

Encouraging the Heart

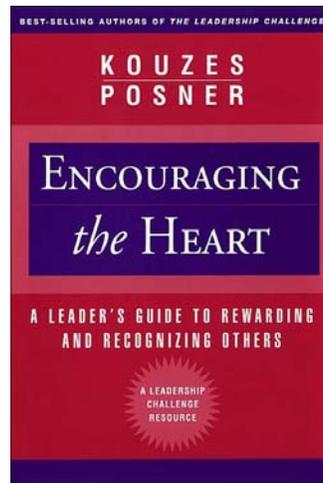
Compliments of
Keith Walker

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“Leadership is all about people, and if you are going to lead people you have to care about them.”

A Leaders’ Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing
Authors: James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner



Kouzes, James M. & Posner, Barry Z (1999). *Encouraging the Heart*. San Francisco: Jossey

Summary

In *Encouraging the Heart*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner seek to explore one of the most elusive leadership skills of all – caring. Caring is an essential skill to successful leadership, yet one of the most difficult to master. Kouzes & Posner propose that caring leadership is composed of seven essentials: setting clear standards, expecting the best, paying attention, personalizing recognition, telling the story, celebrating together, and setting the example.

Encouraging the Heart seeks to describe how and why caring leadership works, and goes beyond outlining practices and principles associated with this type of leadership. This book is an inspirational and uplifting blend of theory and principle, true-life stories of caring leadership, self-reflecting questions for the reader, and practical suggestions for

The Heart of Leadership ~ Seven Essentials

Kouzes & Posner state that if you're after results you'd better start paying attention to encouraging the heart. *Encouraging the Heart* is about the soft side of leadership – a side that is often dismissed or downplayed by leadership traditionalists. This book confronts the myth of leadership with its basis on rugged individualism. Kouzes and Posner defend that only through working together, supporting, encouraging, and helping one another can leaders make a substantial and sustainable difference. Encouraging the heart is difficult for most people. It can even be terrifying because it means showing our

emotions, publicly talking about our feelings, and making ourselves vulnerable to others. Through extensive fieldwork and consultation with successful leaders, Kouzes and Posner have identified seven essentials for encouraging the heart. These practices are:

1. Set clear standards
2. Expect the best
3. Pay attention
4. Personalize recognition
5. Tell the story
6. Celebrate together
7. Set the example

The Encouragement Index

Before reading more about the seven essentials of caring leadership, take a few minutes to rate your self according to The Encouragement Index. The Encouragement Index lists twenty-one statements about what leaders do to encourage the heart.

How frequently do you typically engage in this behaviour? Write the number from the scale below that best describes your response to this statement.

1. ___ I make certain we set a standard that motivates us to do better in the future than we are doing now.
2. ___ I express high expectations about what people are capable of accomplishing.
3. ___ I pay more attention to the positive things that people do than to the negative.
4. ___ I personally acknowledge people for their accomplishments.
5. ___ I tell stories about the special achievements of the members of the team.
6. ___ I make sure that our group celebrates accomplishments together.
7. ___ I get personally involved when we recognize the achievements of others.
8. ___ I clearly communicate my personal values and professional standards to everyone on the team.
9. ___ I let people know I have confidence in their abilities.
10. ___ I spent a good deal of time listening to the needs and interests of other people.
11. ___ I personalize the recognition I give to another person.
12. ___ I find opportunities to let people know the *why* behind whatever we are doing.
13. ___ I hold special events that celebrate our success.
14. ___ I show others, by my own example, how people should be recognized and rewarded.
15. ___ I make it a point to give people feedback on how they are performing against our agreed-upon standards.
16. ___ I express a positive and optimistic outlook even when times are tough.
17. ___ I get to know, at a personal level, the people with whom I work.
18. ___ I find creative ways to make my recognition of others unique and special.
19. ___ I recognize people more in public than in private for their exemplary performance.
20. ___ I find ways to make the workplace enjoyable and fun.
21. ___ I personally congratulate people for a job well done.

- | |
|---------------------|
| 1 - Almost never |
| 2 - Rarely |
| 3 - Seldom |
| 4 - Once in a while |
| 5 - Sometimes |
| 6 - Fairly often |
| 7 - Often |
| 8 - Usually |
| 9 - Very often |
| 10 - Almost always |

"At the heart of effective leadership is a genuine caring for people."

___ Total

Results summary: Please see *Encouraging the Heart*, pp. 38 – 40 for more detailed information.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 186 – 210 | You are doing great. Encouraging heart appears to be a highly developed part of your repertoire. |
| 126 – 185 | You are doing pretty well. You clearly recognize the importance of encouraging the heart, and employ many of the practices of a caring leader, but may feel reluctant or uncomfortable with totally committing yourself to this daily practice. |
| 66 – 125 | You may have the feeling that encouraging the heart is valuable, but are missing many opportunities to put the practice into motion. By reflecting on the seven essentials and giving yourself permission to open up to others you can make your workplace a fun and inspiring place to be. |
| Below 65 | It is unlikely that anyone would score this low, but if you do, all is not lost. Read this book carefully and start to put some of the essentials into your daily practice. |

Setting Clear Standards ~ The First Essential

Great leaders work purposefully to communicate what is important. A clear and commonly understood set of standards is critical to encouraging the heart, argue Kouzes & Posner. Standards must have a focus on excellence and be inspirational. Kouzes & Posner assert that people want to do a good job and be successful, and it is an essential part of a leader's role to communicate what success looks like.

Standards are comprised of three aspects; all of which leaders must address. First, leaders must seek to address values. The first step towards credibility as a leader is clarifying personal values. Leaders have to stand for something and have courage in their convictions. Leaders must convey these values to other members and seek congruence between personal and organizational values. If lead-

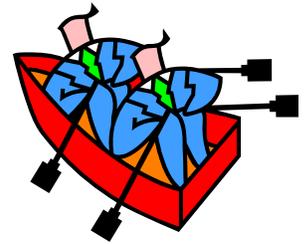
ers want to inspire real commitment from others in their organization they must make a concentrated effort to help others understand their own personal values, and examine the fit between these and the organizations values. The first essential for enlisting others is to find and focus on the very best that the organizational culture has in common with its members' values.

The second aspect of setting clear standards is goal setting. Leaders convey clear standards by setting and sharing goals. Goals provide a purpose to actions, focus members' energy, and aid in blocking out distractions. While goal setting works best when individuals make their own goals, which are set in alignment with organizational values, it is still effective when the organization sets the goals for its members. Organizationally determined goals are certainly

much better than the absence of goals altogether. Goals may be simply described as something meaningful to do. "The lesson for leaders is to be sure people know why doing something is important, and what end it serves."

The third aspect in setting clear standards is providing feedback. Feedback helps keep us engaged, and lets us know how we are doing along the way. Goals without feedback have proven to have little effect on motivation. Kouzes & Posner argue that encouragement is the best kind of feedback. Positive and personalized information is the most effective kind of feedback. Besides providing a relative comparison of success, this type of feedback helps to strengthen trust between leader and constituents, and speaks to deeply held values and beliefs.

The first essential in



"Having a clear set of expectations about what people will achieve is part and parcel of being caring."

Reflecting on Setting Clear Standards

- ♥ What are the values and principles you most cherish?
- ♥ How do you communicate these beliefs to others?
- ♥ How clear and specific are the goals of those you are leading?
- ♥ How are others getting feedback on their performance?
- ♥ How are you getting feedback on how you are doing as a leader?



"Values set the stage for action. Goals release the energy."

"Great leaders, like great companies, create meaning, not just money."

"When leaders unequivocally communicate clear standards they honour everyone's desire to do their very best. They elevate the human spirit."

Expect the Best ~ The Second Essential

The notion of the Pygmalion effect is at the heart of this essential for encouraging leaders. Most times, leaders will get exactly what they expect. High expectations leads to high performance, and successful leaders have high expectations of themselves and others. Leaders must model their high personal expectations – and by communicating a message of expecting the best – sending the message that they expect the best from their constituents as well.

Research has shown that people are initially nervous and anxious when others encourage them to perform at their personal best, but spurred on by their leader's expectations and encouragement they develop a self-confidence to live up to those expectations. The implication for leaders is to focus on positive images, and recognize their role in building the self-esteem of their constituents.



"The thoughts and beliefs we hold in our mind are intangible."

"High expectations lead to high performance."

"Positive expectations yield positive results."

"People tend to live up, or down, to our expectations of them."

Reflecting on Expecting the Best

- ♥ How do your expectations of low performers influence their performance?
- ♥ What images of the future do you hold in your mind right now?
- ♥ Do you believe that the people you lead can acquire the skills required to do their job successfully, or are those abilities innate?
- ♥ How do you communicate your positive expectations of others?



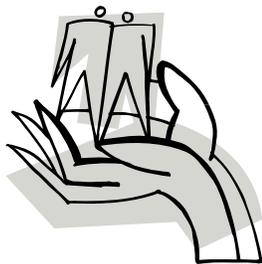
Paying Attention ~ The Third Essential

One way by which leaders show they care is by paying attention to people, what they are doing, and how they're feeling. Successful leaders, according to Kouzes & Posner, take time on a regular basis to walk around paying attention to people, and actively searching for positive examples. Leaders need to ditch the shiny badge; the notion of leader as sheriff dispensing 'frontier justice' is self-defeating. When leaders are constantly on the lookout for problems three things occur. First, leaders create a distorted view of reality. Second, productivity declines over time, and third, the leader's credibility is reduced to nothing. Put yourself in a worker's shoes to drive this point home. How would you feel and act if you knew

someone was coming around to check up on you, and looking to highlight your mistakes?

Paying attention to the positive has numerous benefits. It increases morale by creating an atmosphere in which people can relax and open up to one another. Paying attention and accentuating the positive helps build worker's self-esteem and their own expectations about job performance. Paying attention to the positive also creates benefits in productivity and performance. In a supportive environment, people are more likely to help, teach, and coach one another. In this kind of environment, workers are more likely to let their leaders know about concerns or problems early on – rather than later.

Kouzes & Posner confront a number of other traditional managerial myths that inhibit paying attention. Leaders must shift their focus from self, and put others first. Leaders need to listen with their hearts as well as their heads. "Learning to understand and see things from another's perspective is absolutely critical to building trusting relations and to career success." Leaders need to work in closer proximity to those they are leading. When they take time to hang out, and open up to others, they foster the conditions in which honest and trusting working relationships can develop.



Reflecting on Paying Attention

- ♥ How often are you out there caring by walking around?
- ♥ Would you say you most often notice positive or negative things?
- ♥ How well do you know your co-workers? What do you know about their hopes, dreams, joys, passions, and life? What do your co-workers know about you?
- ♥ What forums do you use for listening to others?
- ♥ When was the last time you talked to another person in your organization about his or her work?

"One of the ways you show you care is by paying attention."

"If we know someone is looking for positive examples we make an effort to reveal them."

"When you are out there paying attention to the positive, you are highly visible, and you are also making yourself known to others."

Personalize Recognition ~ The Fourth Essential

Once leaders set clear standards, expect the best, and pay attention to positive examples, they need to make a point of recognizing these efforts and achievements. But not just any kind of recognition will do! Cold, impersonal recognition can actually hurt a person more than help them. Recognition must be personalized to meet the tastes and interests of the individual. Leaders find out about the preferences that

people have by paying attention to others, and taking the time to find out them. Leaders also use other resources such as family, friends, and other co-workers to find the answers to unknowns about a person's preferences. Leaders also need to be culturally sensitive to the appropriateness and symbolism of acts of recognition to co-workers who may come from different ethnic backgrounds.

Recognition does

not to be a big and formal thing. In fact, some individuals prefer low key types of recognition. "What it comes down to is thoughtfulness; how much effort you put into thinking about the other person and what makes the recognition special for that person."



Reflecting on Paying Attention

- ♥ How well do you know about what honours others that you work with?
- ♥ How do you find out about the preferences of others?
- ♥ What have you done recently to personalize an act of recognition?
- ♥ How much time do you typically spend in thinking about what would make an act of recognition special and unique for that person?

"We can only genuinely honour someone when we know who she is, what she likes, and what she's done."

"What it comes down to is thoughtfulness."



Tell the Story ~ The Fifth Essential

Successful leaders create opportunities to tell and spread the stories of their organization's success. Storytelling is one of the most basic forms of communication, and it is more prevalent and powerful than facts and figures alone. Storytelling is a traditional method of passing along important lessons from generation to generation, and culture to culture. Stories put a human face on success, create role models, put behaviours in context, and make standards come alive. Stories work exceptionally well for teaching, motivating, and mobilizing people because stories allow individuals to locate themselves within these stories. Storytelling should convey a message of the fact that an organization is making progress, and the actions people are taking to get there.

Effective storytelling is an art form

leaders must aspire to master. Gardner states "the artful creation and articulation of stories constitutes a fundamental part of the leaders vocation." Good stories have specific common ingredients. Kouzes & Posner suggest that a good story should include the following elements:

- Identify the person.
- State the predicament.
- Clarify the actor's intentions.
- Describe the actions.
- Include the props.
- Tell how it ended.
- Paint – or reenact – the scene.
- Include a surprise.

While storytelling is best experienced live and in person, the authors advise contemporary leaders to make use of the technological tools at their disposal to aid in tell-

"What is necessary in sensemaking is a good story."

"Great leaders are great storytellers."

"Good storytelling is an

Reflecting on Telling the Story

- ♥ When was the last time you told a public story about someone who did something extraordinary in your organization?
- ♥ How effective of a storyteller would you say you are?

Celebrating Together The Sixth Essential

Celebration – events large or small where recognition and appreciation are expressed. A culture of celebration is essential to an organization's success. It is the symbolic glue that holds a community together. "Promoting a culture of celebration fuels a sense of unity and mission that is essential for retaining and motivating today's employees."

Cultivating a culture of celebration has social benefits that transfer into performance benefits. Celebrating aids in the development of friendships and social support networks for everyone involved. Evidence suggests that leaders who make effective use of social support activities foster high levels of personal health and well being in addition to overall increases in work performance.

Celebrating also builds community and a sense of team – it builds shared meaning and purpose, and helps reinforce the alignment of personal and organizational values.

"Celebration is an integral element of culture."

"... promoting a culture of celebration fuels a sense of unity and mission that is essential for retaining and motivating today's employees."

"Celebrations are quite literally life-giving forces."

"Celebrations... offer opportunities to reinforce

Reflecting on Celebrating Together

- ♥ How often do you and your organization celebrate accomplishments?
- ♥ What are you doing to support networking and the development of social supports?
- ♥ When you celebrate are you clear about what values you are cheering?
- ♥ How fun are your celebrations?
- ♥ Are there people in your organization who feel that celebrations are a waste of time?

Set the Example The Seventh Essential

Great leaders model what they expect from others. Whenever you find a strong culture built around strong values you also find endless examples of leaders who personally live the values. Leadership is based on credibility. When leaders have high credibility, the following things occur:

People are prouder of their organization.

- ♥ There is a stronger sense of team spirit.
- ♥ Workers see their personal values as more consistent with those of the organization.
- ♥ People feel more attached and committed to the organization.
- ♥ People have a deeper sense of ownership for the or-

ganization.

Leaders set the example by acting in a means consistent with the collective set of aims of the organization. Leaders who want to encourage the heart must model the behaviours described within the first six essentials. Setting the example for encouraging the heart begins with giving oneself permission to do so. Kouzes & Posner suggest that overcoming a culturally ingrained discomfort in getting personal, and opening up with others may be the biggest hurdle to overcome in setting the example.

Reflecting on Setting the Example

- ♥ When you look in the mirror at work, what kind of face do you see – happy, sad, serious, mad?
- ♥ Name one thing you've done in the last week to encourage the heart.
- ♥ Who is the most credible person in your organization? How did they get that reputation?
- ♥ How can you start setting the example in encouraging the heart?

"Encouraging the Heart is about the principles and practices that support the basic human need to be appreciated for what we do and who we are."

"From the heart emanates from the top."

"Credibility is the foundation of leadership. Period."

"Setting the example for encouraging the heart starts, in fact, by giving yourself

Book Review

Encouraging the Heart is a self-professed book about the soft side of leadership. The book is inspirational in the way that it supports the notion of the basic human need to be appreciated for who we are and what we do. Is there anyone out there in a leadership position that would not want to be thought of as a caring and empathetic leader? The text goes beyond caring for caring's sake, and interconnects the seven essentials for caring leadership with improved capacity and performance for the organization.

The text is very easy to read and contains a pleasant mix of principles and from-the-field success stories. The text is also meant to be a very practical guide to transforming leadership. The authors accomplish this fairly well by posing many self-reflecting questions to the reader, and offering one hundred fifty ways to get started down the road to caring leadership.

From a more critical perspective the book has several limitations. The text seems to be aimed more at inspiring and uplifting readers by presenting success stories found in the practice of well-established leadership principles than offering new ideas. For example, the importance of setting clear goals and providing feedback on those goals is not a new idea. There is little critical discussion of how well these principles worked in other diverse situations, or how to respond to workers who do not respond favourably to the application of caring leadership. While the book contains 150 suggestions for leadership practices to encourage the heart, many of the ideas would not be relevant or accessible to educational administrators such as principals.

Overall, the book is worthwhile for educational leaders to read though. The seven essentials of caring leadership are very useful in the context of schools where the leader aims to build a collegial and collaborative culture where technical and social supports are readily accessible, and where the goal is to have all people working together to build capacity in working towards commonly held goals.

"Encouraging the Heart is ultimately about keeping hope alive."

