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INSIDE THIS  
ISSUE:

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Summary                               | 1  |
| About the Author                      | 1  |
| Ch.1 Positive Leadership              | 2  |
| Ch.2 Positive Climate                 | 4  |
| Ch.3 Positive Relationships           | 5  |
| Ch.4 Positive Communication           | 6  |
| Ch.5 Positive Meaning                 | 7  |
| Ch.6 Implementing Positive Strategies | 8  |
| Ch.7 Developing Positive Leadership   | 9  |
| Critical Evaluation                   | 10 |

# Positive Leadership: Strategies For Extraordinary Performance

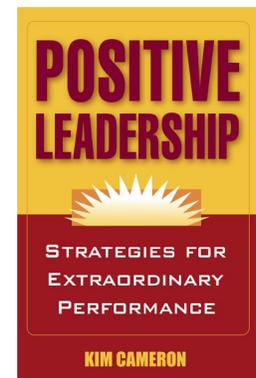
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## What is it all about?

### Summary

Positive Leadership explains the importance of having a positive environment in any organization. The main focus of the book is to show leaders positive leadership strategies that can be used to create positively deviant performance in their organizations. Cameron also explains why these strategies are successful along with providing real examples of different situations where the strategies were proven to be successful. This book provides four strategies and implementation ideas along with a suggested personal management interview program to ensure extraordinary performance in any organization.



Cameron, K. S. (2008). *Positive leadership: Strategies for extraordinary performance*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

## About the Author



Kim Cameron is a professor of management and organizations at the Ross School of Management. He was a co-founder of the center for positive organizational scholarship at the University of Michigan. This research center focuses on investigating positively deviant performance, virtuousness, strength and practices in organizations. These areas are where he also focuses his own research on, as well as developing leadership, organizational virtuousness, effectiveness, quality culture and downsizing. He has been published in more than 100 scholarly articles and 10 books.

# Chapter 1: Positive Leadership

Positive Leadership... What is it and how to we achieve it? Positive leadership encourages leaders to:

- ⇒ **Enable positively deviant performance**
- ⇒ **Create affirmative emphasis in the organization**
- ⇒ **Create a virtuous focus**

Positive leadership looks at applying strategies that are a result of positive psychology, positive change and positive perspective or organizational scholarship.

What can people do to become more effective leaders? Positive leadership answers this question and applies principles which create strategies to encourage this type of performance.

Three associations that form positive leadership are:

#### Positively Deviant Performance:

Facilitating excellently positive performance in order to have results that far exceed what the expected results were .

#### Affirmative Bias:

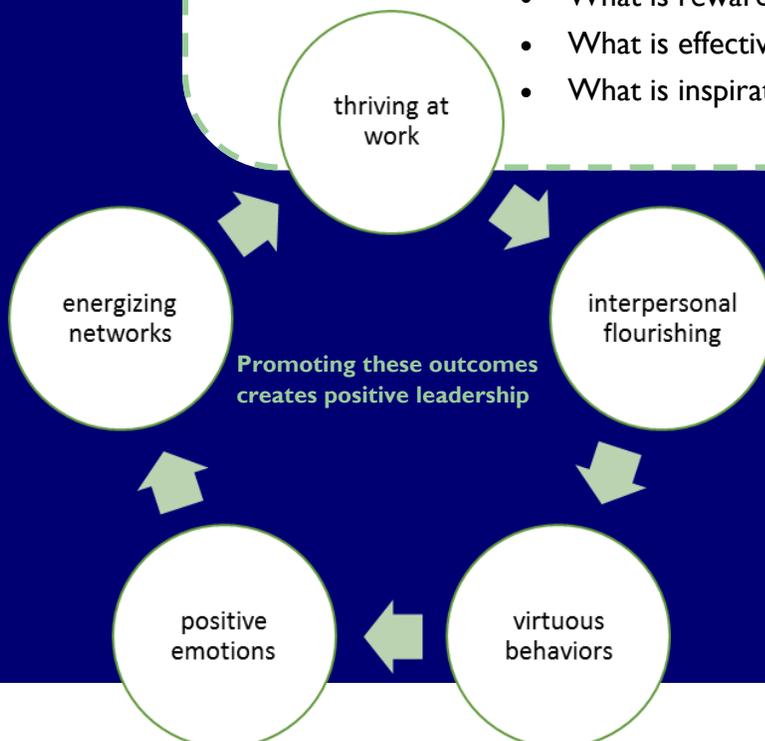
Focusing on peoples strengths and abilities and affirming their potential. Emphasizing the positive, and acknowledging the negative and valuing the opportunities it can bring.

#### Fostering Virtuosity:

Everyone wants to do well, acknowledging that goodness exists. Encouraging and developing the 'goodness' .

#### Positive leadership considers the following:

- What uplifts organizations and what challenges them.
- What works well, and not so well.
- What is rewarding, and what is disappointing
- What is effective and, not so effective?
- What is inspirational and what is difficult?



Positive leadership consists of four strategies that distinctively separate positively deviant organizations from normal organizations. Through observations and investigations these strategies are noticeably effective in creating positively deviant performance however they are not commonly practiced. The strategies are all inter-related and improving one of the areas often leads to having a positive affect on the other three. Each of the strategies is independently important as well and directly relates to positively deviant behavior in organizations.

Figure 1.3

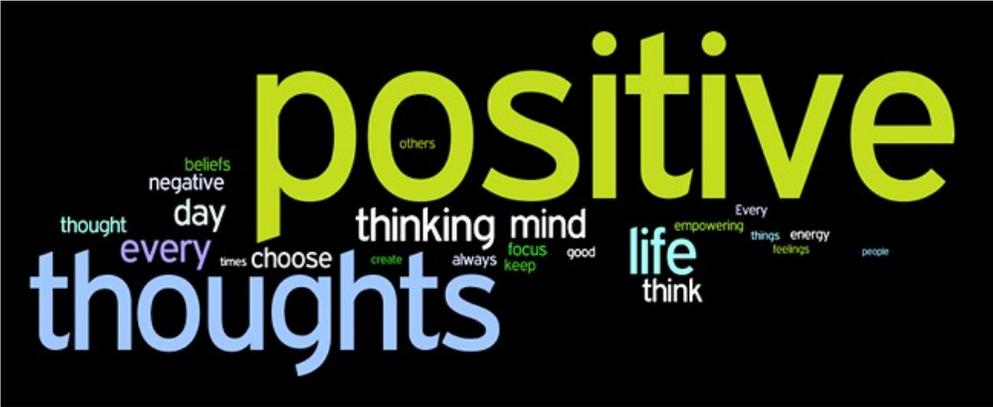
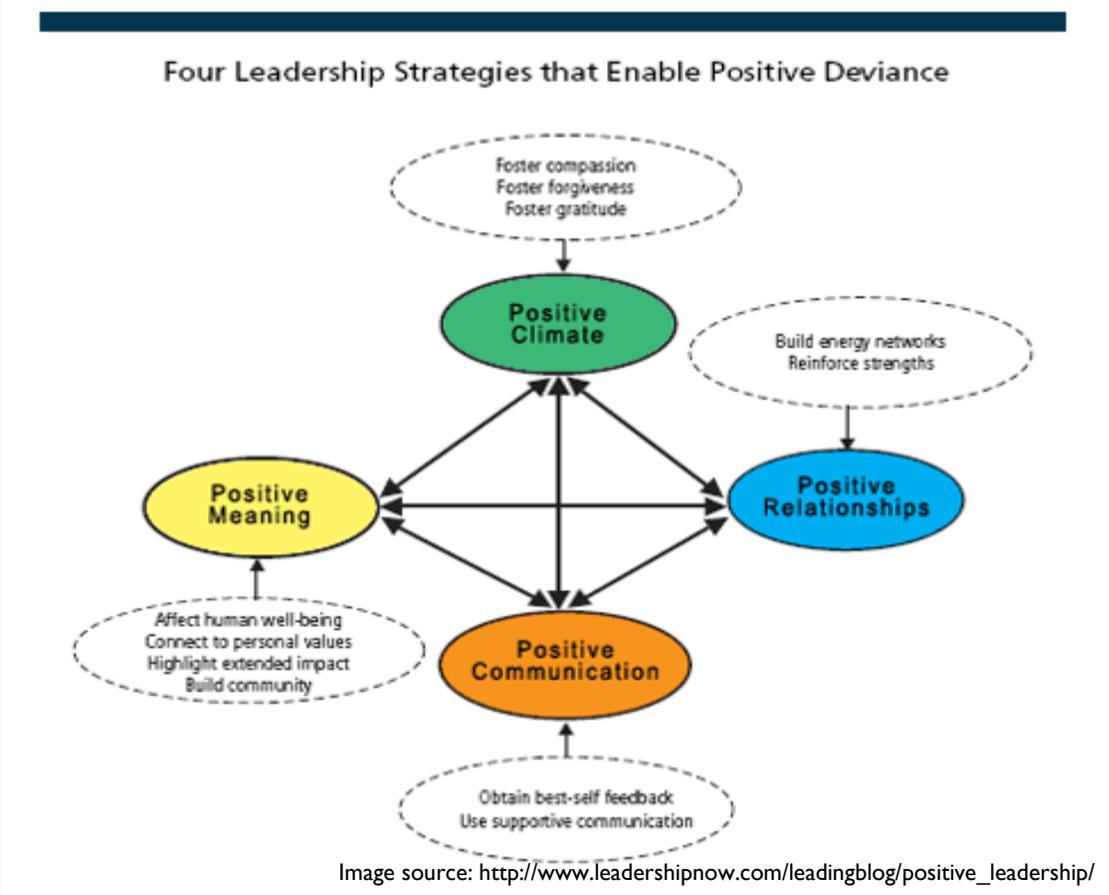


Image source: <http://affirmyourlife.blogspot.com/2009/08/positive-thinking-affirmations.html>

We all have experiences in our lives where we can remember loving and wanting to go to work, and we all have those experiences where we really did not want to go to work. The likely contributing factors were in the climate or the environment of our work place. Positive climates refer to the environment where there are more positive than negative emotions, and there is very little emphasis put on the negative ones.

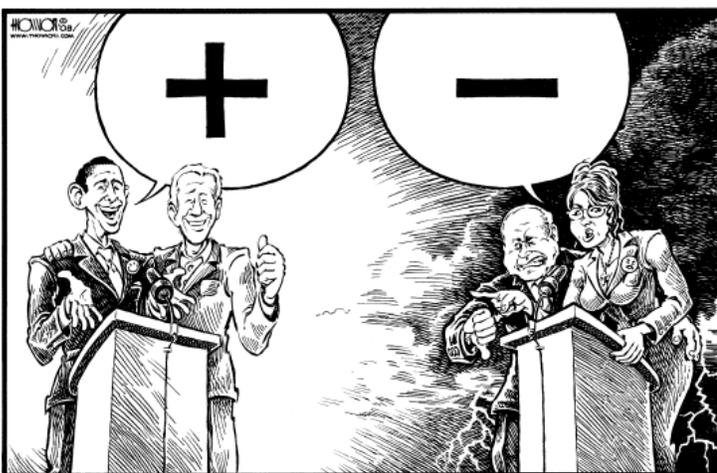
“Positive work climate has also been found to enhance decision making, productivity, creativity, social integration and prosocial behaviors” (Cameron, 2008, p.19).

We tend to focus more on negative than positive statements which is why it is important to nurture a more positive environment. It is important for positive leaders to “emphasize the uplifting and flourishing side of organizational life, even in the face of difficulty” (Cameron, 2008, p.21). In order for leaders to create a positive environment they cannot focus mostly on the negative rather they need to focus their energy on the positive outcomes that situations can bring.

## POSITIVE CLIMATES AT WORK = POSITIVE PERFORMANCE

Fostering compassion, forgiveness and gratitude amongst members of the organization leads to creating positive climates. Is this true for you? Can you recall working in both types of environments?

| Compassion  | Forgiveness  | Gratitude   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Become aware of what is happening.</li> <li>◆ Express emotion as collective group.</li> <li>◆ Take action as an organization to foster healing and restoration.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Acknowledge the occurrence.</li> <li>◆ Replace victimization with a chance to give to someone or something else.</li> <li>◆ Work toward higher standards, communicate.</li> <li>◆ Provide support to move forward.</li> <li>◆ Use acceptable language.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Engage.</li> <li>◆ Gratitude visits.</li> <li>◆ Gratitude letters.</li> <li>◆ Gratitude journals.</li> </ul> |



THE DIFFERENCE

Image source: <https://veganliberty.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/positive-negative.gif>

“Leaders who reinforced these virtuous behaviors were more successful in producing bottom line results than typical leaders” (Cameron, 2008, p.23). Implementing these strategies with virtuous acts tends to create climates where people feel cared about, supported and encouraged. As we know these types of climates lead to higher work performance and excelling in organizational performance as well.

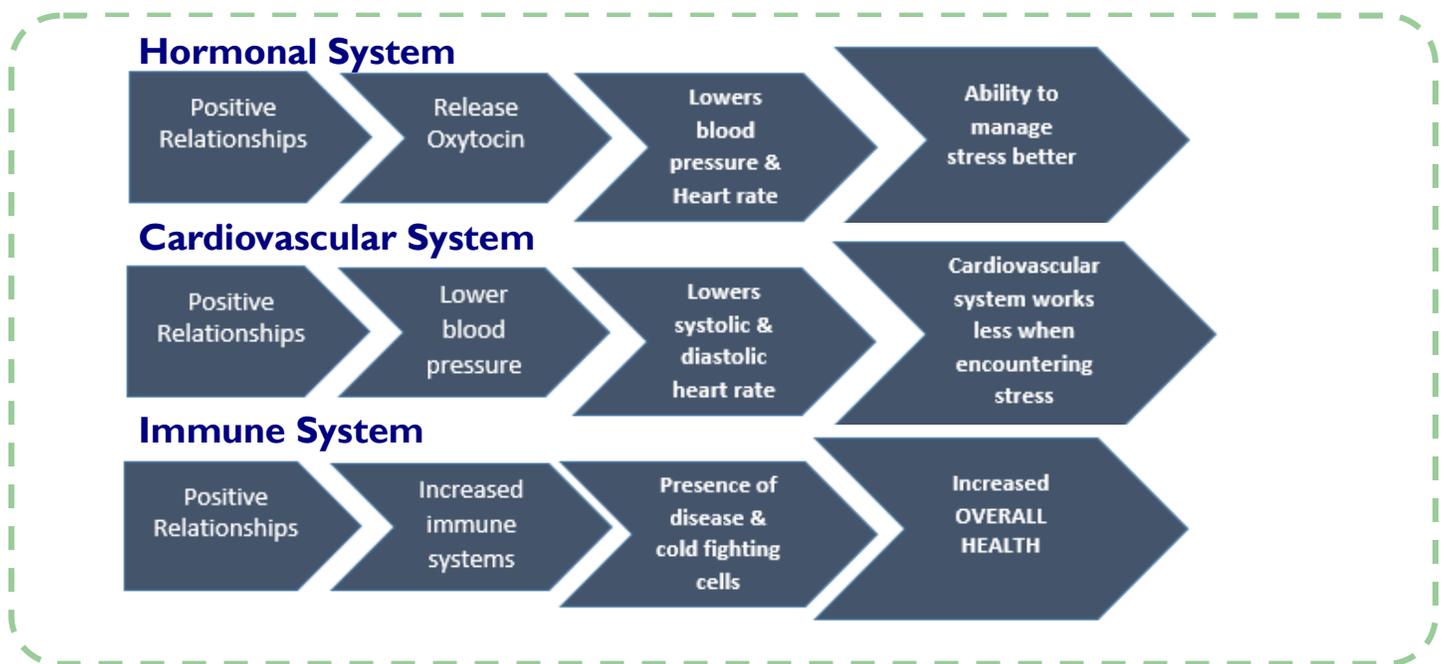
# Chapter 3: Positive Relationships



“Positive relationships serve as enablers of positively deviant outcomes physiologically, psychologically, emotionally and organizationally” (Cameron, 2008, p.35). The benefits of positive relationships are not to just provide a good experience rather evidence has shown that they are connected to human behavior and health. These types of relationships impact the hormonal, cardiovascular and immune systems which overall enhance peoples health and well-being.

**“Positive Relationships are not just people getting along.”**

Think about your own relationships. Can you relate to the following chart?



When people feel supported and have their needs met they are more likely to feel safe and secure, these feelings increase their performance. This feeling is not just a result of feeling supported, but also happens when they are able to give to the relationship as well. Positive leaders need to encourage and poster positive relationships through building positive energy networks and reinforcing individuals strengths. Enabling positive relationships increases peoples health, safety and security which in turn improves their performance in the organization and environment.

**POSITIVE ENGERGIZERS**

- build up & enhance other performance
- learned behaviors

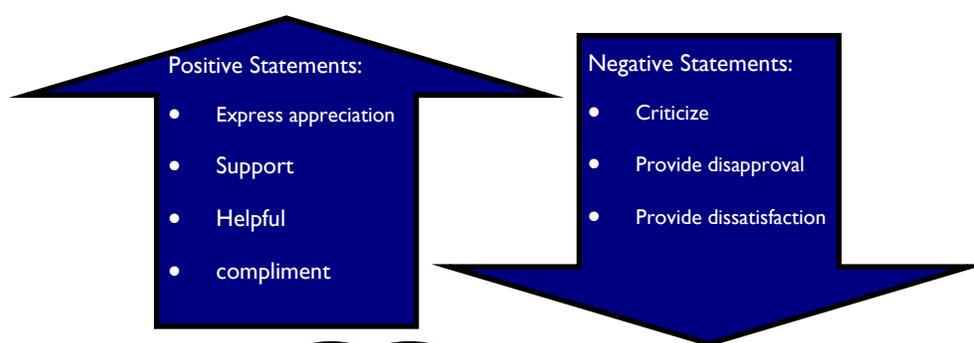
**STRENGTHS**

- identify & promote strengths not weaknesses
- celebrate the positive

# Chapter 4: Positive Communication



“Positive communication occurs in organizations when affirmative and supportive language replaces negative and critical language” (Cameron, 2008, p.51). Research has shown that the most important contributing factor that predicts performance in organizations is the ration of positive statements to negative statements. This chapter informs us that the research indicates in high performing organizations there are five times more positive statements made than negative ones. Highly effective organizations provide more compliments and have different communication patterns than lower performing organizations. Positive comments impact the environment and peoples emotions and performance. Providing more positive talk creates positive emotions. This leads to a greater connectivity, exchanging of information and more interactions within the organization which most importantly empowers high levels of performance.



In order to enable positive communication, leaders must use positive self-talk and lead by example. People usually respond to more negative situations than positive ones therefore it can be difficult to practice positive communication. However as a leader, it is important to facilitate positive communication and Cameron suggests doing it by two strategies, the best-self feedback process and supportive communication.



Best-Self Feedback

- uncovering individual strengths as perceived by others
- acquaintances are asked to provide short statements on times that the individual displayed their best self
- information is analyzed by the individual to create their own best-self picture
- strengthens relationships

Supportive Communication

- enhances relationships but allow problematic issues to be addressed
- provide unbiased description of occurrence
- describe outcomes of the behavior and the affects in unbiased way
- provide alternatives and suggestions

Enabling positive communication in organizations is essential for productivity. As well as using supportive language that acknowledges issues but more importantly focuses on creating a positive outcome to address the issues. This type of communication creates a workplace where individuals feel supported and are able to better connect which has multiple benefits on the organizations overall success.

# Chapter 5: Positive Meaning

Finding positive meaning is important in order for people to engage in meaningful work and participate in creating positive outcomes. When people feel their work is important they are more likely to give it their best and be fully committed to getting the job done efficiently and correctly. People will often identify with their work in one of three ways, as a job, a career or a calling. People who see it as a job, do the work for the money and so they can pay their bills. Others that see it as a career usually work for personal achievements, success and are very motivated by recognition and accomplishments. Finally the people that refer to it as their calling are the types of people that go to work for the sake of work. They are intrinsically motivated by their jobs which provide them with a sense of self-fulfillment and purpose.

There are three types of relationships between members and organizations that parallel the three types of identifications people formulate with their work.

| Compliance   | Identification  | Internalization  |
|--|---|--|
| -act for personal material or benefit.<br>-employees conform to procedures and rules so they get rewards.<br>-behavior complies with expectations. | -more engaged with the organization.<br>-seek involvement and contribution.<br>-enjoy satisfaction of belonging.<br>-mutually benefits employee and organization. | -complete adoption of organizational goals.<br>-internalize culture and mission.<br>-adopts organizations purpose as their own.<br>-loyal. |
| <b>JOB</b>   | <b>CAREER</b>   | <b>CALLING</b>   |

These relationships all relate to meaningfulness. The more meaningful work is to an individual, the greater job and life satisfaction they have. This satisfaction leads to better individual and organizational performance. Creating extremely meaningful environments contributes to grander success.



In order for work to be associated with meaningfulness it must possess one or more of the following:

1. Have positive impact on others.
2. Work must be associated with core individual values.
3. It must highlight the long-term impacts it will have.
4. Build a sense of community.



Leaders that can provide these opportunities to engage members with are more likely to create positive meaning an increase individuals meaningfulness with their job. This will have a positive impact on higher levels of performance and success.

# Chapter 6: Implementing Positive Strategies

Now that we are aware of the four strategies, the question is **HOW** can we implement these into our own environments? Cameron introduces the idea of the PMI Program. (Personal Management Interview Program). This technique is very useful in implementing the strategies of positive leadership. It provides a clear-cut way to apply the four strategies on a regular basis. The program has a positive impact on the overall performance of both individuals and the organization. It leads to people having more positive experiences which then guides to improved performance. The following is how to implement the program:

## **First:**

### **Role Negotiation Session**

- clarify expectations, responsibilities, standards, reporting, cultures and value.
- must happen early on in the relationship.
- establishes a foundation of expectations.
- provides clarity.
- positive climate is determined.
- forms positive relationship.
- uses positive communication.
- clarifies positive meaning associated with work.

## **Second:**

### **Ongoing one-on-one meetings**

- between the leader and direct report.
- meetings are regular, private, face to face.
- they occur at least monthly.
- accomplish specific objectives.
- generate action plans to increase performance.
- build relationships and provide continuous improvement plans.
- encompass open communication and collaboration.
- coaching and developing opportunities.

There may be some implications with this interview program, like time and the number of employees an organization has. Therefore it is critical to be creative and perhaps provide peer to peer PMI's or have levels of leadership that would conduct the PMI's.

### ***How would this look in an school setting? Do you think it could work?***

Leaders can implement the four strategies but to ensure they are consistently being practiced and positively deviant performance is achieved leaders must have regular communication with their employees. PMI's provide a conferencing time that can be used to maintain and increase individuals development which will have a positive impact on the organizations performance.

# Chapter 7: Developing Positive Leadership

Acquiring leadership strategies that empower positive deviance has become more prominent with the development of positive organizational leadership. Research suggest individual strategies help achieve very positive outcomes within organizations and individuals. However people are usually more drawn to the negative experiences and paying more attention to fixing the damage rather than putting the focus on the possible benefits the experience can have. This is why positive leadership is not the most frequently used style of leadership. However the four strategies the book outlines have significant impact on an organization. It may take time to re-train people into focusing more on the positive than on the negative but implementing the strategies can have huge rewards. Each individual strategy can have great gains when used in an organization. “These four strategies are not independent of each other, of course, and they tend to overlap and interrelate with one another” (Cameron, 2008, p.96).

After summarizing his research Cameron (2008) identifies five leadership principles that associate with the strategies in order to help leaders facilitate positive deviance.

1. Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by fostering a positive work environment.
2. Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by fostering positive relationships among members.
3. Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by fostering positive communication.
4. Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by associating the work being done with positive meaning.
5. Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by implementing the four strategies through a PMI program.



If leaders are unsure of where to start or which specific behaviors they need to implement in order to create more positivity, Cameron (2008) provides a 2 step process with tables in the back of the book. First one must diagnose their current practice and then one must plan for implementation. The tables are clearly laid out and easy to follow which would make implementing this strategic plan pretty seamless.

# Critical Evaluation

As I read this book I could easily relate to the strategies that Cameron suggests. Working in many different school I have had the opportunity to work in a school that was positively deviant and also in one that was not. I reflected on my experiences as I read through the chapters and it was very evident that when working in a positive environment that was led with positive leadership strategies created a much happier and successful school. Whereas the not so positive experience was one that did focus on the negative. It is much easier to focus on the negative and try to fix the problems however the success and overall happiness of the staff was definitely not very high. In the positive environment the success and well-being of the staff and students was much higher.

It can be difficult to always focus on the positive but once you start thinking and acting in this way the behavior is learned and it is contagious with the other members of the organization. Reading and applying the strategies Cameron suggests would definitely ensure a work place of positive deviance. This book is a very good read for leaders who wish to take the positive approach. It is easy to read and relate to and it also provides great strategies that can be carried out with ease. The book provides not only the strategies but also why they are effective and the results they bring. I really enjoyed reading through the strategies and then reading the real life examples that Cameron provided with research that affirmed the strategies and their success. IF you are a leader who wishes to lead from a positive point of view then this book will be of great value to you and your organization.

