

The Anatomy of Inspiration

by Patrick Sweeney

When people are inspired, it is generally by someone who has defied the odds, overcome adversity and succeeded. Such individuals are rare. Their presence makes people hope for something new inside themselves.

Yet only a small percentage of people who are truly inspirational are driven to be leaders. Instinctively, inspiring leaders know that it is easier to bring people together against an enemy than to unite for a worthy cause. David, after all, would be just another kid with a slingshot without Goliath.

Among the most inspiring business leaders of all time was Steve Jobs, who reinvented computers, animated videos and changed how the world listens to music and reads books. In the 1980s, Jobs made it clear that IBM was the technocratic enemy, and that Apple had arrived to breathe a new life into the world.

Inspiring leaders often start with a worthy cause, which they clarify by listening to their inner voice. Then they surround themselves with talented individuals who believe in and can expound on what they hear and believe.

These leaders then make it a priority to connect with each of the key people on their team, building their strengths and engaging them. Such leaders make sure that all of their top performers know they are truly valued by:

- Setting aside regular meetings with managers and top performers in the organization.
- Taking the time and care to understand each manager's and team's workload, and any concerns that might exist.
- Recognizing and rewarding exemplary performance, while providing constructive feedback on growth opportunities.

To keep a talented team of employees engaged, inspiring leaders make a solid commitment to develop the individual potential of each member of their team. The team is seen for its collective and individual talents. As a result, collective dreams are realized, and inspiring leaders are able to retain more top performers.

Employee engagement begins with leaders showing that they

value their people, and they are willing to spend their time and resources to strengthen their potential. Development can take many forms, including personalized coaching, team development, management training, or a combination of those.

To facilitate individual and team development, some organizations bring in coaches to provide personalized programs based on their company's needs. These types of programs can include:

1. Coaching: Developmental plans can enhance each individual's abilities, motivations and growth opportunities.

2. Top talent retention: Work one-on-one with top performers to assess their talents, identify hidden potential and clarify their goals, while linking their abilities, interests and loyalty with the organization's cause.

3. Validation study: An in-depth assessment can help leaders glean a clear understanding of the qualities that distinguish their top performers, highlighting how to hire more people like them and how to develop high-potential employees currently on board.

Being an inspirational leader starts with believing in a vision, then being able to connect with a team of talented individuals who are committed to that cause. From there, leaders must engage and develop each individual to engender true collaboration.

There is really nothing more important than inspiring others, because if leaders don't take the time to listen to and recognize top-performing employees, another company will.

Patrick Sweeney is the president of Caliper, a global human resources consulting firm based in Princeton, N.J. For more information visit www.calipercorp.com or call 609-524-1200.

CALIPER ^{50th} Anniversary
Helping companies hire & develop top performers.