

The 7 Secrets of Inspiring Leaders

(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/carminegallo/2011/07/06/the-7-secrets-of-inspiring-leaders/#4d5a495a3195>)

Carmine Gallo

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Very few people look forward to going to work. And no, providing free coffee and fruit in the company kitchen isn't going to change their minds. It's a sad observation about the state of American business today. According to a Mercer consulting survey that I quoted in an [earlier column](#), one-third of U.S. employees are so unhappy they are thinking of leaving their jobs. Let me ask you – how is it possible that unhappy, unmotivated and disengaged employees could possibly offer exceptional customer service or develop exciting, innovative products that move your brand forward? They can't. That's why it is up to you as leader to satisfy what Emerson called a person's "chief want:" someone who will inspire us to be what we know we can be.

In a [recent article](#) about [Richard Branson](#), I outlined what I believe are the 7 qualities that all inspiring leaders share. The list was compiled with the help of dozens of the world's most inspiring business leaders for a book I wrote in 2009. Since then I have never seen a leader considered to be "inspiring" by his or her team who did not possess each and every one of these qualities. So here they are.

Ignite Your Enthusiasm. I once asked the famous financial guru, [Suze Orman](#), for the secret behind her success. You cannot inspire, she said, unless you're inspired yourself. She's speaking about passion. Every inspiring leader is abundantly passionate—not about the product itself, but *what the product means* to their customers. Steve Jobs is not passionate about computers. He's passionate about building tools that help people to unleash their personal creativity. Big difference.

Navigate a course of action. Nothing extraordinary ever happened without a leader articulating a vision, a course of action. We've seen this throughout history (think John F. Kennedy challenging a nation to land a man on the moon) and it works for building brands as well. When I interviewed Teach for America founder, [Wendy Kopp](#), she said that her 'vision' as a college student was to "eliminate educational inequities."

That vision remains as strongly in place today as it did when she started the non-profit that trains college graduates to teach in schools across America. Bold visions create excitement and inspire evangelists.

Sell the benefit. Your employees don't care about growing sales by 10 percent this year. That's a goal—or a result—of achieving a vision. But it's not inspiring. One CEO of a major retailer once told me that his "goal" was to double his company's stock price in one year—a goal most people thought was impossible to achieve. He did it with the enthusiastic help of his employees who bought in to the plan. They did so because in every conversation he talked about what it would mean to them – job security, stability, new flex time policies, more day-care for working mothers, etc.. Your employees are asking one question, "What's in it for me?" Don't leave them guessing.

Paint a picture. Our brains are programmed more for stories than for abstract ideas. Stories can include the real stories of how your products are improving the lives of your customers. Stories can also include personal anecdotes, helping to establish a closer connection between leaders and teams. Recently I spent time with a top executive of a very large, global energy company. He had very personal, touching

stories of what the company and its safety record meant to him. I urged him to begin telling the stories in his public presentations, especially with employees. After one talk an employee approached this leader and said he felt more inspired than ever. Stories make connections. Tell more of them.

Invite participation. Google Vice President [Marissa Mayer](#) once told me that she keeps a sign-up sheet outside her door for “office hours” that are held each day at 4:00 p.m. She gives team members 15 minutes to voice their opinions or pitch new ideas. People want more than a paycheck. They want to create meaning. Invite them in.

Reinforce optimism. Great leaders are more optimistic than average. Former Secretary of State [Colin Powell](#) once said, “Optimism is a force multiplier.” He also said that optimism was the “secret” behind President Ronald Reagan’s charisma. Never before in the history of civilization have we had access to such a wealth of ideas, resources and opportunities. Spread the word.

Encourage potential. When I was on a tour of Zappos’ headquarters in Henderson, Nevada, I met the Zappos Goal Coach.

“What kind of goals do you help people achieve?” I asked.

“Almost anything,” he said. “The other day I worked with a young man who wanted to learn how to play guitar and a woman who wanted to start writing the book she had always dreamed of.”

“What does that have to do with Zappos?” I asked.

“It has everything to do with Zappos,” he responded.

[Zappos](#) has achieved a reputation for superior customer service because it doesn’t see employees as cogs in a wheel. Employees know that Zappos’ leaders genuinely care about their well-being. It’s also one of the “happiest” places to work. Imagine that.

The topic of inspirational leadership is being discussed around the world, not just in America. I just returned from giving keynote presentations in Germany and Austria. The topic came up repeatedly. More specifically, the question was raised, *how do great leaders inspire their teams?* The Europeans are just as interested in the answer as their American counterparts. Historically many European employees didn’t look to their company for personal growth nor did they seek inspiration from their boss. They do now. It’s up to leaders in every country and in every industry to motivate and inspire their teams to higher levels of achievement.

[Carmine Gallo](#) is the communications coach for the world’s most admired brands. He is a popular keynote speaker and author of several books including the bestsellers, [The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs](#), [The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs](#), and [Fire Them Up! 7 Simple Secrets of Inspiring Leaders](#). Follow him on Twitter: [carminegallos](#)