right now, it's possible to learn from it, recover from it, derive benefit from it, and then move on from it. As Seligman notes,

The defining characteristic of pessimists is that they tend to believe bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do, and are their own fault. The optimists, who are confronted with the same hard knocks of this world, think about misfortune in the opposite way. They tend to believe defeat is just a temporary setback, that its causes are confined to this one case. The optimists believe defeat is not their fault: Circumstances, bad luck, or other people brought it about. Such people are unfazed by defeat. Confronted by a bad situation, they perceive it as a challenge and try harder. (pp. 4–5)

In other words, it's possible to learn how to become optimistic even if you don't have a naturally sunny disposition. People who treat success as though it were the expected outcome of their efforts, while regarding failure as something that occurs occasionally because of circumstances beyond their control, tend to develop a more positive outlook on life over time. Viewed from this perspective, optimism isn't blind faith; it's an intentional cognitive strategy that anyone can adopt. Even cynics, curmudgeons, and worrywarts—perhaps *especially* these people—can adopt an attitude that tells others, "It's not me; it's the world," when things are going wrong and think, "I helped contribute to this huge success" when things are going well. In a similar way, in order for leadership to be

positive, leaders don't have to ignore problems and act as though they see nothing but joy and happiness all around them. They merely have to seek positive outcomes in every situation, even when they are dealing with a frustration or failure.

These clarifications will be useful as we shift our discussion from positive leadership in general to positive academic leadership. The purpose of this book is, after all, to help administrators understand how they can change their default mode from solving problems to creating something phenomenal. But in order to provide a different type of leadership, administrators need to be trained in new ways and interpret their roles differently. They have to start leading with what Kim Cameron calls a *positive bias* (What's right? And how can I make it even better?) and stop leading with a *negative bias* (What's wrong? And how can I fix it?). They need to learn how to identify strengths, not just solve problems.

Negative Leadership

When Maslow (1954) coined the term *positive psychology*, he also mentioned "the negative psychology we now have" (p. 361). In a similar way, if leadership with a positive bias involves identifying assets, then a fixation on problems and liabilities might be termed negative leadership. What's distressing, however, is that negative leadership is what most people think of when they think of leadership at all. That view of what a leader does is implicit in the high-pressure "give no quarter and take no prisoners" approach to management outlined in books like Donald Trump's *Time to Get Tough: Making America #1 Again* (2011) and, with B. Zanker, *Think Big and Kick Ass in Business and Life* (2007). But there is an alternative. Consider the way in which psychologist Daniel Goleman (2006) distinguishes good bosses from bad bosses, based on dozens of discussions he's had with employees from the entire spectrum of the labor market:

GOOD BOSS	BAD BOSS
Great listener	Blank wall
Encourager	Doubter
Communicator	Secretive
Courageous	Intimidating
Sense of humor	Bad temper
Shows empathy	Self-centered
Decisive	Indecisive
Takes responsibility	Blames
Humble	Arrogant
Shares authority	Mistrusts

Goleman writes, “The best bosses are people who are trustworthy, empathetic and connected, who make us feel calm, appreciated, and inspired. The worst—distant, difficult, and arrogant—make us feel uneasy at best and resentful at worst” (p. 277; for a similar conclusion, see Longenecker, 2011). Replace the phrase “bad boss” with “negative leader,” and you’ll come up with almost the same list and draw the same conclusion. We’ve all known supervisors who thought that they needed to threaten others, either openly or by implication, in order to receive “respect” and mistook arrogance for confidence. Negative leaders are the bosses who routinely suspect others of having ulterior motives because they always have their own and who distrust any idea they didn’t think of themselves. To judge from movies and the stories we’ve heard from our parents, negative leaders were once rampant in military, corporate, and academic life. But there’s another way to lead—one that brings about greater benefits in the long run. That’s what the rest of this book is about.

Conclusion

We seem to have come a long way from Frederick Ahearn’s descriptions of the frustrations facing college administrators. We’ve taken a detour through alternative models of health care like concierge medicine and the P4 Institute and ended by encountering the principles of positive psychology and positive leadership. You may be asking at this point, “What does the last topic have to do with the first? How might positive leadership provide an alternative to the sort of challenges that Ahearn was describing?” In order to answer these questions, we turn next to various alternative types of academic leadership and see what different administrators have discovered when they made a conscious effort to lead their programs in new, more constructive ways.

References

- Ahearn, F. L. (1997). A day in the life of a dean. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 98, 9–20.
- Alessandra, A. J., & O’Connor, M. J. (1996). *The platinum rule: Discover the four basic business personalities—and how they can lead you to success*. New York, NY: Warner.
- Becker, D., & Marecek, J. (2008). Positive psychology: History in the remaking? *Theory and Psychology*, 18, 591–604.
- Bernstein, D. (2010). *Essentials of psychology*. Florence, KY: Wadsworth/Cengage.

- Blanchard, K. H., & Johnson, S. (1982). *The one minute manager*. New York, NY: Morrow.
- Butler, E. A., Egloff, B., Wilhelm, F. H., Smith, N. C., Erickson, E. A., & Gross, J. J. (2003). The social consequences of expressive suppression. *Emotion*, 3(1), 48–67.
- Cameron, K. S. (2008). *Positive leadership: Strategies for extraordinary performance*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Cameron, K. S., Dutton, J. E., & Quinn, R. E. (2003). *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Carr, A. (2004). *Positive psychology: The science of happiness and human strengths*. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge.
- Christopher, J., & Hickinbottom, S. (2008). Positive psychology, ethnocentrism, and the disguised ideology of individualism. *Theory and Psychology*, 18, 563–589.
- Collins, J. C. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap—and others don't*. New York, NY: HarperBusiness.
- Ferriss, T. (2009). *The four-hour workweek: Escape 9–5, live anywhere, and join the new rich*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Flora, S. R. (2004). *The power of reinforcement*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Social intelligence: The new science of human relationships*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Grandey, A. A., Fisk, G. M., & Steiner, D. D. (2005). Must “service with a smile” be stressful? The moderating role of personal control for American and French employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90, 893–904.
- Jones, L., & Page, D. (1993). Punishment: Its use and abuse. *Education and Training*, 25, 35–37.
- Karl, K., Harland, L., Peluchette, J., & Rodie, A. (2010). Perceptions of service quality: What’s fun got to do with it? *Health Marketing Quarterly*, 27, 155–172.
- Knope, S. D. (2008). *Concierge medicine: A new system to get the best healthcare*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Liao, S.-H., Hu, D.-C., & Chung, H.-Y. (2009). The relationship between leader-member relations, job satisfaction and organizational commitment in international tourist hotels in Taiwan. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20.8, 1810–1826.
- Longenecker, C. O. (2011). Characteristics of really bad bosses: An applied research study ferreted out the top “dirty dozen” characteristics of bad bosses. *Industrial Management*, 53(5), 10–15.

- Macdonald, I., Burke, C. G., & Stewart, K. (2006). *Systems leadership: Creating positive organizations*. Aldershot, England: Gower.
- Martin, G., & Pear, J. (1999). *Behavior modification: What it is and how to do it*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). Toward a positive psychology. In A. H. Maslow, R. Frager, & J. Fadiman, *Motivation and personality* (pp. 353–363). New York, NY: Harper.
- Nelson, B. (1997). *1001 ways to energize employees*. New York, NY: Workman.
- Nelson, B. (2005). *1001 ways to reward employees*. New York, NY: Workman.
- P4 Medicine Institute. (2010). *Mission*. Retrieved April 1, 2011, from <http://p4mi.org/mission>.
- P4 Medicine Institute. (2012). *P4 medicine*. Retrieved April 1, 2011, from p4mi.org/p4-medicine.
- Parachin, V. (2006, September). Laws for positive leadership: How to be a leader others want to follow. *Toastmaster*, 16–18. Retrieved April 29, 2011, from www.toastmasters.org/laws.aspx.
- Richardson, F., & Guignon, C. (2008). Positive psychology and philosophy of social science. *Theory and Psychology*, 18, 605–627.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2006). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Seligman, M.E.P., & Csikszentmihályi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5–14.
- Snee, T. (2006). Break room posters: Motivational or mockable? UI business professor says big picture more important. *FYI: Faculty and Staff News, University of Iowa*. Retrieved April 16, 2011, from http://www.uiowa.edu/~fyi/issues/issues2009_v46/07062009/posters.html.
- Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (2007). *Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Taylor, W. (2011). Booster breaks: An easy-to-implement workplace policy designed to improve employee health, increase productivity, and lower health care costs. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 26, 70–84.
- Thorndike, E. L. (1932). *The fundamentals of learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press of Columbia University.
- Trump, D. (2011). *Time to get tough: Making America #1 again*. Washington, DC: Regnery.
- Trump, D., & Zanker, B. (2007). *Think big and kick ass in business and life*. New York, NY: Collins.

Resources

- Buller, J. L. (2012). The deceptive allure of negative academic leadership. *Department Chair*, 22(4), 19–21.
- Lewis, S. (2011). *Positive psychology at work: How positive leadership and appreciative inquiry create inspiring organizations*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Macdonald, I., Burke, C. G., & Stewart, K. (2006). *Systems leadership: Creating positive organizations*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Nelson, B., & Spitzer, D.R. (2003). *The 1001 rewards and recognition field-book: The complete guide*. New York, NY: Workman.
- Whitney, D. K., Trosten-Bloom, A., & Rader, K. (2010). *Appreciative leadership: Focus on what works to drive winning performance and build a thriving organization*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

