POSITIVE LEADERSHIP

Strategies for Extraordinary Performance

KIM CAMERON

POSITIVE LEADERSHIP

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This book is dedicated to the positive leaders in my life and the people who constantly exemplify positively deviant performance:

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Contents

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Preface

Prescriptions for leading organizational success are plentiful, often provided by well-known senior executives, political candidates, and consultants. The objective of this book is different. It aims to explain strategies that can help leaders reach beyond ordinary success to achieve extraordinary effectiveness, spectacular results, and positively deviant performance. It does so by relying on validated findings from empirical research.

The book is based on analyses of organizations that have achieved exceptional levels of success. One such study, for example, chronicles the cleanup and closure of a nuclear weapons production facility (Cameron & Lavine, 2006). The company receiving the contract to dismantle and clean up the Rocky Flats Nuclear Arsenal completed the assignment 60 years ahead of schedule, $30 billion under budget, and 13 times cleaner than required by federal standards. This company's achievement far exceeded every knowledgeable expert's predictions of performance, and it represents what I refer to as positive deviance. Carefully examining organizations such as this one has helped uncover some atypical leadership strategies that enable levels of performance that dramatically exceed expectations and reach extraordinary levels of excellence.

These strategies are atypical in that they supplement oft-prescribed mandates that appear frequently in discussions about leadership such as enhancing teamwork, articulating a vision, encouraging employee participation, treating people with respect, changing culture, becoming more customer-centric, and establishing stretch goals. Whereas such prescriptions are important and they have mostly been validated as contributing to organizational effectiveness, examining positively deviant organizations has revealed additional leadership strategies that are less often recognized. Four of the most important ones are explained in this book.

These strategies are built on the concept of *positive.* Positive leadership refers to the application of principles arising from the newly emerging fields of positive organizational scholarship, positive psychology, and the positive change literature. The concept of positive has at least three connotations:

(1) A focus on positively deviant performance, or successful performance that dramatically exceeds the norm in a positive direction;

(2) An affirmative bias, or an orientation toward, for example, strengths rather than weaknesses, optimism rather than pessimism, supportive rather than critical communication; and

(3) A focus on virtuousness and eudaemonism, or on the best of the human condition and that which human beings consider to be inherently good (Cameron, 2003).

In this sense, the concept of positive possesses the attributes of the *heliotropic effect*. This effect is defined as the tendency in all living systems toward that which gives life and away from that which depletes life—toward positive energy and away from negative energy. All living systems have an inclination toward the positive—for example, plants lean toward the light, people learn and remember positive information faster and better than negative information, positive words predominate over negative words in all languages, all life forms from bacteria to mammals possess an inclination toward positive energy (e.g., Cameron, 2008; Matlin & Stang, 1978)—so strategies that capitalize on the positive similarly tend to produce life-giving, flourishing outcomes in individuals and organizations. As is demonstrated in this book, a focus on the positive is life-giving for individuals and organizations in the same way that positive energy in nature enhances thriving in living organisms. These four positive strategies, therefore, are among the most important enablers for producing life-giving outcomes and extraordinarily positive performance.

The four strategies include the cultivation of *positive climate*, *positive relationships*, *positive communication*, and *positive meaning*. Each strategy is explained and illustrated, empirical evidence is provided, and specific actionable guidelines are identified. The intent is to provide leaders with validated, implementable strategies that can enable positively deviant performance. In Chapter 6, I describe a proven process whereby these four strategies can be

implemented in organizations, and the final chapter provides a self-assessment instrument and a guide for implementing these four strategies.

A distinctive feature of this book, compared to more common discussions written by celebrated leaders recounting their own experiences or by storytellers reciting inspiring examples, is that these strategies and prescriptions rely on rigorous empirical research for their credibility. A variety of scholarly research studies are cited that support the existence of verifiable associations between these strategies and positively deviant performance. This research helps ensure the legitimacy and integrity of the prescriptions being advocated. Rather than being based on the personal experiences of well-regarded leaders or editorialists—which may or may not be generalizable—this book relies on scholarly research from multiple investigations to substantiate the recommendations for enabling positive leadership.

In preparing this book, I benefited immeasurably from the broad expertise and scholarly experience of valued colleagues. I want to express appreciation to these individuals who provided critical insights, editorial advice, and helpful observations regarding the contents of this book. They include Jane Dutton, Adam Grant, Steve Piersanti, Robert Quinn, Jeevan Sivasubramaniam, Gretchen Spreitzer, and David Whetten. The production staff members at Berrett Koehler Publishers have also been outstanding models of professionalism and competence. I am grateful to you all.

CHAPTER

1

Positive Leadership

This book introduces the concept of *positive leadership,* or the ways in which leaders enable positively deviant performance, foster an affirmative orientation in organizations, and engender a focus on virtuousness and eudaemonism. Positive leadership refers to the application of positive principles arising from the newly emerging fields of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), positive psychology (Seligman, 1999), and positive change (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). It helps answer the question: "So what can I *do* if I want to become a more effective leader?" Applying the principles of positive leadership leads to extraordinary performance.

The vast majority of the tens of thousands of books on leadership currently in print are based on the prescriptions

of celebrated leaders recounting their own experiences or on storytellers' recitations of inspirational examples. This book is different. It explains strategies that have been validated by empirical research with multiple individuals and organizations. It provides an explanation of practical strategies that can help leaders apply principles that have recently emerged through an emphasis on the positive in social science research. These strategies are, for the most part, seldom implemented in organizations.

Positive leadership has three connotations:

(1) It refers to the facilitation of extraordinarily positive performance—that is, *positively deviant performance*. This means outcomes that dramatically exceed common or expected performance. Facilitating positive deviance is not the same as achieving ordinary success in that it represents "intentional behaviors that depart from the norm of a reference group in honorable ways" (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003: 209). Positive leaders aim to help individuals and organizations attain spectacular levels of achievement.

(2) Positive leadership also 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. Without being Pollyannaish, it emphasizes positive communication, optimism, and strengths as well as the value and opportunity embedded in problems and weaknesses. Positive leadership does not ignore negative events but builds on them to develop positive outcomes. It is not the same as merely being nice, charismatic, trust-

worthy, or a servant leader (Conger, 1989; Greenleaf, 1977); rather it incorporates these attributes and supplements them with a focus on strategies that provide strengths-based, positive energy to individuals and organizations.

(3) The third connotation focuses on facilitating the best of the human condition, or on fostering virtuousness (Cameron & Caza, 2004; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). It is based on a eudaemonic assumption; that is, that an inclination exists in all human systems toward goodness for its intrinsic value (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*; Dutton and Sonenshein, 2007). Whereas there has been some debate regarding what constitutes goodness and whether universal human virtues can be identified, all societies and cultures possess catalogues of traits that they deem virtuous (Dent, 1984; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive leadership is oriented toward developing what Aristotle labeled goods of first intent—or to "that which is good in itself and is to be chosen for its own sake" (*Metaphysics XII*: 3). An inherent orientation exists, in other words, toward virtuousness in individuals and organizations.

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 life-giving (in addition to what is problematic or life-depleting), what is experienced as good (in addition to what is objectionable), what is extraordinary (in addition to what is merely effective), and what is inspiring (in addition to what is difficult or

arduous). Positive leadership means promoting outcomes such as thriving at work, interpersonal flourishing, virtuous behaviors, positive emotions, and energizing networks. In this book, the focus is primarily on the role of positive leaders in enabling positively deviant performance.

AN EXAMPLE OF POSITIVE DEVIANCE

An easy way to identify positive leadership is to notice positive deviance. An example of such performance is illustrated by the cleanup and closure of a nuclear weapons production facility near Denver, Colorado (Cameron & Lavine, 2006). At the time, the facility was rife with conflict and antagonism. It had been raided and temporarily closed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1989 for alleged violations of environmental laws, and employee grievances had skyrocketed. More than 100 tons of radioactive plutonium was on site, and more than 250,000 cubic meters of low-level radioactive waste was being stored in temporary drums on the prairie. Broad public sentiment existed that the facility was a danger to surrounding communities, and demonstrations by multiple groups had been staged from the 1960s through the 1980s in protest of nuclear proliferation. Radioactive pollution levels were deemed to be so high that a 1994 ABC *Nightline* broadcast labeled two buildings on the site the most dangerous buildings in America.

The Department of Energy estimated that to close and clean up the facility would require a minimum of 70 years and cost more than $36 billion. A Denver, Colorado,

engineering and environmental firm—CH2M HILL—won the contract to clean up and close the 6,000-acre site consisting of 800 buildings.

CH2M HILL completed the assignment 60 years ahead of schedule, $30 billion under budget, and 13 times cleaner than required by federal standards. Antagonists such as citizen-action groups, community mayors, and state regulators changed from being adversaries and protestors to advocates, lobbyists, and partners. Labor relations among the three unions (i.e., steelworkers, security guards, building trades) improved from 900 grievances to the best in the steelworker president's work life. A culture of lifelong employment and employee entitlement was replaced by a workforce that enthusiastically worked itself out of a job as quickly as possible. Safety performance exceeded federal standards by twofold and more than 200 technological innovations were produced in the service of faster and safer performance. These achievements far exceeded every knowledgeable expert's predictions of performance. They were, in short, a quintessential example of positive deviance and positive leadership:

> The leadership from the CH2M HILL organization was very important. . . . They poured their corporate heart into what we were trying to do. They brought some fabulous positive leadership to the site. (U.S. Department of Energy Executive, cited in Cameron & Lavine, 2006: 77)

Of course, for positive leaders to focus on positive deviance does not mean that they ignore non-positive conditions or situations when mistakes, crises, deterioration, or

problems are present. Most of the time people and organizations fall short of achieving the best they can be or fail to fulfill their optimal potential. Many positive outcomes are stimulated by trials and difficulties; for example, demonstrated courage, resilience, forgiveness, and compassion are relevant only in the context of negative occurrences. As illustrated by the Rocky Flats example, some of the best of human and organizational attributes are exposed only when confronting obstacles, challenges, or detrimental circumstances. Common human experience, as well as abundant scientific evidence, supports the idea that negativity has a place in human flourishing (Cameron, 2008). Negative news sells more than positive news, people are affected more by negative feedback than positive feedback, and traumatic events have greater impact on humans than positive events.

A comprehensive review of psychological research by Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs (2001: 323) summarized this conclusion by pointing out that "bad is stronger than good." Human beings, they pointed out, *react* more strongly to negative phenomena than to positive phenomena. They learn early in life to be vigilant in responding to the negative and to ignore natural heliotropic tendencies. Thus, achieving positive deviance is not dependent on completely positive conditions, just like languishing and failure are not dependent on constant negative conditions. A role exists for both positive and negative circumstances in producing positive deviance (Bagozzi, 2003), and both conducive and challenging conditions may lead to positive deviance.

Moreover, when organizations should fail but do not, when they bounce back but are supposed to wither, when they remain flexible and agile but ought to become rigid, they also demonstrate a form of positive deviance (Weick, 2003). The cleanup and closure of Rocky Flats was expected to fail; nuclear aircraft carriers in the 1990 Persian Gulf War were not supposed to produce perfect performance (Weick & Roberts, 1993); and the U.S. Olympic hockey team in 1980 was predicted to be annihilated by the Russians. Nonfailure in these circumstances also represents positive deviance.

One way to think about positive deviance is illustrated by a continuum shown in Figure 1.1. The continuum depicts a state of normal or expected performance in the middle, a condition of negatively deviant performance on the left, and a state of positively deviant performance on the right. Negative and positive deviance depict aberrations from normal functioning, problematic on one end and virtuous on the other end.

At the individual level, the figure shows a condition of physiological and psychological illness on the left and healthy functioning in the middle (i.e., the absence of illness). On the right side is positive deviance, which may be illustrated by high levels of physical vitality (e.g., Olympic fitness levels) or psychological flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fredrickson, 2001). At the organizational level, the figure portrays conditions ranging from ineffective, inefficient, and error-prone performance on the left side, to effective, efficient, and reliable performance in the middle. On

FIGURE 1.1 A Deviance Continuum

	Negative Deviance	Normal	Positive Deviance
Individual:			
Physiological	Illness	Health	Vitality
Psychological	Illness	Health	Flow
Organizational:			
Economics	Unprofitable	Profitable	Generous
Effectiveness	Ineffective	Effective	Excellent
Efficiency	Inefficient	Efficient	Extraordinary
Quality	Error-prone	Reliable	Perfect
Ethics	Unethical	Ethical	Benevolent
Relationships	Harmful	Helpful	Honoring
Adaptation	Threat-rigidity	Coping	Flourishing

(SOURCE: Cameron, 2003)

the right side is extraordinarily positive, virtuous, or extraordinary organizational performance. The extreme right and left points on the continuum are qualitatively distinct from the center point. They do not merely represent a greater or lesser quantity of the middle attributes.

For the most part, organizations are designed to foster stability, steadiness, and predictability (March & Simon, 1958; Parsons, 1951; Weber, 1992)—that is, to remain in the middle of the Figure 1.1 continuum. Investors are quick to flee from companies that are deviant or unpredictable

in their performance (Marcus, 2005). Consequently, organizations formalize expectations, reporting relationships, goals and targets, organizational rules, processes and procedures, strategies, and structures—all intended to reduce variation, uncertainty, and deviance. Most organizations, and most leaders, focus on maintaining performance at the center of the continuum, so most performance is neither positively nor negatively deviant (Quinn, 2004; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). Success is traditionally represented as effective performance at the center of the continuum—predictable trends, reliable functioning, profitable operations.

On the other hand, a few organizations perform in extraordinary ways—at the right end of the continuum—but they are the exception, not the rule. They are positively deviant, and this implies more than just being profitable. Positive deviance almost always entails more than merely earning more revenue than the industry average for a certain number of years (as in Collins, 2001). It involves thriving, flourishing, even virtuous performance, or achieving the best of the human condition. Of course, no single leader can account for this kind of spectacular success, but certain leadership strategies have been found to enable organizational thriving, flourishing, and extraordinarily positive performance. This book highlights four of these enabling strategies and provides the empirical evidence that supports their validity.

AN EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP THAT ENABLES POSITIVE DEVIANCE

One example of leadership that led to positive deviance occurred in a New England health-care facility—Griffin Hospital—which faced a crisis when the popular vice president of operations, Patrick Charmel, was forced to resign by the board of directors (Cameron & Caza, 2002). Most employees viewed him as the most innovative and effective administrator in the hospital and as the chief exemplar of positive energy and hope for the future. Upon his resignation, the organization was thrown into turmoil. Conflict, backbiting, criticism, and adversarial feelings permeated the system. Eventually, a group of employees formally appealed to the board of directors to replace the current president and CEO with Charmel. Little confidence was expressed in the current leadership, and the hospital's performance was deteriorating. The group's lobbying efforts were eventually successful in that the president and CEO resigned under pressure, and Charmel was hired back to fill those two roles.

Within six months of his return, however, the decimated financial circumstances at the hospital necessitated a downsizing initiative aimed at reducing the workforce by at least 10 percent. The hospital faced millions of dollars in losses. Charmel had to eliminate the jobs of some of the very same people who supported his return. The most likely consequences of this action would normally be an escalation in the negative effects of downsizing (Cameron,

1994); for example, loss of loyalty and morale, perceptions of injustice and duplicity, blaming and accusations, and cynicism and anger. Based on research on the effects of downsizing, a continuation of the tumultuous, antagonistic climate was almost guaranteed (Cameron, 1998; Cameron, Kim, & Whetten, 1987).

Instead, the opposite results occurred. Upon his return, Charmel made a concerted effort to implement strategies that enabled positively deviant change rather than to merely manage the problems. He focused on fostering a positive climate rather than allowing a negative one to develop, where strong relationships, open and honest communication, and meaningfulness of work were emphasized. The organization institutionalized forgiveness, optimism, trust, and integrity as expected behaviors. Throughout the organization, stories of compassion and acts of kindness and virtuousness were almost daily fare. One typical example involved a nurse who was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Respondents reported that when word spread of the man's illness, doctors and staff members from every area in the hospital donated vacation days and personal leave time so that he would continue to collect a salary even though he could not work. Fortuitously, the pool of days expired just before the nurse died, so he was never terminated, and he received a salary right up to his last day of life.

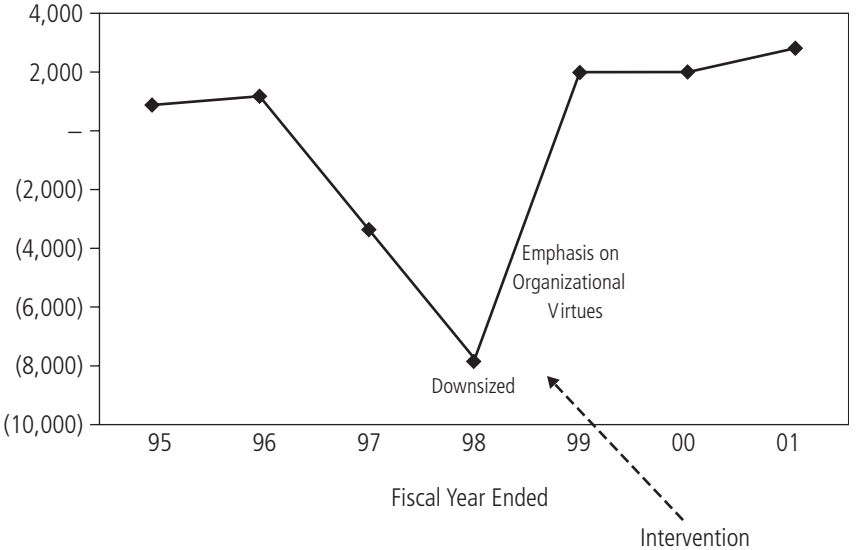
Employees reported that the personal and organizational damage done by the announced downsizing—friends losing jobs, budgets being cut—were forgiven, employees released grudges and resentment, and, instead, an optimistic future was emphasized. One indicator was the language

used throughout the organization, which commonly included words such as love, hope, compassion, forgiveness, and humility, especially in reference to the leadership that announced the downsizing actions.

> We are in a very competitive health care market, so we have differentiated ourselves through our compassionate and caring culture. . . . I know it sounds trite, but we really do love our patients. . . . People love working here, and our employees' family members love us too. . . . Even when we downsized, Pat maintained the highest levels of integrity. He told the truth, and he shared everything. He got the support of everyone by his genuineness and personal concern. . . . It wasn't hard to forgive" (representative response in a focus group interview of employees, cited in Cameron, 2003: 56).

Employees indicated that the climate of positivity established by Charmel was the key to their recovery and thriving. For example, the maternity ward installed double beds (which had to be newly designed) so the fathers could sleep with the mothers rather than sitting in a chair through the night. The hospital created numerous communal rooms for family and friend gatherings and carpeted hallways and floors. Volunteer pets were brought in to comfort and cheer up patients. Original paintings on walls displayed optimistic and inspiring themes. Nurses' stations were all within eyesight of patient's beds. Jacuzzis were installed in the maternity ward. Since then, Griffin has been listed in the "Top 25 Best Places to Work" by *Fortune* for

FIGURE 1.2 Financial Performance after a Leadership Intervention

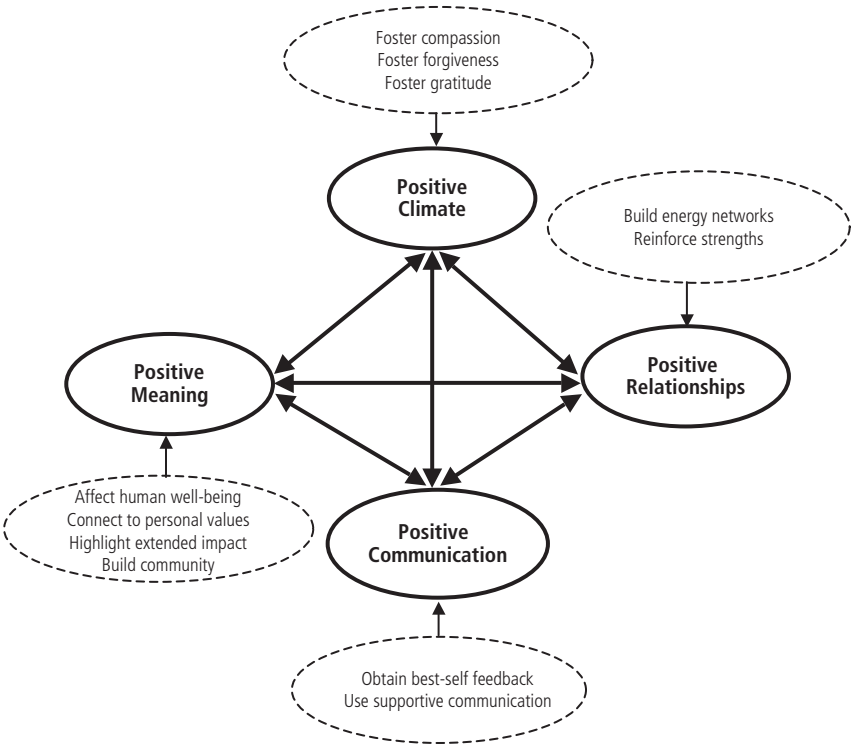


(SOURCE: Cameron, 2003)

more than five years and is ranked 12th nationwide in the "Top 100 Quality Award." Figure 1.2 illustrates the financial turnaround associated with Charmel's leadership.

Positive leaders focus on organizational flourishing, enabling the best of the human condition, and creating exceptionally positive outcomes, not merely on resolving problems, overcoming obstacles, increasing competitiveness, or even attaining profitability. These outcomes may be achieved in difficult circumstances—as in the case of Griffin Hospital—as well as in benevolent circumstances. The key is a focus on the positive.

FIGURE 1.3 Four Leadership Strategies that Enable Positive Deviance



POSITIVE LEADERSHIP

Each of the chapters that follow discusses a key positive leadership strategy that differentiates positively deviant organizations from normal organizations. These strategies do not represent a comprehensive or exclusive list, of course, but observation and empirical evidence from a number of investigations suggest that they are among the most

important enablers of positively deviant performance, yet they are too seldom practiced. These four leadership strategies are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. As illustrated in Figure 1.3, enhancing one of these strategies tends to positively impact the other three. In addition to reviewing why each strategy is important and how it is related to positively deviant performance, each chapter includes a brief description of some practical activities that can enable the implementation of the positive strategy, some diagnostic questions for leaders, and some references to the validating research.

An integrating chapter is also provided (Chapter 6) in which I explain a process for implementing these four strategies in an organization. This process is called the Personal Management Interview program. Empirical evidence is persuasive that by implementing this process, and by employing these four strategies, marked improvement in individual and organizational performance can occur. The concluding chapter summarizes the principles of positive leadership and provides a process to help leaders begin to implement the most personally relevant leadership behaviors.

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CHAPTER

2

Positive Climate

The term *positive climate* refers to a condition in which positive emotions predominate over negative emotions in the work environment (Denison, 1996; Smidts, Pruyin, & Van Riel, 2001). Employees with optimistic attitudes and cheerful outlooks are typical of a positive climate, for example, compared to employees experiencing stress, anxiety, or distrust. Positive interpretations predominate over negative interpretations. Fredrickson (1998, 2001, 2002, 2003) and Bagozzi (2003) found in their research that conditions that foster positive emotions led to optimal individual and organizational functioning; in other words, to positive deviance. Positive outcomes are produced both in the immediate term as well as over the long run. Organizational performance is substantially and

positively affected by a positive climate (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Engendering a positive climate is especially amenable to the approach adopted by the leader. Leaders, it has been found, have an extraordinary degree of impact on the climate, on the way others interpret their circumstances, and on their definitions of subjective well-being (Diener, 1995; Fredrickson, 2003). Consequently, leaders significantly affect organizational climate as they personally induce, develop, and display positive emotions (George, 1998).

Fredrickson (1998) documented the "broaden and build" phenomenon that is associated with positive emotions. Experiencing positive emotions "broadens people's momentary thought-action repertoires and builds their enduring personal resources" (Fredrickson, 2003: 166). Negative emotions narrow people's thought-action repertoires and diminish their coping abilities. In other words, inducing positive emotions (such as joyfulness, love, or appreciation) enlarges cognitive perspectives and enhances the ability of individuals to attend to more information, make richer interpretations, and experience higher levels of creativity and productivity (Isen, 1987). People are literally able to take in more information when they experience positive emotions. This also builds enduring personal resources such as intellectual complexity, knowledge, intellectual interest, and the capacity to explore (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001). People become more creative and experimental. Positive emotions also down-regulate negative emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, or anxiety, and reverse their negative

physiological effects (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Positivity nullifies the harmful consequences of negativity.

Enabling positive emotions, in other words, fosters a positive climate that, in turn, generates "upward spirals toward optimal functioning and enhanced performance" (Fredrickson, 2003: 169). A positive work climate has also been found to enhance decision making, productivity, creativity, social integration, and prosocial behaviors (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), meaning that individuals and organizations almost always flourish when a positive climate is present.

On the other hand, Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001), in a comprehensive review of psychological literature, highlighted the fact that negative occurrences, bad events, and disapproving feedback were more influential and longer lasting in individuals than positive, encouraging, and upbeat occurrences. One piece of negative feedback amid several compliments, one significant loss amid several important gains, one incidence of abuse amid several incidents of nurturing, one traumatic event amid several pleasant events, or one bad relationship amid several good relationships all have a disproportionately negative impact on individuals and on organizations. The negative event engenders more coping behaviors, longer lasting reactions, and more lingering memories than the comparable positive event. If a person receives three compliments on her performance, for example, but one person offers a disparaging evaluation, given equal credibility of the persons offering the comments, the negative

statement carries more weight than the positive statements.

The title of Baumeister et al.'s article summarizes its conclusion: "Bad Is Stronger than Good." People tend to pay more attention to negative than positive events, and for good reason. Ignoring a negative threat could be lethal. From the onset of life, individuals learn that to ignore negative feedback is likely to be not only unpleasant but potentially dangerous or even life threatening. It could be fatal, for example, to ignore the honking of a horn or the screeching of tires while crossing the street. People learn early in life to pay attention to information that is negative. On the other hand, ignoring an enjoyable or pleasant occurrence only results in regret at missing a gratifying experience. Seldom does anything life-altering occur because positive feedback is ignored.

Consequently, individuals in general—and especially leaders in organizations who are constantly confronted by problems, threats, and obstacles—have a tendency to focus on the negative much more than the positive. They are socialized this way from infancy. Moreover, most leaders and authority figures are charged with resolving problems, defeating the competition, and protecting the innocent from threats (March & Simon, 1958; Riley, 1998). Traditionally, organizations require the best leadership when problems, threats, or difficulties are present. Consequently, negative factors receive much more attention than positive factors in organizations. This is consistent with Walsh's research (1999), which found that positive terms (e.g., virtue, caring, compassion, goodness) seldom appeared in the busi-

ness press (e.g., *Wall Street Journal*) over the prior 17 years, whereas negatively biased words (e.g., beat, fight, compete) increased fourfold in the same period. More attention is given to the negative than to the positive in business.

Positive leaders are unusual in that they choose to emphasize the uplifting and flourishing side of organizational life, even in the face of difficulty. It is not that they ignore the negative or adopt a Pollyannaish perspective, but they counter the tendency toward negativity with an abundance of positivity. In the absence of such an emphasis, negative inclinations overwhelm the positive and a negative climate is the default option (Cameron, 2008). This implies that intentional strategies are needed if leaders are to enable a positive climate in their organizations.

AN EXAMPLE OF POSITIVE CLIMATE

Synovus Financial Services Corporation, a regional bank headquartered in Columbus, Georgia, has achieved an earnings-per-share annual growth of 13 percent since 1999, well above industry average. What makes it positively deviant, however, is its positive climate. Synovus is rated by the *Wall Street Journal* as the "Number 1 Bank in the South" and has been rated by *Fortune* magazine as one of the 10 best companies to work for in America for five years in a row. Led by Jimmy Blanchard, the firm prides itself on building a positive climate that, in turn, enables positively deviant performance. Leaders "strive to maintain an

atmosphere where employees grow materially, spiritually, and intellectually, and where customers see the culture coming 'from the heart' " (Drazin, Hess, & Mihoubi, 2006: 16). Quotations from senior officers provide examples of the company's climate:

> In a social and economic environment where so many things are uncertain, it is more important than ever that the team members of Synovus and the employees of companies throughout the country know that they are cared for. Enabling our working mothers to be productive, valued, and rewarded, while also caring for their families, is one of our primary missions as an employer of choice. (p. 14)

> [Our] latest addition, a "customer covenant" adopted last year and carried on small cards in employees' wallets, codifies the company's goal of serving all clients with "the highest levels of sincerity, fairness, courtesy, respect, and gratitude." All of this is wrapped up neatly in what officials like to call a "culture of the heart." (p. 15)

> Every person has great worth. We will invest in every member of our team just like we save money for the future. We should build people. Teach them. If team members know their part in the plan—why they are important, regardless of their roles—then their attitudes are brighter. They want to serve. Our returns are hearty. Working here is better. (p. 22)

ENABLING A POSITIVE CLIMATE

Leaders who enable positive deviance resist the tendency to concentrate primarily on the negative, threatening, or problematic in the environment and, instead, emphasize positive phenomena—for example, positive emotions, positive opportunities, and positive relationships—in the interest of developing a positive climate. Substantial research confirms that a positive climate at work is strongly associated with positive performance (Schneider, 1991). Three particularly important activities for promoting a positive climate include the fostering of *compassion, forgiveness*, and *gratitude* among employees in organizations.

Companies that scored higher on these activities were found to have performed significantly better than others in a study of organizations across 16 different industry groups (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004). (The study included large firms such as General Electric, National City Bank, and OfficeMax; medium and small firms; and not-for-profit organizations.) When leaders fostered compassionate behavior among employees, enabled forgiveness for missteps and mistakes, and encouraged frequent expressions of gratitude, organizations' profitability, productivity, quality, innovation, customer satisfaction, and employee retention were significantly higher than in other organizations. Leaders who reinforced these virtuous behaviors were more successful in producing bottom-line results than typical leaders (Cameron, 2003).

Several specific activities relating to compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude can enable the development of a positive climate.

Compassion

In a study of organizational compassion following a major tragedy, Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilius, and Kanov (2002) identified the strategies that enabled an entire organization to mobilize its institutional capabilities to demonstrate compassion. Shortly before final exams, three non-U.S. MBA students lost everything they owned in an apartment fire. The response by the organization represented an extraordinary example of organized compassion. Fellow students replaced class notes, computers, clothing, and food enabling the victims to take final exams on time. The institution provided free housing until other arrangements could be made. School leaders donated personal funds to help the students get back on their feet. In the analysis of the mechanisms that explained this demonstration of organized compassion, Dutton et al. (2002) identified a variety of strategies that led to this unusual institutional response—the presence of a strong community, the presence of expediters and coordinators, enabling routines that were already a part of the school's operations, collective events, and organizational values that supported compassionate responses.

In supplementing this work, Kanov, Maitlis, Worline, Dutton, Frost, and Lilius (2004) identified three specific actionable processes that enable organizational compassion: *collective noticing*, *collective feeling*, and *collective responding*. When people experience difficult or negative

events, the first step these authors identified is to notice or become aware of what is occurring. This can occur simply by being on the lookout for colleagues who need help and by sharing information broadly. While maintaining sensitivity to privacy concerns, positive leaders make it legitimate for employees to share personal concerns at work, colleagues can be made aware of others' struggles, and performance management interviews can include a discussion of personal issues as well as professional issues. Tightly knit communities and groups that share a common value system tend to notice one another, keep track of one another, and detect one anothers' difficulties.

The second step, the expression of collective emotion, is fostered through planned forums or events at which people are encouraged to publicly express their compassionate feelings (Frost, 1999). Dutton et al. (2002) described the public forums and email communication, for example, that enabled compassion to flourish after the tragic apartment fire. The dean of the school at which the students were enrolled ensured that it was legitimate to express compassionate feelings in a public forum by discussing his personal feelings about the victims and by publicly writing a personal check to assist the students with unexpected expenses.

In a separate study of a shooting spree and hostage crisis at another institution, Powley (2005) found a similar set of factors that fostered the expression of compassionate emotions. Public events were held to share personal feelings and reactions (e.g., the president and the mayor organized public gatherings almost immediately after the tragedy and

small groups of people met formally and informally over a period of weeks), ceremonial activities and symbols helped direct compassionate feelings (e.g., vigils were organized to mourn the loss of victims and necklaces were distributed to symbolize the memory of those affected), and personal contacts with victims and vulnerable members were initiated by organizational leaders (e.g., leaders made home visits, shared meals, and minimized hierarchical distinctions in interactions).

Third, collective responding occurs when organized action is taken to foster healing and restoration. Dutton et al. (2002) and Powley's (2005) studies investigated the processes that are used in organizations to enable compassion in the face of traumatic events, and the exemplary actions of the leader were found to be crucial. In their investigations, leaders visibly called others to action, shared stories of caring, and articulated values in which "we care for our own," and "the whole person matters here" were predominant. Making resources available for compassionate action—for example, collecting goods for those who lost possessions, replacing course notes for students who had theirs destroyed, and rededicating the building where the tragedy occurred—was a vitally important leadership activity that enabled collective compassion.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness becomes relevant in organizations when harmful or hurtful events happen; for example, downsizing and cutbacks, difficult union negotiations, or embarrassing mistakes. These may be major or minor offenses, but in

order to move forward and not be weighed down by animosity and grudge holding, forgiveness must be fostered. Inevitably, when plants close, when layoffs are announced, when unethical decisions are made, when trust is violated, when personal affronts are encountered, individuals have one of three alternatives (Bright, 2006): hold a grudge and seek retaliation, neutralize the angry or judgmental feelings and abandon hostility, and actively replace negative with positive responses. A positive climate enabling positive deviance is most closely associated with the third alternative. A quotation from Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu (1998: xiii; 1999: 155) summarizes this relationship best:

> In forgiving, people are not asked to forget. On the contrary, it is important to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again. Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously and not minimizing it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence. It involves trying to understand the perpetrators and so have empathy, to try to stand in their shoes and appreciate the sort of pressures and influences that might have conditioned them. . . . Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim. . . . We will always need a process of forgiveness and reconciliation to deal with those unfortunate yet all too human breaches in relationships. They are an inescapable characteristic of the human condition. . . . Ultimately, you discover that without forgiveness, there is no future. We recognize that the past

> cannot be remade through punishment. . . . There is no point in exacting vengeance now, knowing that it will be the cause for future vengeance by the offspring of those we punish. Vengeance leads only to revenge. Vengeance destroys those it claims and those who become intoxicated with it . . . therefore, forgiveness is an absolute necessity for continued human existence.

Based on a variety of investigations of forgiveness in organizations (Bright, 2006; Cameron & Caza, 2002; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoreson, 2000; Worthington, 1998), at least five leadership activities were found to be associated with the enablement of organizational forgiveness.

(1) Acknowledge the trauma, harm, or injustice that organization members have experienced, but then define these occurrences as an opportunity to move forward toward a new goal. Clarify a positive future with greater emphasis than a negative past.

(2) Associate the outcomes of the organization (e.g., its products, services, and relationships) with a higher purpose that provides personal significance for organization members—something they care deeply about. This higher purpose replaces a focus on self (e.g., retribution, self-pity) with a focus on an elevating objective. Selfishness and victimization can be replaced by an opportunity to contribute value to someone or something else.

(3) Maintain high standards and communicate the fact that forgiveness is not synonymous with tolerance for error or lowered expectations. Forgiveness enables excellence

by refusing to dwell on the negative. It counters the tendency to dwell on mistakes and problems and, instead, points toward a higher standard. Working on mistakes usually produces competence—the midpoint in Figure 1.1—but focusing on forgiveness and high standards frees up individuals and organizations to become positively deviant.

(4) Provide support to individuals by communicating that human development and human welfare are as important in the organization's priorities as the financial bottom line. Instead of isolating or abandoning offenders or ignoring victims, offer social support to help humanize the harmful event. This kind of support helps both perpetrators and victims find a way to move past the injury.

(5) Pay attention to language, so that terms such as reconciliation, compassion, humility, courage, and love are acceptable in the organization's vocabulary. Such language provides a context in which forgiveness is seen as a legitimate response to harm or offense. Expressions of forgiveness are almost always accompanied by statements about caring, humility, reconciliation, and love for others.

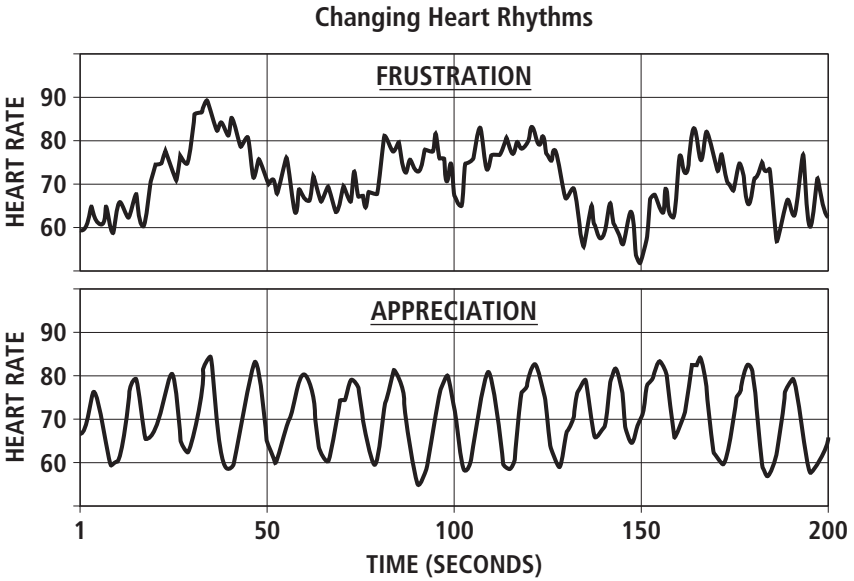
Research on several organizations' successful turnarounds after the trauma of downsizing reveals that these five strategies were successful in helping organizations move past the damaging effects of job loss (Cameron & Caza, 2002). Abundant evidence indicates that most organizations deteriorate after downsizing, but of the few that flourish, institutionalized forgiveness is a key enabler (Bright, Cameron, & Caza 2006).

Gratitude

Observing acts of compassion and forgiveness—not to mention being the recipient of them—creates a sense of gratitude in people. Gratitude has been found to have dramatic effects on individual and group performance. For example, Emmons (2003) induced feelings of gratitude in students by assigning them to keep journals as part of a semester-long assignment. Some of the students were required to keep "gratitude journals" on a daily or weekly basis. That is, they wrote down events or incidents that happened during the day (or week) for which they were grateful. Other students were assigned to write down events or incidents that were frustrating, and still other students were assigned to write down events or incidents that were merely neutral. The students who kept gratitude journals, compared to frustrated students and neutral students, experienced fewer physical symptoms such as headaches and colds; felt better about their lives as a whole; were more optimistic about the coming week; had higher states of alertness, attentiveness, determination, and energy; reported fewer hassles in their lives; engaged in more helping behavior toward other people; experienced better sleep quality; and had a sense of being more connected to others. In addition, they were absent and tardy less often and had higher grade point averages. Feelings of gratitude had significant impact on student classroom performance as well as their personal lives.

Figure 2.1 illustrates one reason why such positive results occur. Individuals experiencing gratitude demonstrate a more consistent and healthy heart rhythm than

FIGURE 2.1 Heart Rhythms and Gratitude



(SOURCE: McCraty & Childre, 2004)

individuals experiencing frustration. Physiological health, cognitive functioning, and performance at work are substantially higher when gratitude is fostered at least partly because of the harmonious pattern adopted by the body.

Emmons also found that expressions of gratitude by one person tended to motivate others to express gratitude, so a self-perpetuating, virtuous cycle occurred when gratitude was expressed. Gratitude elicited positive behavior on the part of other people (e.g., they were more likely to loan money or provide compassionate support)

as well as reciprocal behavior. For example, a handwritten "thank you" on a restaurant bill by the server elicited about 11 percent higher tips, and visits by case workers and social workers were 80 percent higher when they were thanked for coming (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

Engaging in gratitude visits (e.g., simply visiting another person in order to express gratitude), writing gratitude letters (e.g., sharing feelings of thanks with another person), and keeping gratitude journals (e.g., writing down three things daily for which you are grateful) all have important impacts on individual and organizational performance (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and each activity is easily implemented.

SUMMARY

Leadership strategies that help engender a positive climate in organizations include modeling and encouraging acts of compassion (noticing, feeling, and responding), encouraging collective forgiveness (acknowledging harm, identifying purpose, maintaining standards, providing support, using appropriate language), and encouraging expressions of gratitude (visits, letters, journals). Such virtuous acts tend to create a climate in which people are cared for, supported, and encouraged to flourish. As confirmed by several empirical studies, these activities are associated with positive physiological, mental, emotional, and organizational effects. Demonstrating compassion, forgiveness,

and gratitude produce a positive climate, people demonstrate significantly higher performance at work when a positive climate exists, and organizational performance tends to flourish in the presence of this kind of environment (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

As a quick assessment of practical leadership activities that enable a positive climate, the following diagnostic questions may be helpful. Use the following scale to respond.

1 — Never 2 — Seldom 3 — Sometimes
4 — Frequently 5 — Always

As a leader, to what extent do you:

_____ Foster information sharing so that people become aware of colleagues' difficulties, and, therefore, can express compassion?

_____ Encourage the public expression of compassion by sponsoring formal events to communicate emotional support?

_____ Demonstrate forgiveness for mistakes and errors rather than punish perpetrators or hold grudges?

_____ Provide support and development as an indicator of forgiveness for individuals who have blundered?

_____ Express gratitude to multiple employees each day?

_____ Make gratitude visits and the distribution of gratitude notes a daily practice?

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CHAPTER

3

Positive Relationships

Positive relationships refer to those that are "a generative source of enrichment, vitality, and learning" for both individuals and organizations (Dutton & Ragins, 2007: 5). This implies more than people merely getting along with one another or avoiding toxicity in their interactions. It means that positive relationships serve as enablers of positively deviant outcomes physiologically, psychologically, emotionally, and organizationally. It is commonly understood that positive relationships are satisfying and preferred by people, but the benefits extend well beyond just providing a pleasant experience.

For example, Heaphy and Dutton (2008) reviewed the literature on the association between positive relationships and physiological health. They reported abundant evidence

that links the positive effects of social relationships with social phenomena such as career mobility (Burt, 1992), mentoring and resource acquisition (Kram, 1985), power (Ibarra, 1993), and social capital (Baker, 2000). Studies also have shown that social relationships have positive affects on longevity and recovery from illness (Ryff & Singer, 2001). That is, positive social relationships—the uplifting connections associated with individuals' interpersonal interactions—have beneficial effects on a variety of aspects of human behavior and health. Heaphy and Dutton also helped explain the mechanisms for *why* these positive outcomes occur. Specifically, positive social relationships affect the *hormonal, cardiovascular*, and *immune* systems of the body, thus enhancing health, well-being, and the nature of the relationships themselves.

HORMONAL SYSTEM

More specifically, when people experience positive relationships with others, oxytocin (a health-enhancing hormone) is released in the body leading to lower blood pressure and heart rate and an enhanced ability to handle stress calmly (Ryff, Singer, Wing, & Love, 2001; Taylor, 2002). Positive social contacts lessen the allostatic load (the physiological reaction in the body to stress), so the body works less hard to cope under the effects of stressful conditions (Epel, McEwen, & Ickovics, 1998). The increase in anabolic hormones associated with positive relationships also has a calming effect on the body and mind

(Seeman, 2001). In addition, increases in oxytocin cause people to seek social contact with others (Taylor, 2002), so that a virtuous cycle of positive social interactions is created. Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, and Fehr found that exposure to oxytocin "causes a substantial increase in trust among humans," so that positive social interactions, teamwork, and prosocial (e.g., helping) behavior all are enhanced (2005: 673).

Kiecolt-Glaser, Bane, Glaser, and Malarkey (2003) found that the hormonal effects of positive relationships also have a long-term impact on marriages. In one study, married couples were asked to discuss a stressful topic in their relationship, and four stress-related hormones (e.g., adrenocorticotropic hormone [ACTH]) were measured over a 24-hour period. Ten years later, these couples were studied again, and it was found that the hormonal levels in the original experiment significantly predicted their marital status 10 years later (married, divorced, separated). Those with elevated stress-hormone levels in the original study were less likely to still be married. The release of good hormones (e.g., oxytocin) and the decrease of bad hormones (e.g., ACTH) predicted relationship durability (see Heaphy & Dutton, 2008).

CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM

Similar results were found regarding the effects of positive relationships on the cardiovascular system. People who experience positive relationships (as opposed to ambivalent or

negative relationships) experience lower blood pressure, systolic heart rate, and diastolic heart rate (Holt-Lunstad, Uchino, Smith, Olson-Cerny, & Nealey-Moore, 2003). When encountering stressful events, people's cardiovascular systems worked less hard (as evidenced by lower heart rates and blood pressure) when they were in positive relationships or felt social support at work (Brondolo et al., 2003; Unden, Orth-Gomer, & Elofsson, 1991). Social and emotional support at work (especially from supervisors and coworkers) had a direct effect on lowering heart rate and blood pressure (Karlin, Brondolo, & Schwartz, 2003). People simply have healthier cardiovascular systems when experiencing positive social relationships.

Especially interesting was an investigation of caregivers for Alzheimer's patients. In this investigation caregivers with high levels of social support had heart rate patterns associated with lower chronological age compared to caregivers with low levels of social support (Uchino, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Cacioppo, 1992). Those with positive relationships were not as physiologically old as those without positive relationships. In addition, a study of 10,000 Israeli men (Medalie & Goldbourt, 1976) found that among those experiencing high levels of stress, those who had a loving and supportive wife had half the rate of angina pectoris (chest pain). After a heart attack, the presence of social and emotional support doubled the chances of survival six months later (Berkman, Leo-Summers, & Horowitz, 2002), and was more predictive of physiological health than chronological age. People in positive relationships tend to have younger and healthier cardiovascular systems than others.

IMMUNE SYSTEM

Heaphy and Dutton's third factor—the immune system—is also positively affected by positive relationships. Individuals in positive relationships had greater resistance to upper respiratory infections (Cohen, Doyle, Skoner, Rabin, & Gwaltney, 1997), and men reporting greater satisfaction with their social support system had lower levels of a prostate-specific antigen which indicates various prostate diseases. Positive relationships actually enhanced the body's ability to fight off cancer (Stone, Mezzacappa, Donatone, & Gonder, 1999). Medical students who reported higher levels of social support had stronger immune responses to Hepatitis B vaccines than those with less social support (Esterling, Kiecolt-Glaser, Bodnar, & Glaser, 1994), and stronger immunity responses were detected in caregivers who experienced higher levels of social support. These immune responses were due primarily to the presence of natural killer (NK) cells and T-lymphocytes, which fight off colds and disease.

OTHER SYSTEMS

In addition to the physiological effects of positive relationships, a variety of psychological, emotional, and organizational benefits have also been uncovered in research. For example, positive relationships enhanced the emotional carrying capacity of individuals (i.e., their ability to experience a broad range and intensity of emotions) (Heaphy,

2007); fostered greater resiliency and an ability to adapt to and bounce back from difficult experiences (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003); created stronger self-identity and more accurate self-assessments (Roberts, 2007); produced greater degrees of creativity, trust, and openness to new ideas (Pratt & Dirks, 2007); cultivated higher levels of mutual benefit (Blatt & Camden, 2007); fostered healthier team functioning (Ancona & Isaacs, 2007); raised levels of commitment to the organization (Kahn, 2007); created higher levels of energy, learning, cooperation, resource utilization, cost reduction, time savings, and human capital development in organizations (Baker & Dutton, 2007); and engendered higher levels of project performance in organizations (Baker, Cross, & Parker, 2003).

The presence of positive and supportive relationships, in sum, have positive effects on individuals' functioning and, subsequently, on their performance because of their association with very basic physiological and social processes (Dutton & Ragins, 2007). Leaders who enable positive deviance in organizations invest in the formation of positive relationships at work inasmuch as such relationships engender especially high levels of collective performance in teams and organizations (Dutton, 2003).

ENABLING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Fostering the formation of positive relationships in organizations is a topic that has been well-examined; for example, a search of the phrase "relationships at work"

on Amazon.com results in approximately 50,000 hits. Forming close friendships at work, it has been found, tends to enhance and increase productivity and performance (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Dutton, 2003; Lawler, 2003). Research by Jehn and Shah (1997), for example, found that friendship groups (people in positive social relationships) significantly outperformed acquaintance groups on both decision-making and motor tasks.

One of the most important findings associated with this research, however, is the explanation for *why* positive relationships produce these desirable outcomes. The most common assumption is that when people *receive* love, support, and encouragement, when their psychological and emotional needs are met, they tend to feel secure, and their performance is therefore elevated. What has actually been found, however, is that it is what people *give* to a relationship rather than what they *receive* from the relationship that accounts for the positive effects (Brown & Brown, 2006; Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; Grant, Dutton, & Russo, in press). Although it is clear that positive relationships are advantageous to psychological, emotional, and physical health, research has found that it is the contributions made to others that account for the advantages. The demonstration of altruism, compassion, forgiveness, and kindness all were found to be necessary for positive relationships to have their maximum positive impact on well-being and performance.

In one study, for example, widows who provided instrumental support to others had no depression six months after the loss of a spouse compared to substantial and lasting

depression among those who merely received support but did not provide it. No "receiving support" factors were positively correlated with an absence of depression, but "giving support" factors were (Brown et al., 2003). In another study, employees who participated in programs in which they provided support to fellow employees, rather than receiving support, substantially increased their commitment to the organization as well as their inclination toward prosocial behaviors. Giving rather than receiving was the key enabler (Grant, Dutton, & Russo, in press).

A large number of activities exist for fostering positive relationships at work (e.g., Dutton & Ragins, 2007), so I highlight some less common but very potent ones. Two especially important activities that have emerged from research on positively deviant performance include building *positive energy networks* and reinforcing individuals' *strengths.*

Positive-energy networks

Research by Baker, Cross, & Wooten (2003) discovered that individuals can be identified as "positive energizers" or "negative energizers," and that the difference has important implications. Positive energizers create and support vitality in others. They uplift and boost people. Interacting with positive energizers leaves others feeling lively and motivated. Positive energizers have been found to be optimistic, heedful, trustworthy, and unselfish. Interacting with them builds energy in people and is an inspiring experience. In contrast, negative energizers deplete the good

feelings and enthusiasm of others. They sap strength from and weaken people. They leave others feeling exhausted and diminished. Negative energizers have been found to be critical, inflexible, selfish, and untrustworthy (Baker, Cross, & Parker, 2003). Moreover, positive energizing is a learned behavior, not a personality attribute. The correlation between positive energy and the personality factor *extraversion/introversion*, for example, is essentially zero (Baker, Cross, & Parker, 2003). It is not a matter of merely being gregarious or outgoing. People learn how to become positive energizers. It is not an inherent attribute.

Positive energizers benefit their organizations by enabling others to perform better. In fact, a comparison between peoples' position in information networks (i.e., who obtains information from whom), influence networks (i.e., who influences whom), and positive energy networks (i.e., who energizes whom) revealed that position in the energy network is far more predictive of success than position in information or influence networks (Baker, 2004). Being a positive energizer made individuals four times more likely to succeed than being at the center of an information or influence network. Moreover, this success was conveyed to those interacting with the energizer (Baker, Cross, & Wooten 2003). Positive energizers helped others become better energizers. In fact, Baker (2004) found that high-performing organizations have three times more positive energizers than average organizations. This is understandable inasmuch as the strength of the interpersonal relationships that are formed, the coordination and collaboration among

individuals, and the efficiency of work being done all are positively affected by individuals who exude positive energy (Baker, Cross, & Parker, 2003).

Leaders affect interpersonal relationships in their organizations by facilitating positive energy—both by modeling positive energy themselves and by diagnosing and building positive-energy networks among others. Because interacting with a positive energizer is attractive (Baker & Dutton, 2007), positive relationships are more frequently formed. Leaders may not only radiate positive energy themselves, but they can identify the positive energizers with whom they work, and recognize, reward, and support them. Because positive energizers affect the performance of others, positive energizers can be placed in tasks and roles that allow others to interact with them, for example, thus enhancing the performance of a broadened field of employees. Positive energizers can also be asked to coach or mentor others.

On the other hand, negative energizers who are essential to the organization for reasons of talent or experience (e.g., a highly skilled specialist who, nevertheless, serves as a "black hole" in the organization) may best be approached using four sequential steps. The first step is to provide direct and honest feedback regarding the de-energizing behaviors being demonstrated and the effects they are having on the organization. Most people respond to authentic feedback that is meant to be helpful to them and to the organization (Cameron, 2007). If this is ineffective, a second step is to provide development for the person. Often, negative energizers simply are unaware of alternative

behavioral and emotional alternatives. Coaching and training often proves effective. Third, if development does not work, place the individual in a noncentral position or technical role that minimizes the energy-depleting effects on others. This implies making the person peripheral or removing the opportunity for the negative energizer to have a central position. If none of these steps work—and this is a rare occurrence—the person may need to be given a chance to flourish elsewhere. This fourth alternative should not be the first one selected, of course, but should follow feedback and coaching on how to add positive energy to the system.

Not everyone is a positive energizer for everyone else, of course, and an individual may positively energize certain people but not others. Hence, conducting a diagnosis of the positive-energy network in an organization helps to identify positive-energy hubs, black holes, and peripheral members who may need development. This diagnosis can be done in a comprehensive and rigorous way by formal network analysis (Baker, 2000) in which all employees are rated on a one-to-five scale with one representing "very de-energizing" and five representing "very energizing." The data are submitted to a statistical program that produces a map—similar to an airline magazine route map—showing the positive- and negative-energy connections in the organization. A more simplistic, but still useful, diagnosis is to ask employees to write down the names of the two or three most energizing people in the organization. The results are then tabulated so that the most frequently named individuals are identified—the positive energizers—as well as the

names of individuals not mentioned who can be mentored and developed.

Strengths

A second opportunity for leaders to promote positive relationships lies in reinforcing individual and organizational strengths. Identifying and building on people's strengths can produce greater benefit than finding and correcting their weaknesses (Clifton & Harter, 2003; Seligman, 2002). For example, studies have shown that managers who spent more time with their strongest performers, as compared to spending it with their weakest performers, achieved double the productivity in their units. In organizations where workers have a chance each day to do what they do best or to demonstrate their strengths, productivity is one-and-a-half times greater than in the typical organization (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

One reason for this difference in performance lies in the way that people learn. Individuals learn more readily and more completely from positive demonstrations than from negative demonstrations (Bruner & Goodnow, 1956). In other words, telling people what not to do is less helpful than identifying what they should do. People given negative examples (i.e., told what to fix or to avoid repeating) are much more likely to do exactly what they were told not to do, simply because that is the picture in their minds.

For example, if someone says to you, "Do not think of a white bear," the first thing that occurs is you think of a white bear, a phenomenon called the ideomotor reflex

(Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). In other words, thinking of an action makes people much more likely to engage in that action regardless of whether or not they were thinking about doing it beforehand. Consequently, leaders who want to foster positive relationships emphasize strengths, small victories, and positive imagery with organization members as opposed to errors, mistakes, or problematic behaviors.

The impact of leaders who reinforce strengths among those with whom they work can be illustrated by a study of the performance of bowlers. In an experimental condition, people were videotaped as they bowled three games. Half of the bowlers were then shown videotapes of their spares or strikes, whereas the other half of the bowlers were shown videotapes of frames when they did not knock down all the pins. After a period of practice, using the videotapes as sources of feedback for change, statistically significant differences were found between the two groups. Those who watched themselves succeed (i.e., making strikes or spares) had improved significantly more than those who watched themselves in a nonsuccess condition (Kirschenbaum, 1984). That is, people tend to learn from and model positive imagery more effectively and efficiently than they follow negative imagery.

Leaders who enable positive deviance, therefore, emphasize successes, build on strengths, and celebrate the positive much more than spending time correcting the negative. They begin interactions and meetings with a celebration of what is going right. They role-model positive energy. They provide opportunities for other positive energizers to infuse members with their enthusiasm. They emphasize strengths

more than weaknesses. They highlight positive images more than problematic images. Simply stated, they focus on the positive and encourage others to do so as well, thereby enabling the development of positive relationships.

An example of the effectiveness of positive relationships in achieving extraordinary success is illustrated by a quotation from a leader at the Rocky Flats Nuclear Arsenal three years before the project was completed (Cameron & Lavine, 2006: 165, 170, 181):

> It took years to change the attitude of the workforce. We got workers on board by listening to them, and unleashing their energy to do good work. The climate changed to one of working together. . . . That was the shift that really allowed us to make progress. It isn't much more magical than people sitting down together and actually solving problems together. . . . I said the very first day I arrived at Rocky Flats: "This is the best team I've ever worked with," and I say that today. It is the best team I've ever worked with. . . . I think we have the best in the industry right now.

SUMMARY

The importance of enabling positive relationships in organizations is not news, but the impact of such relationships on multiple factors—including people's emotional and physiological health, life expectancy, and positively deviant performance in teams and organizations—is often

unrecognized and worth reinforcing. Relationships that help people contribute to the benefit of others, rather than merely receive support from them, are the most valuable. Fostering positive energy in the organization and effectively managing positive energizers are also important elements in enabling these kinds of relationships. Helping individuals and organizations to become aware of and capitalize on their strengths has also been found to predict positive deviant performance.

As a quick assessment of practical leadership activities that enable positive relationships, the following diagnostic questions may be helpful. Use the following scale to respond.

1 — Never 2 — Seldom 3 — Sometimes
4 — Frequently 5 — Always

As a leader, to what extent do you:

_____ Ensure that employees have an opportunity to provide emotional, intellectual, or physical support *to* others in addition to receiving support *from* the organization?

_____ Model positive energy yourself, and also recognize and encourage other positive energizers in your organization?

_____ Diagnose your organization's energy networks, so that you support and utilize individuals in energy hubs as well as to help develop peripheral members?

_____ Provide more feedback to individuals on their strengths than on their weaknesses?

_____ Spend more time with your strongest performers than with your weakest performers?

CHAPTER

4

Positive Communication

Positive communication occurs in organizations when affirmative and supportive language replaces negative and critical language. The power of positive communication is illustrated in a study of 60 top-management teams who were engaged in annual strategic-planning, problem-solving, and budget-setting activities (Losada & Heaphy, 2004). The research investigated why some management teams performed better than others.

Teams of senior managers who worked together on a regular basis were categorized as high, medium, or low performing based on three measures of performance in their organizations: profitability, customer satisfaction, and 360-degree evaluations of the managers comprising the teams. Of the 60 teams, 15 were rated as high, 26 as medium, and

19 as low in their performance. To explain differences among the teams, the communication patterns of team members were carefully monitored during the workday and categorized by trained raters who were unaware of the performance level of the teams. Four communication categories were used: the ratio of *positive* to *negative* comments, the ratio of *inquiry* to *advocacy* comments, the ratio of a focus on *others* compared to a focus on *self*, and a measure of *connectivity*, or the amount of interaction, engagement, and information exchanged in the team.

The single most important factor in predicting organizational performance—which was more than twice as powerful as any other factor—was the ratio of positive statements to negative statements. Positive statements are those that express appreciation, support, helpfulness, approval, or compliments. Negative statements express criticism, disapproval, dissatisfaction, cynicism, or disparagement. As shown in Table 4.1, the results of the research revealed that in high-performing organizations, the ratio of positive to negative statements in their top management teams was 5.6 to 1. Five times more positive statements were made than negative statements as high-performing teams engaged in work. In medium-performing organizations, the ratio was 1.85 to 1. In low-performing organizations, the ratio was 0.36 to 1. In organizations that performed poorly, in other words, three times as many negative comments were made as positive comments among top management members. (This study, by the way, utilized nonlinear dynamics and Lorenz attractor diagrams, so causal directionality could be projected. Results were not

TABLE 4.1 Communication in Top Management Teams

	TEAM PERFORMANCE		
	High	**Medium**	**Low**
Positive Statement Ratio	5.6 to 1	1.8 to 1	0.36 to 1
(supportive, encouraging, appreciation versus critical, disapproval, contradictory)			
Inquiry/Advocacy Ratio	1.1 to 1	0.67 to 1	0.05 to 1
(questioning versus asserting)			
Others/Self Ratio	0.94 to 1	0.62 to 1	0.03 to 1
(external versus internal focus)			
Connectivity Average	32	22	18
(mutual influence, assistance, interaction)			

Source: Losada & Heaphy, 2004

merely a product of positive talk resulting from high performance.)

Team members in high-performing organizations were found to be balanced in the number of *inquiry* statements (i.e., asking questions, seeking others' viewpoints) compared to *advocacy* statements (i.e., telling, or advocating a position), whereas low-performing organizations were highly overloaded toward advocacy rather than inquiry. High performers had a ratio of 1.1 inquiries for every 1.0 advocacy statements. Low performers had a ratio of 0.05 to 1, or 5 inquiries for every 100 advocacy statements. A relative balance also existed in the focus on *self* versus *others*

in high-performing organizations (0.94 statements focused on others for every 1.0 statements focused on self), whereas low-performing organizations were heavily overloaded in their focus on self (3 statements focused on others' perspectives for every 100 statements focused on self). Finally, in measures of connectivity (engagement, information flows, participation), the ratio was almost twice as high for high-performing organizations as for low-performing organizations (32 compared to 18).

These results demonstrate that high-performing organizations had different communication patterns than low-performing organizations—primarily based on the abundance of positive comments among top management team members. Highly effective organizations were far more complimentary and supportive than low-performing organizations. It is not that correction and criticism were entirely absent; that is, these organizations were not characterized by a Pollyannaish or rose-colored-glasses approach to work. The ratio, it is important to point out, was not 5 to 0, or 20 to 1. Rather, as discovered by Fredrickson and Losada (2005), a ratio of between 3 and 9 positive statements to every 1 negative statement is predictive of the highest levels of performance. Negative communications were certainly present in high-performing organizations, but just not to the extent that they dominated or overwhelmed the positive. Organizations that performed moderately well had about an equal number of positive and negative comments, and organizations that performed poorly were more negative than positive (Losada & Heaphy, 2004).

This same 5 to 1 ratio was discovered by Gottman (1994) in his predictive studies of successful marriages and divorces. In a study where couples were tape-recorded for 15 minutes as they conversed about a topic that was controversial in their relationships (e.g., child rearing, budget, time at work), the best predictor of the sustainability and quality of the marital relationship was found to be the ratio of positive to negative communication events. The "Gottman index," in fact, has made the 5 to 1 ratio quite well-accepted in family therapy and family sociology based on the finding that marriages that end in divorce and marriages that are not judged to be happy and fulfilling are typified by more negative than positive interactions (Gottman, 1994). After following these couples for 10 years, Gottman could predict with a high degree of accuracy which couples were still married and were happily married, based on the 15-minute conversation a decade before. The predictive ratio was the same 5:1 ratio of positive to negative statements.

A similar finding is associated with experienced emotions and performance. Since positive comments tend to engender positive emotions, Fredrickson and Losada (2005) studied the relationships between emotions and performance. They found evidence from several psychological studies that people who experience a ratio of at least three positive emotions for every negative emotion tend to flourish in mental health and individual performance (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005).

One explanation for the performance effects of positive communication is that positive communication has been found to create significantly more "connectivity"—that is,

the exchange of information, interpersonal interactions, and positive emotions—in organizations. This connectivity is the means by which resources flow and coordinated action takes place (Losada & Heaphy, 2004). Coordinated exchange, in turn, enables higher productivity and higher-quality performance because it facilitates the formation of needed social capital and synchronicity (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Losada, 1999; Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000).

ENABLING POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Because most people react more strongly to bad than to good (Baumeister et al., 2001), and because most organizations are fraught with problems and challenges, prescribing positive communication is much easier than practicing it. One obvious way that leaders enable positive communication is by using positive talk themselves. Minimizing criticism and negativity, and replacing them with an abundance of positive feedback and expressions of support, can enable the affirmative effects of communication. Because leaders' role modeling has an exponential effect on creating such outcomes in organizations (George, 1998), the communication patterns of leaders are especially important. Communicating authentically and sincerely are requisite characteristics of such positive talk by leaders, of course, because comments that appear to be untrustworthy or disingenuous have the reverse effect. Moreover, the appropriate positive-to-negative statement ratio is crucial for maintaining balance

and motivation. Too much positivity can foster complacency and mediocrity and too much negativity can lead to defensiveness and withdrawal (Cameron, 2007).

In addition to role modeling, two specific strategies are available for facilitating positive communication in organizations: *the reflected best-self feedback* process (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2004) and the use of *supportive communication* (Cameron, 2007).

Best-self feedback

The reflected best-self feedback process is based on the impact of positive feedback on individual improvement. It is a technique used to capture positive information, which uncovers and highlights an individual's talents and highest capabilities. It encourages positive communication, and then guides people through a process of uncovering their strengths and the positive attributes that are perceived by others. The technique was developed at the University of Michigan and is now being used in a variety of universities and corporations (Roberts et al., 2004).

The process works as follows. An individual identifies approximately 20 acquaintances. These can be friends, coworkers, neighbors, or family members. Each of these acquaintances is asked to write three short anecdotes in response to the question: "When you have seen me make a special or important contribution, what distinctive strengths did I display?" Or, alternatively, "When you have seen me at my best, what unique value did I create?" In other words, the 20 acquaintances write three anecdotes about a time when this person displayed his or her best self. The 60

stories or anecdotes identify the key strengths and unique talents of the individual—information that is both rare and extremely valuable. This communication is designed to be universally positive and to uncover strengths and abilities that individuals often cannot identify themselves, and the concomitant positive effects of positive feedback naturally follow (Roberts et al., 2004).

This positive information is analyzed by the person who receives the stories. He or she summarizes the key themes and develops a best-self portrait. These themes represent the best-self strengths and unique contributions of the person, and the person can be assisted in identifying strategies for capitalizing on these strengths. A process for developing such strategies is available at www.bus.umich.edu/positive (*Reflected Best Self Exercise Suite of Products*).

The feedback comes in the form of retold incidents and stories, not numbers or trend lines, so it is connected directly to behaviors that the person has displayed in the past and that can be repeated and enhanced in the future. The stories capture emotions and feelings as well as intentional actions, so it provides a rich array of information for individuals to analyze. Almost always, strengths and abilities that people would never mark on a "strengths finder" checklist (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) are uncovered because such strengths are so natural and easily displayed. People often discover that they add unique value in circumstances that are natural and almost effortless in their interactions.

The result of this feedback is a personal agenda for capitalizing on and expanding positive attributes that are not

necessarily conscious or obvious to the individual. Providing feedback on weaknesses and deficiencies is also important, of course, but a focus on weaknesses or deficiencies usually leads only to the development of competence (Clifton & Harter, 2003), whereas a focus on strengths can lead to excellence and positively deviant performance.

Additional benefits of best-self feedback are that feedback recipients often have strengthened relationships with feedback givers, a desire for reciprocity grows, an enhanced desire to live up to the positive best-self descriptions emerges, and a reinterpretation of past personal history as being more strength-based occurs. When best-self feedback is practiced in organizations, cohesion and mutual support are positively affected (Roberts et al., 2004).

Of course, completely ignoring weaknesses and inadequacies is not healthy, and focusing exclusively on the positive and disregarding critical deficiencies is not apt to be productive in the long run. As has been pointed out, however, most individuals, as well as most organizations, concentrate overwhelmingly on the negative, and they are likely to ignore, or at least give short shrift to positive feedback. The reflected best-self feedback technique is a way to counterbalance this tendency by encouraging and enabling positive communication. It strengthens relationships between feedback providers and receivers, it fosters positive interactions and reciprocal feedback, it enhances feelings of closeness among individuals, and it provides the positive energy needed to embark on personal improvement efforts.

Of course, leaders may not have the wherewithal to implement a complete best-self feedback process across their

organizations, but this technique may be substituted by regular feedback to others that highlights valuable contributions, unique strengths, and displays of positive qualities on an ongoing basis. As a variation on the best-self feedback process, for example, the leader of one business organization in LG (the Korean conglomerate) distributes each day to individual employees at least five "strength cards" on which he highlights and praises the person's unique contribution or success.

Supportive communication

The use of *supportive communication* is another means by which leaders can enable positive deviance through their feedback, particularly when corrective, critical, or negative messages must be delivered (Cameron, 2007). All communication cannot be complimentary, agreeable, or focused on the best-self, of course, and negative messages must always be delivered at some point. Mistakes are made, corrections are required, and disapproving statements are necessary and healthy in any relationship. It is not difficult to communicate positively—to express confidence, trust, and openness—when things are going well and when people are doing what they should. But when someone else's behavior must be corrected, when negative feedback must be provided, or when the shortcomings of another person must be pointed out, communicating in a way that builds and strengthens the relationship is more difficult.

This type of communication is called supportive communication because it seeks to preserve or enhance a positive relationship while still addressing a problematic or

uncomfortable issue, giving negative feedback, or communicating uncomplimentary information (Gibb, 1961; Knapp & Vangelisti, 1996). A great deal of evidence confirms that supportive communication is a prerequisite for and enabler of especially positive organizational performance (Dutton, 2003; Spitzberg, 1994). Supportive communication consists of at least eight techniques: congruent, descriptive, problem-centered, validating, conjunctive, specific, owned statements, and reflective listening (see Cameron, 2007). One of the most important and powerful of these techniques is the use of *descriptive statements* rather than *evaluative statements* in identifying and resolving problems (Rogers, 1961). Here is the difference.

Evaluative communication makes a judgment or places a label on other individuals or on their behavior (e.g., "You are wrong," "You are incompetent"). These kinds of statements generally make recipients feel attacked and, consequently, they respond defensively, feel devalued and worthless, and withdraw or quit trying. The frequency and accuracy of subsequent communication and the quality of the relationship deteriorate (Rogers, 1961). Evaluative statements are usually made because people don't know how to be honest and authentic without being judgmental or evaluative of another person when things go wrong.

An alternative to evaluation, however, is *descriptive communication,* which allows a person to be congruent and authentic in providing negative information but also to be helpful. Descriptive communication involves three steps. First, provide an objective description of the event that occurred or the behavior that needs to be modified. Deliver this

objective description as dispassionately as possible and focus on the action or event, not the person per se. The description should identify elements of the behavior that can be confirmed by someone else (they are valid), that are under the control of the recipient (they are changeable), and that can be compared to accepted standards rather than to personal opinions or preferences (they are factual). Subjective impressions or attributions to the motives of another person are avoided.

Second, describe reactions to or consequences of the behavior. Rather than projecting onto another person the cause of the problem or the supposed rationale for the behavior, the focus is on the reactions or consequences the behavior produced. This requires that communicators are aware of their own feelings and reactions and are able to describe them. Using one-word descriptions for feelings is often the best method: "I'm concerned about our productivity," "Your level of accomplishment frustrates me." Similarly, point out the consequences of the behavior: "Profits are off this month," "Department quality ratings are down," or "Two customers have called in to express dissatisfaction." Describing feelings or consequences also lessens the likelihood of defensiveness since the problem is framed in the context of the communicator's feelings or objective consequences, not the attributes of the other person. If those feelings or consequences are described in a nonaccusing way, the major energies of the communicators can be focused on problem solving rather than on defending against evaluations.

The third step is to suggest a more acceptable alternative. This focuses the discussion on possible solutions to

the problem, not on the person. It also helps the other person save face and avoid feeling personally criticized because the person is separated from the behavior. Self-esteem is preserved because it is a controllable behavior, not the person or the personality, that should be modified. The emphasis is on finding a solution that is acceptable to both parties, not on deciding who is right and who is wrong or who should change and who shouldn't. Consequently, the relationship is preserved and even strengthened through a message of support.

In sum, when delivering negative messages, three steps are necessary:

(1) Describe a situation (rather than evaluate it);

(2) Identify objective consequences or personal feelings associated with it (rather than place blame); and

(3) Suggest acceptable alternatives (rather than argue about who is right or at fault).

Implementing these three steps leads to a constructive conversation that emphasizes commonalities and collaborating rather than arguing or judging (Rogers & Farson, 1976). It provides support for the recipient while still delivering negative messages. Any lingering disagreements focus on determining which alternative is most acceptable rather than defending, arguing, or proving who is at fault.

Other strategies of supportive communication are to maintain *congruence* among the words, thoughts, and feelings of the communicator (i.e., be authentic and sincere); remain *problem-focused* rather than person-focused (i.e.,

concentrate on the action, not the person); use *validating* (i.e., communicate that the other person's perspective is worthwhile), *specific* (i.e., refer to an actual example or behavior), and *conjunctive* (i.e., connected directly to the preceding message) statements; personally *own* the communication (i.e., take personal responsibility for the message); and demonstrate *active listening* and appropriate *response types* (i.e., use reflective, probing, deflecting, and advising responses appropriately; for a thorough description of these attributes, see Cameron, 2007).

SUMMARY

To enable positive communication in organizations, use supportive strategies—especially when critical or corrective messages must be delivered—and provide feedback on strengths, unique contributions, and best-self demonstrations. The communication patterns of leaders are a powerful factor in enabling positively deviant performance to emerge. It is essential to convey positive messages, as well as to deliver negative messages in supportive, growth-producing ways.

As a quick assessment of practical leadership activities that enable positive communication, the following diagnostic questions may be helpful. Use the following scale to respond.

1 — Never 2 — Seldom 3 — Sometimes
4 — Frequently 5 — Always

As a leader, to what extent do you:

_____ Communicate a ratio of approximately five positive messages for every negative message to those with whom you interact?

_____ Provide opportunities for employees to receive best-self feedback and develop best-self portraits?

_____ Consistently distribute notes or cards to your employees complimenting their performance?

_____ Provide negative feedback in supportive ways—especially using descriptive rather than evaluative statements—so that the relationship is strengthened?

_____ Focus on the detrimental *behavior* and its consequences, not the person, when correcting people or providing negative feedback?

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CHAPTER

5

Positive Meaning

The search for positive meaning has been proposed as a universal human need (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Frankl, 1959; Grant, 2007), and well-established relationships exist between engaging in meaningful work and positive outcomes. When people feel that they are pursuing a profound purpose or engaging in work that is personally important, significant positive effects are produced, including reductions in stress, depression, turnover, absenteeism, dissatisfaction, and cynicism, as well as increases in commitment, effort, engagement, empowerment, happiness, satisfaction, and a sense of fulfillment (see Chen, 2007). Wrzesniewski (2003), citing research in sociology (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985) and psychology (Baumeister, 1991; Schwartz, 1994), pointed out

that individuals typically associate one of three kinds of meaning with work. They define their work as a *job,* as a *career*, or as a *calling*.

Those who see work as a job do their work primarily for the financial or material rewards it provides. They gain no particular personal satisfaction from the work per se, and they pursue interests and passions in nonwork settings. Work is merely a means for obtaining financial resources to engage in some other activity (e.g., "This job is just to help me make car payments").

In contrast, individuals with a career orientation are motivated by success. They work to achieve the prestige, power, recognition, and advancement that come from performing their work well. They desire to be exemplary members of their organizations, and they use work to acquire promotion, notoriety, or advancement. Work is a means for achieving personal growth, recognition, and capability development (e.g., "I want to reach a senior leadership position in this organization"). The third orientation, the sense of work as a calling, characterizes individuals who work for the sake of the work itself. The actual tasks involved in their work provide intrinsic benefit and profound purpose. They consider work inherently fulfilling, and they seek for a greater good, regardless of the material rewards offered by the work. Their work possesses a sense of meaning that reaches beyond personal benefit or the acquisition of a reward (e.g., "I care deeply about what I'm doing at work").

Paralleling these work orientations are three types of relationships between members and their organizations:

compliance, *identification*, and *internalization* (Kelman, 1958; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). These researchers have identified different types of connections that people develop with their employing organization, and these connections are similar to Wrzesniewski's (2003) orientations toward work meaning. A compliance relationship produces desired behaviors through punishments and rewards. That is, compliant individuals act for personal material benefit and do not necessarily believe in the content of the action they take (i.e., a job orientation). They conform to organizational rules and procedures and produce results not because they want to but because the reward and punishment system demands it. Their behavior complies with what the organization expects.

Individuals with an identification relationship are motivated to maintain a more engaged relationship with the organization. These individuals are committed to what they do as organizational members, and they seek involvement and contribution. Actions are taken to procure the satisfaction of belonging and to reinforce a sense of membership (i.e., a career orientation). The relationship produces mutual benefits to both employee and the organization.

Internalization is a relationship defined by a complete and absolute adoption of organizational goals. Individuals who have internalized the organizational culture and mission have a conviction that what they are doing is right and good. Internalization leads individuals to adopt the organization's purposes and priorities as their own (i.e., a calling orientation). Their loyalty to the organization is unequivocal,

and their behavior embodies the values, mission, and activities to which the organization subscribes.

These orientations toward a sense of calling and internalization in work are associated with the concept of *meaningfulness*. The more that individuals define their work as a calling and have a conviction that what they are doing is good and right, the more meaningful the work (Grant, 2008). High levels of meaningfulness in work have been found to be associated with positive outcomes and extraordinary individual and organizational performance. For example, workers with a calling orientation reported higher job and life satisfaction scores compared to those with career or job orientations. They also experienced higher satisfaction with their organization and with their work (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). A stronger identification with the work unit accompanied a calling orientation, as did higher levels of trust and confidence in management, higher levels of commitment to the organization, less conflict, more satisfactory relationships with coworkers, and higher levels of satisfaction with the tasks themselves (Cook & Wall, 1980; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Taylor & Bowers, 1972).

These high satisfaction scores are likely to be associated with higher performance—based on Judge, Thoreson, Bono, and Patton's (2001) definitive meta-analysis, which shows that the average correlation between job satisfaction and performance is 0.30—and the relationship between a sense of calling and satisfaction is significant (Wrzesniewski, 2003). In fact, significantly higher levels of organizational

performance were detected in health-care organizations when a sense of calling predominated among employees (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2008; Wrzesniewski & Landman, 2000). Grant et al. (2007) found that workers whose meaningfulness was enhanced by means of a personal interaction with the beneficiary of their outputs subsequently displayed substantially more persistence and productivity in their work than those whose meaningfulness was not enhanced.

It is important to remember that a sense of calling is not dependent on the type of work performed but, rather, on the interpretation of the positive meaning inherent in the work (Bellah et al., 1985; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Any kind of work—even that typically thought of as physically, socially, or morally tainted—can be reframed in a positive light (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Put another way, exactly the same task may be viewed as a job or a calling depending on the perspective of the individual.

For example, in a study of custodians in a Midwest hospital (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2008), researchers interviewed a staff member who was assigned to clean up vomit and excrement in the oncology ward when patients came in for chemotherapy. These patients sometimes lost control of bodily functions when they were subjected to medications needed to treat their malignancies. They were often at their very worst in these conditions—physically ill, emotionally embarrassed, fearful of the outcomes. This staff member's response to her work was characterized by this statement: "My job is equally important to the physician. I help these people feel human. At their lowest and most vulnerable

point, I help them maintain their dignity. I make it okay to feel awful, to lose control, and to be unable to manage themselves. My role is crucial to the healing process." Even the most noxious and unpleasant of tasks can be reinterpreted as a calling that possesses profound purpose (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

ENABLING POSITIVE MEANING

Early management theorists (Barnard, 1968; Selznick, 1984; Weber, 1992) believed that the primary responsibility of the leader is to infuse purpose and meaning into the work lives of organization members. Instead of merely focusing on economic performance, managing the production function, or positioning the organization for competitive advantage, meaning-making was seen by these writers as the primary function of an executive. Unfortunately, in subsequent decades less emphasis has been placed on the leader's role in clarifying and enhancing meaningfulness.

Work is associated with meaningfulness when it possesses one or more of four key attributes:

(1) The work has an important positive impact on the well-being of human beings (Brown et al., 2003; Grant, 2008; Grant et al., 2007).

(2) The work is associated with an important virtue or personal value (Bright, Cameron, & Caza, 2006; Weber, 1992).

(3) The work has an impact that extends beyond the immediate time frame or creates a ripple effect (Cameron & Lavine, 2006; Crocker, Nuer, Olivier, & Cohen, 2006).

(4) The work builds supportive relationships or a sense of community in people (Polodny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005; Rousseau, 1995).

Regarding the first attribute, *positive impact on others*, studies of job design by Hackman and Oldham (1980) found that workers who could see the effects of their work on others—who were aware of the contributions they made to the welfare of people—had a significantly higher sense of meaningfulness, and their subsequent performance and engagement in the organization were significantly higher. Grant and colleagues (2007) conducted research in which half the workers were given direct contact with the beneficiaries of their work and half were not. Some workers observed the beneficial impact that their efforts had on others, while other workers remained unaware of any direct benefits resulting from their efforts. Those having direct contact with the recipients of their work subsequently produced significantly greater productivity in routine tasks, and they produced more than one-and-a-half times the output of those who did not have contact with beneficiaries.

Ensuring that individuals are given opportunities to interact directly with those receiving their output or service, and to receive feedback regarding the impact of what they do,

has proven to be an effective leadership strategy for fostering a sense of meaningfulness in work. Companies such as Medtronic regularly invite patients whose lives have been transformed by the medical devices the company manufactures to give speeches at employee gatherings. Google posts comments from customers, some of them indicating life-changing benefits of using Google, on its company website. Huffy manufacturing employees visit customers to observe how people use their products and how they affect their lifestyles.

The second attribute, *associating work with core individual values*, depends on highlighting the connections between what is most meaningful to individuals and the benefits produced by the organization. Of course, what people value may vary a great deal, but certain values tend to be nearly universal—for example, caring, helpfulness, frugality, assisting the disadvantaged. Attaching the work to such values tends to enhance its meaningfulness for individuals.

For example, Mark Schwartz, CEO at Timberland, decided to substantially increase the percentage of organically grown cotton in the clothes the company manufactures in order to reduce exposure to carcinogens by migrant workers who pick corporately grown cotton. Even in the absence of any customer demand or regulatory encouragement, and at a substantial expense to the company's bottom line, Schwartz's intention was to provide benefit to a disadvantaged group of individuals who would likely never be customers but whose lives could be made better by Timberland's change in policy.

> We make boots, shoes, shirts, jackets, and other apparel. That's what we do, but that's not who we are. We believe that doing good and doing well are not separable ideas. No consumer cares about the health of cotton pickers. People who buy our products don't care about the carcinogenic pesticides sprayed on cotton. But we care. We don't know all the solutions, but we're trying to work to find them. (Schwartz, 2001)

Similarly, in an attempt to marry his theological and free-enterprise values, Tom Chappell, founder of Tom's of Maine, created products void of dyes, sweeteners, and preservatives two decades before it became the socially accepted thing to do for health-conscious companies. He also established a policy in his firm in which 10 percent of all profits and 5 percent of employees' time would be donated annually to charitable organizations. The motive was not public recognition or marketing advantage—since these decisions were made at a time when such moves were considered imprudent—but "just because it is the right thing to do" (Chappell, 1999).

Highlighting the connections between the organization's output and the values that employees care deeply about—in these cases, protecting the health of and providing benefit to disadvantaged populations as well as to the planet—exemplifies a second way to enable meaningfulness in and of work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

The third attribute, *highlighting the long-term impact of the work*, also enhances its meaningfulness. According to a number of authors such as Lawrence and Nohria (2002) and Covey (2004), a basic human need or drive is to

create a legacy, or to extend influence beyond the immediate time frame. Rather than to seek merely for immediate personal benefit or self-aggrandizement, these authors highlighted the performance benefits of having an effect on long-term consequences.

Cameron and Lavine (2006) documented this effect in studying the positively deviant performance of the cleanup of the Rocky Flats Nuclear Arsenal in a previously considered impossible time frame, budget, and cleanliness standard. Union members had to be willing to work themselves out of a job as quickly as possible—a stance completely contradictory to the fundamental purposes of unions—while maintaining high levels of morale and safety among remaining workers. This remarkable performance was dependent on highlighting the long-term effects on successful accomplishment of the work. Employees found profound meaningfulness in what they believed to be a multigenerational impact of their efforts. The fact that a dangerous location would be removed but also that it would become a wildlife refuge—the only such site on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains, and a safe environment for a thousand years to come—was a driving force in motivating the sacrifices that were required to succeed. Meaningfulness and long-term legacy are closely linked, as illustrated by Congressman Joe Knollenberg:

> We call it "catch the fever" because you are actually becoming part of something historical. Most everyone now is proud of the work they do, even the steelworkers

> union, the trade unions, the guards union. They are proud of what they do, and they are proud to be able to achieve something special. Everyone wants meaning in their job. Now they are back to work and the buildings are going away. Building 771 was the most dangerous building in the world, and now it's not. It's going to come down shortly. We are proud of our achievements, and they are too. (Cameron & Lavine, 2006: 126–127)

Fourth, *building a sense of community* is another of the central bases of meaningfulness (Polodny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005). Some authors have claimed, in fact, that this attribute is the fundamental feature of meaningfulness (Rousseau, 1992). One especially noteworthy way for leaders to enable a sense of community is to reinforce and sponsor *contribution goals.*

For example, Crocker and Park (2004) found that the goals individuals pursue can be categorized into two types. Most people pursue both kinds of goals, but one or the other type tends to predominate in people. One type of goal is an emphasis on self-interest or personal achievement. These goals focus on obtaining desired outcomes, obtaining a preferred reward, accomplishing something that brings self-satisfaction, enhances self-esteem, or creates a positive self-image in the eyes of others. Individuals who emphasize these goals are primarily interested in proving themselves, reinforcing self-worth, or demonstrating competency. Attaining desired performance outcomes is the primary objective.

The other type of goal focuses on providing benefit to others or making a contribution. These types of goals focus

on what individuals can give compared to what they can get. Contribution goals are motivated more by benevolence than by a desire for acquisition. Crocker et al. (2006) found that goals focused on contributing to others produced a *growth* orientation in individuals over time, whereas self-interest goals produced a *proving* orientation over time. In studies of individuals over a four- or five-month period, Crocker found that contribution goals led to significantly more learning and development, higher levels of interpersonal trust, more supportive relationships, and less depression and loneliness than did self-interest goals. Most importantly, when contribution goals predominated, the meaningfulness of activities was substantially higher than when self-interested goals predominated (Crocker et al., 2006).

These findings are consistent with several other studies that also highlight the importance of contribution goals compared to self-interest goals. As mentioned before, Brown and colleagues (2003, 2006) found that the contribution individuals make to a relationship, not what they receive from that relationship, is significant in accounting for meaningfulness and positive outcomes. Even immobile individuals such as kidney dialysis patients—people who felt that they were *offering* love, support, and encouragement to others—enjoyed better emotional and physical health than when they felt they were the *recipients* of support, love, and encouragement. Contribution-focused goals produced significantly more mental, emotional, and physiological benefits than self-achievement-focused goals.

Similarly, in studies of the language that people use to

describe their work experiences, Pennebaker (2002) found that a predominance of the word "we" was associated with more meaningfulness and engagement when applied to work than the predominance of the word "I." Positive meaning, in other words, was associated with contribution to and engagement with others significantly more than self-focused activity.

SUMMARY

Leaders that enable meaningfulness in work are interested in highlighting the value associated with the organization's outcomes, which extends beyond the personal benefit of individual employees. They are conscious of the different orientations that individuals possess regarding their work (job, career, or calling) and toward the organization itself (compliance, identification, or internalization). Since positively deviant performance is most closely associated with a sense of calling or an orientation toward internalization, several techniques are available to enhance and capitalize on those orientations. Reinforcing the benefits produced for others, associating work outcomes with the core values of employees, identifying the long-term impact created by the work, and emphasizing contribution goals more than achievement goals all foster a sense of meaningfulness and, as a result, higher levels of performance.

As a quick assessment of practical leadership activities that enable positive meaning, the following diagnostic

questions may be helpful. Use the following scale to respond.

1 — Never 2 — Seldom 3 — Sometimes
4 — Frequently 5 — Always

As a leader, to what extent do you:

_____ Establish, recognize, reward, and maintain accountability for goals that contribute to human benefit, so that the effects on other people are obvious?

_____ Emphasize and reinforce the core values of the individuals who work in the organization, so that congruence between what the organization accomplishes and what people value is transparent?

_____ Tie the outcomes of the work to an extended time frame, so that long-term benefits are clear?

_____ Ensure that contribution goals take precedence over acquisition goals for individuals in the organization?

CHAPTER

6

Implementing Positive Strategies

One of the most helpful techniques leaders can use to implement the four strategies of positive leadership is a technique referred to as the *Personal Management Interview (PMI) program*. This technique is applicable in professional settings with leaders and subordinates, in families with parents and children, and in volunteer settings such as spiritually based organizations or community-service groups. The PMI program provides a straightforward way to institutionalize the four positive strategies on an ongoing basis.

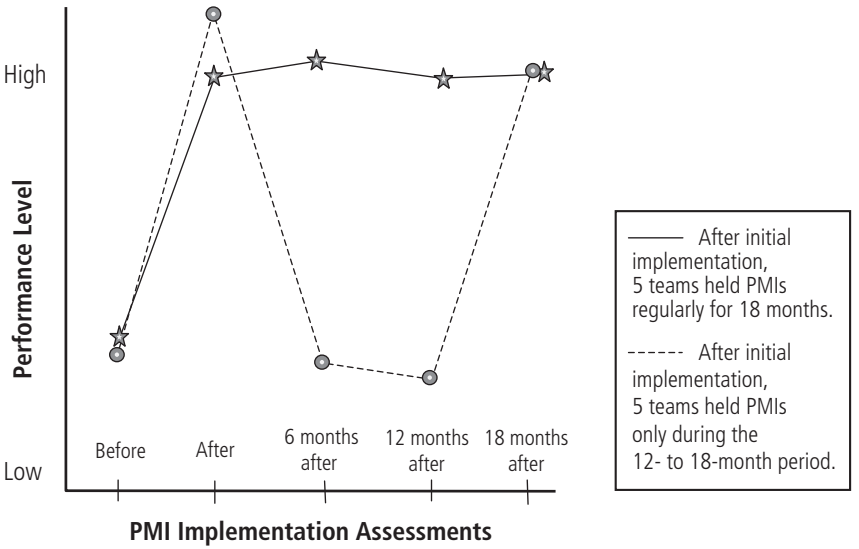
These four strategies are most effectively applied when specific interactions between leaders and their subordinates

are planned and conducted frequently. Whereas leaders usually have good intentions to facilitate a positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning, the press of everyday problems often drives out the best of intentions. One attribute of positive leaders, however, is that they provide others with opportunities to receive regular feedback, feel supported and bolstered, and be coached, counseled, and developed. Providing these opportunities is difficult, of course, because of the time demands most leaders face. One effective technique for implementing the four strategies leading to positively deviant performance, therefore, is to engage in a PMI program.

In research conducted among intact teams—such as project teams, top management teams, consulting teams, departmental groups—implementation of a PMI program significantly improved the performance of these teams on both subjective factors such as morale, trust, and engagement as well as objective factors such as productivity and goal accomplishment (Boss, 1983). Teams that implemented a PMI program, for example, significantly improved their performance over time, whereas teams that did not implement PMI programs remained the same. Teams that initially implemented PMI programs and then stopped the program were also found to significantly improve performance until cessation of the PMI program, and then performance deteriorated.

Figure 6.1, for example, shows the performance of two matched sets of teams. Each line in the graph represents 5 teams whose performance was measured by a combination of objective factors (e.g., productivity) and subjective

FIGURE 6.1 Intact Teams' Performance Before and After Implementing PMIs



(SOURCE: Boss, 1983)

factors (e.g., trust). All of the teams were performing at essentially the same level at the outset of the investigation, and all 10 teams initially implemented a PMI program. Each team's performance increased significantly after implementation. Five of the teams continued to implement PMI and were assessed at 6-month intervals over an 18-month time frame. Performance increased and stayed high in these teams. The other 5 teams, on the other hand, initially implemented PMI and then stopped. At the 6- and 12-month points in time, measured performance had fallen to previous levels. At the end of the study, the five

teams that ceased PMIs were shown the data—what performance levels they had achieved with PMIs and where they were performing at the present time. These teams reimplemented PMI programs and after 6 months had significantly improved performance again (Boss, 1983).

Another study compared performance scores—objective and subjective assessments—in five health-care organizations (Goodman & Boss, 2002). Organizational performance scores were significantly higher in each organization when PMI programs were in place compared to when they were not. Also important is that individuals in the organizations were also positively affected by the PMI programs. Employees were categorized into three groups according to the extent to which they felt burned out, overwhelmed, and highly stressed in their work—high, medium, and low burnout levels. When PMI programs were in place, a majority of employees experienced little if any burnout (53 percent had low burnout scores compared to 29 percent with high burnout scores). When PMI programs were not in place, the larger percentage of employees felt overwhelmed (43 percent had high burnout scores compared to 38 percent with low burnout scores).

The point is that a PMI program appears to have significant positive impact on team and organizational performance as well as on the personal work experience of individual employees. Empirical evidence suggests that performance improves when a PMI program is implemented, and individual employees have a more positive experience at work.

IMPLEMENTING A PERSONAL MANAGEMENT INTERVIEW PROGRAM

A PMI program is quite simple in concept but not necessarily simple in application. It consists of two steps. First, hold a *role-negotiation session* in which you clarify expectations, responsibilities, standards of evaluation, reporting relationships, culture, and values. This is a psychological contract-setting meeting. If possible, hold this meeting early in a relationship as a way to establish a foundation of clarity of expectations and a path for moving forward. In a work setting this means role-negotiation sessions are held when new leaders or new direct reports are assigned together. In a family it means when children are old enough to understand their responsibilities in the family. In a community-service setting it is when the group first comes together to accomplish a task. Unless such a meeting is held, most individuals do not have a clear idea of precisely what is expected of them in their role or on what basis they will be evaluated. More importantly, the underlying often-undiscussed aspects of their roles are never clarified such as the values, cultural attributes, and styles that distinguish the setting.

In informal surveys incorporated within my presentations to thousands of leaders over the last 20 years, few of them have reported that they have participated in such a meeting with the person to whom they report. Most leaders merely learn on the job or follow the path of a predecessor. A surprisingly low percentage express confidence that

they know precisely what is expected of them, how they are being evaluated, the measurement criteria being applied, or the full array of resources in place that will allow them to flourish. In a role-negotiation session, that uncertainty is addressed. The mission, goals, and values of the organization are explicated. The appraisal system, the accountability system, and the rewards are made clear. The leader and direct report negotiate all role-related issues that are not prescribed by policy or by mandate. A relationship of mutual understanding and mutual commitment is formed. Importantly, a written record is made of the agreements and responsibilities that result from the meeting. Keeping a written account serves as an informal contract between the leader and the direct report, and it ensures that the meeting really need only occur on a one-time basis.

The goal of a role-negotiation session is simply to obtain clarity between both parties regarding what each expects from the other, what the goals and standards are, and what the ground rules are for the relationship and for task accomplishment. It provides a foundation on which the relationship is built and helps facilitate better performance on the part of the leader as well as the direct report. Because this role negotiation is not adversarial in tone but rather focuses on mutual support and positivity, the four positive strategies should characterize the interaction. A positive climate is established, a positive relationship is formed, positive communication is used, and the positive meaning associated with the work is clarified.

ONGOING PMIs

The second, and most important, step in a PMI program is a set of ongoing, *one-on-one meetings* between the leader and each direct report. These meetings are regular (not just when a mistake is made or a crisis arises) and private. The meetings are one-on-one, face-to-face meetings (not staff meetings, luncheon dates, or electronic messages). Successful positive leaders always hold these meetings at least monthly, if not more frequently. Hardly ever does this strategy work when frequency is less than monthly, both in organizations and in families. Many times leaders choose to hold PMIs more frequently than monthly, depending on the life cycle rhythms of their work and the time pressures they face.

PMIs are not department staff meetings, family gatherings, or end-of-the-day checkups. They occur one-on-one with sufficient time to accomplish very specific objectives; that is, generating action steps focused on performance improvement and relationship building. The meeting provides the two parties with a chance to communicate freely, openly, and collaboratively. It also provides leaders with the opportunity to coach and develop subordinates and to help them improve their own skills or job performance. It presents an opportunity to demonstrate and reinforce behaviors that enable positive climates, positive communication, positive relationships, and positive meaning. It is a collaborative meeting—not a top-down, micromanagement mechanism—so both persons prepare agenda items

for the meeting in advance, work together to make progress, and leave the experience both personally and interpersonally enriched. Rather than being an attempt to tightly control people, this meeting becomes a means to foster collaboration, information sharing, and mutual benefit. It is a means to implement the four strategies that characterize positive leadership.

Each PMI meeting usually requires from 45 to 60 minutes and focuses on problem-solving issues as well as positive strategies. Items such as the following are typically on the agenda: (1) leadership and organizational issues, (2) information sharing, (3) interpersonal issues, (4) obstacles to improvement, (5) training in necessary skills, (6) individual needs, (7) feedback on job performance and on personal capabilities, (8) resource needs, (9) accountability for commitments made in past meetings, (10) targets and goals, and (11) personal concerns or problems. A PMI is a working meeting that leads to verifiable improvements. It is a crucial means by which individuals and organizations accomplish their tasks in a way that can produce positive deviance.

This PMI meeting is not just a time to sit and chat. It has two overarching—and crucial—objectives: (1) to foster improvement in performance, and (2) to strengthen positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning. If performance improvement does not occur as a result of the meeting, it is not being held correctly. If the positive strategies are not strengthened over time, something is not working as it should.

The PMI meeting always leads toward identifying action items that need to be accomplished before the next

meeting, some by the direct report and others by the leader. These action items are articulated and clarified at the end of the meeting and reviewed again at the beginning of the next meeting. Accountability is maintained for improvement. Action, not just talk, is the explicit goal.

A PMI is not just a meeting held because it is on the calendar. Without agreements as to specific actions that will be taken, and the accountability that will be maintained, it will be a waste of time for both parties. It is not a meeting just because someone scheduled it. It takes priority because it is the means by which positively deviant performance is achieved.

This means that both the leader and the direct report prepare for the meeting, and both bring agenda items to be discussed. PMIs are not formal appraisal sessions called by the leader, but a development and improvement session in which both the leader and the direct report have a stake. It does not replace formal performance appraisal sessions, but it supplements them. The purpose of PMIs is not to conduct monthly evaluations or performance appraisals. Rather, they provide a chance for individuals to have personal time with their leaders to work out issues, report information, experience a positive environment, develop personal capabilities, and improve performance.

Consequently, PMIs help eliminate unscheduled interruptions and long, inefficient group meetings. At each subsequent PMI, action items are reviewed from previous meetings, so that continuous improvement and accountability are expected. PMIs, in other words, become an

institutionalized continuous improvement activity, a key to building the collaboration and teamwork needed in organizations, and an effective mechanism to implement the strategies that produce a positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning.

OBJECTIONS

The major objection to holding PMI sessions, of course, is lack of time. Most leaders are of the opinion that they simply cannot impose on their schedules a series of one-on-one meetings with each of their team members, direct reports, or children. If a leader has seven or eight direct reports, for example, this requires seven or eight hours per month of face-to-face meetings, plus preparation time. Boss's (1983) research found, however, that a variety of benefits resulted when a PMI program was instituted, and one of the most important was time savings. Leaders found that more discretionary time became available to them as a result of holding PMIs than they had before implementing the program. This is because the PMI program reduced interruptions, unscheduled meetings, mistakes, and problem-solving time, and it increased alignment, collaboration, improvement strategies, and positive energy. On the average, leaders free up the equivalent of almost a day a month in discretionary time as a result of the benefits produced by the PMI program.

Some flexibility may be required, of course, in different settings and in different organizations. PMIs with family

members are not of the same character as PMIs in a work setting. Moreover, a number of variations have been reported by leaders who were committed to holding PMIs but who faced unusual working situations. One leader found that it was more important for him to hold PMIs with peers—across divisions and functions—than to hold the meetings with direct reports. His coordination requirements were far greater with colleagues than with individuals who reported to him. In his case, PMIs were peer-to-peer. Another leader had almost 50 direct reports, which made individual one-on-one meetings on a monthly basis impossible. She identified a "kitchen cabinet" of eight or nine individuals with whom she scheduled PMI meetings. She judged this group to be the rainmakers, high-potentials, and central influencers in her unit, and PMIs with this group produced the greatest performance impact.

Another leader with a similar number of direct reports asked her team to nominate individuals who would serve as representatives of subgroups within the unit. PMIs were held with these representatives. One other regional sales manager located in Ethiopia had direct reports in Singapore, Taipei, Tokyo, Seoul, and Manila making monthly face-to-face meetings impractical. He scheduled an hour-long telephone call monthly, and then on a quarterly basis one or the other flew to hold a face-to-face PMI on site. In each case, the benefits of PMIs made the investment in a creative solution worthwhile.

The point is, both empirical evidence and practical experience provide a strong case that PMIs produce performance improvements, and, in addition, become a successful

experience in themselves. They are a means by which individuals experience the positive outcomes associated with the four positive leadership strategies, as well as increase organizational effectiveness, individual accountability, department meeting efficiency, and individual development. Even when correction or negative feedback needs to be communicated, when obstacles must be overcome, and when challenges or crises are faced, a PMI program provides an effective way to address those issues in a positively deviant way.

SUMMARY

Leaders can implement the four strategies of positive leadership—enabling positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning—by engaging in a Personal Management Interview program. This begins by holding a one-time role negotiation session with each direct report, designed to establish a psychological contract that helps clarify goals, expectations, important cultural attributes, and areas of responsibility. Abundant evidence exists that goal clarity is an important prerequisite for high performance (Locke & Latham, 2002), and this role-negotiation meeting helps provide that clarity.

The role-negotiation session is followed by ongoing, one-on-one, face-to-face, at-least-monthly meetings designed to facilitate positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and to clarify positive meaning.

These ongoing meetings between a leader and each of his or her direct reports not only help leaders implement the four strategies of positive leadership, but a variety of additional benefits also accrue. These include institutionalizing continuous improvement, maintaining accountability, developing personal competencies, and establishing a two-way exchange of feedback. Empirical investigations support the strong positive connection between holding PMIs and significant improvement in both organizational and individual performance.

As a quick assessment of practical leadership activities that enable a PMI program, the following diagnostic questions may be helpful. Use the following scale to respond.

1 — Never 2 — Seldom 3 — Sometimes
4 — Frequently 5 — Always

As a leader, to what extent do you:

_____ Clarify for your direct reports the specific set of expectations and responsibilities associated with their roles, as well as the mission, values, and culture of the organization?

_____ Meet at least monthly in one-on-one meetings with your direct reports?

_____ Consistently and continually emphasize continuous improvement and the development of strong interpersonal relationships among your direct reports?

_____ Have a formalized routine (such as PMIs) in which you can regularly demonstrate positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning associated with the work?

CHAPTER

7

Developing Positive Leadership

Identifying leadership strategies aimed at enabling positive deviance has become a salient topic with the emergence of positive organizational scholarship, positive psychology, and positive change. Observations of a variety of positively deviant organizations and empirical investigations suggest that certain leadership strategies can help enable extraordinarily positive outcomes in individuals and organizations. Because negative phenomena tend to dominate people's attention, however, and because human beings have learned to pay more attention to potential harm than to potential benefit, positive leadership is not the most common form of leadership. It represents an aberration from the norm. It is

unlikely to emerge without conscious effort and attention. People have learned that ignoring negative feedback can be dangerous, whereas ignoring positive cues has few consequences. Thus, leaders' attention tends to focus on problematic, threatening, or potentially harmful phenomena rather than positive phenomena (Cameron, 2008).

Similarly, organizational processes and routines are usually developed to avoid errors, to prevent or address problems, and to reduce or eliminate deviance. It is normal in organizations to resist deviance, whether it is positive or negative. The activity of organizing itself is almost always an exercise in reducing variance; that is, creating more predictability, control, and reliability. Organizing, by definition, helps to diminish failure as well as excellence—negative deviance as well as positive deviance. If positive leadership is to be pursued, therefore, assiduous attention is required in order to overcome most people's learned sensitivity to the negative.

In previous chapters, four validated leadership strategies have been described that are associated with positively deviant outcomes. These four strategies are not independent of each other, of course, and they tend to overlap and interrelate with one another. For example, it is easy to see that positive communication can have powerful effects on positive relationships and positive climate. Positive meaning may strongly affect positive climate and positive communication. Positive relationships help strengthen a sense of positive meaning and positive climate. And so forth. The practices and techniques that operationalize each strategy may also affect other strategies. Moreover, evidence suggests that by

implementing a Personal Management Interview (PMI) program, a setting can be created in which each of the four strategies may be effectively implemented. Thus, employing any of these strategies tends to establish an amplifying effect in the others and helps enable positively deviant outcomes. Amplifying extraordinary performance is the primary aim of positive leadership.

POSITIVE LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

The propositions below serve as a summary of the empirical findings associated with each strategy and as guidelines for leaders aspiring to enable positive deviance in their organizations.

- Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by fostering a positive work climate.

  Empirical evidence suggests that working in a positive climate has substantial positive effects on individual and organizational performance. Among the leadership enablers that affect the work climate are fostering (1) compassion, (2) forgiveness, and (3) expressions of gratitude at work. Expressing compassion involves noticing that pain has been experienced, expressing care and concern, and organizing systematic action to help repair damage or support the person that is suffering. Facilitating forgiveness involves acknowledging the hurt, identifying a purpose to which employees can look forward, maintaining high expectations or standards of

performance, providing support for harmed persons, letting go of feelings of offense and grudges, and legitimizing the use of language that elevates thought and communicates virtuousness. Frequent and public expressions of gratitude to others can be enhanced as individuals are encouraged to keep gratitude journals, recording things for which they are grateful each day, engage in purposeful gratitude visits, in which the agenda is simply to convey thanks to another person, or distribute gratitude notes, where cards or notes are provided to individuals who deserve appreciation. Such expressions lead people toward more respectful and supportive relationships, which, in turn, affect organizational performance. Leaders who enable the expression of these virtues create a climate in which people are cared for, supported, and encouraged to flourish. Such a climate is associated with positive physiological effects, mental and emotional effects, and organizational performance effects.

- Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by fostering positive relationships among members.

  Empirical evidence suggests that experiencing positive interpersonal relationships produces an array of positive physiological, mental, social, and emotional benefits for individuals and elevated performance for organizations. Making contributions to relationships more than receiving benefits from relationships is the main factor that produces positive outcomes. Among the important but less common leadership strategies for engendering positive relationships are (1) developing and managing positive

energy networks, and (2) capitalizing on employees' strengths and best-self attributes. In addition to radiating positive energy themselves, positive leaders identify individuals who contribute positive energy to others around them, and they enable these people to infect the organization with this energy. They facilitate the building of positive-energy networks, positive mentoring relations, and positive energy teams. These positive-energy networks strengthen interpersonal relationships, foster coordination and collaboration, and enhance the efficiency of interactions so that performance advantages for individuals and organizations result. Similarly, positive leaders emphasize and build on employees' strengths (what they do well) rather than focus on their weaknesses, and this emphasis also creates an attraction to forming strong interpersonal ties. Addressing weaknesses helps people achieve a level of competence, but building on strengths helps people achieve excellence in performance and in relationships.

- Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by fostering positive communication.

  Empirical evidence suggests that an abundance of positive communication compared to negative communication is related to higher levels of organizational performance and connectivity among people. Engagement, information exchange, and commitment all are enhanced in the presence of positive communication. Among the many strategies that may foster positive communication are the use of (1) best-self feedback and

(2) supportive communication. The best-self feedback process builds on the power of positive feedback by helping individuals systematically gather information about their own strengths and unique contributions. Because most people have difficulty accurately identifying their own strengths, using others' descriptions of the unique value that they produced or a special contribution that was made allows them to capitalize on what they do best. Creating a best-self portrait, or a description of their strengths and the conditions under which they add significant value, helps them reproduce the circumstances in which their best contributions can be made. Using supportive communication—especially congruent, descriptive, and problem-centered statements—allows leaders to provide corrective or negative feedback in ways that make the communication encouraging and helpful, strengthening rather than weakening the relationship, and enhancing individual performance. The negative effects of criticism are avoided and replaced with a trusting, helpful relationship. Positive communication, in other words, builds on positive energy and positive regard, which are strongly related to high levels of effectiveness among individuals and organizations.

- Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by associating the work being done with positive meaning.

  Empirical evidence suggests that when people experience positive meaning in their work—or a sense of calling—performance is elevated and individual well-being is enhanced. Leaders enhance the meaningfulness of the task

in at least four ways. (1) Identifying the positive impact that the work produces on the well-being of people fosters meaningfulness. The more human impact that can be observed—that is, how the work affects individuals for the better—the more meaningful the work. Similarly, the more meaningful the work, the more individuals desire to share its effects with other people. (2) Associating the work with a virtue or an important personal value engenders positive meaning. Highlighting the relationship between work and sustainability, generosity, or compassion, for example, helps engender meaningfulness. Identifying a higher purpose that supercedes personal benefit is almost always a prerequisite to prosocial and contributory work activities. (3) Identifying the long-term effects of the work beyond immediate outcomes, and highlighting the ripple effect that may occur, also enhances positive meaning. Leaving a legacy that benefits people beyond the immediate circumstances represents a form of unselfishness that is associated with high levels of performance. (4) Building supportive relationships and a sense of community among coworkers also enhances positive meaning. Leaders who highlight and pursue contribution goals as opposed to self-interest goals enable important individual and organizational outcomes such as learning, trust, high-quality connections, and improved performance.

- Positive leaders enable extraordinary performance by implementing these four strategies through a PMI program.

Empirical evidence suggests that the implementation of a PMI program leads to significant increases in organizational and individual performance. When PMIs are implemented, performance improves. When PMIs are halted, organizational performance tends to deteriorate. Similarly, in comparing organizations with and without PMI programs in place, individuals experience significantly less stress and overload when PMIs are held compared to when they are not. A PMI program is implemented by holding an initial one-time role-negotiation session, followed by an ongoing, regularly scheduled, one-on-one meeting with each direct report. These meetings provide the formalized process by which a positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning can be developed and demonstrated. Rather than increasing the time burden on leaders, PMIs have been demonstrated to actually increase discretionary time, so that leaders are more efficient as well as more effective.

In sum, while not ignoring or minimizing problems and obstacles, leaders who enable positive deviance focus on engendering that which is elevating and virtuous in organizations. Because this positive emphasis is contrary to the natural tendencies of most leaders, specific strategies have been identified that can foster human flourishing and unusually high positive levels of performance. Four interrelated strategies for positive leaders have been discussed, and research associated with each has been reviewed in order to

validate the prescriptions. These four strategies are not comprehensive but they illustrate empirically verified enablers available to leaders.

The four strategies, of course, have amplifying effects on one another. As mentioned, positive climates tend to foster positive relationships and communication, positive meaning facilitates positive climates and relationships, positive relationships foster positive communication and positive climate, positive communication fosters positive climates and positive relationships. As a way to help leaders get started on this amplifying process and implement some of these strategies, the final section provides a simple tool for identifying two or three positive leadership behaviors that can be initiated right away.

IMPLEMENTING POSITIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

Implementing positive leadership strategies should be tailored, of course, to the specific circumstances in which leaders lead. Being a positive leader in the family may require different behaviors than being a positive leader in a project-team or a manufacturing division. Moreover, some positive leadership behaviors may already be institutionalized whereas others may be entirely neglected in an organization. In the interest of helping leaders identify some specific behaviors they can implement in becoming more positive, a simple two-step

process is offered. The two steps include (1) diagnosing current leadership behaviors, and (2) identifying specific actions that help implement the four positive leadership strategies.

Step 1: Diagnosing current practice

A consolidated assessment instrument is provided in Table 7.1, which summarizes the behaviors discussed in each of the preceding chapters. Individuals can identify the extent to which they engage in these behaviors as part of their normal leadership activities. Since improvement cannot occur unless reasonably accurate self-assessments occur, a realistic evaluation of current (not desired) performance is a prerequisite.

In reviewing this self-assessment, individuals should identify the areas in which they are doing especially well (scores of 4 and 5) as well as the areas in which they would like to improve (scores of 1 and 2). It is important that leaders highlight and capitalize on strengths as well as identify areas that may require upgrading. Effective positive leaders score in the 3, 4, and 5 range on these items with an average rating of about 4.

Step 2: Planning for implementation

Based on the current levels of positive-leadership behaviors, individuals should identify two or three behaviors that can have a significant impact on improving positive leadership. The question is: *What one or two actions can I take that will enhance my effectiveness in each of the five positive leadership strategies?*

TABLE 7.1 **Positive Leadership Assessment**	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
As a leader, to what extent do you:	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. Foster information sharing so that people become aware of colleagues' difficulties and, therefore, can express compassion?					
2. Encourage the public expression of compassion by sponsoring formal events to communicate emotional support?					
3. Demonstrate forgiveness for mistakes and errors rather than punish perpetrators or hold grudges?					
4. Provide support and development as an indicator of forgiveness for individuals who have blundered?					
5. Express gratitude to multiple employees each day?					
6. Make gratitude visits and gratitude notes a daily practice?					
7. Ensure that employees have an opportunity to provide emotional, intellectual, or physical support *to* others in addition to receiving support *from* others?					
8. Model positive energy yourself, and also recognize and encourage other positive energizers in your organization?					
9. Diagnose your organization's energy networks, so that you support and utilize individuals in energy hubs as well as to help develop peripheral members?					
10. Provide more feedback to individuals on their strengths than on their weaknesses?					
11. Spend more time with your strongest performers than with your weakest performers?					
12. Provide a ratio of approximately five positive messages for every negative message to those with whom you interact?					
13. Provide opportunities for employees to receive best-self feedback and develop best-self portraits?					

(continued)

TABLE 7.1 **Positive Leadership Assessment**	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
As a leader, to what extent do you:	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
14. Consistently distribute notes or cards to your employees complimenting their performance?					
15. Provide negative feedback in supportive ways—especially using descriptive rather than evaluative statements—so that the relationship is strengthened?					
16. Focus on the detrimental *behavior* and its consequences, not on the person, when correcting people or providing negative feedback?					
17. Establish, recognize, reward, and maintain accountability for goals that contribute to human benefit, so that the effects on other people are obvious?					
18. Emphasize and reinforce the core values of the individuals who work in the organization, so that congruence between what the organization accomplishes and what people value is transparent?					
19. Tie the outcomes of the work to an extended time frame, so that long-term benefits are clear?					
20. Ensure that contribution goals take precedence over acquisition goals for individuals in the organization?					
21. Clarify for your direct reports the specific set of expectations and responsibilities associated with their roles, as well as the mission, values, and culture of the organization?					
22. Meet at least monthly in one-on-one meetings with your direct reports?					
23. Consistently and continually emphasize continuous improvement and the development of strong interpersonal relationships among your direct reports?					
24. Have a formalized routine (such as PMIs) in which you can regularly demonstrate positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning associated with the work?					

Leaders may want to check the specific behaviors on which they will focus as they attempt to foster a positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning. Of course, the list of suggestions in Table 7.2 is not a comprehensive list, so other behaviors may also be identified that can foster positively deviant outcomes.

In selecting items to implement, individuals should respond to two different circumstances—their personal or family lives (e.g., in relation to home life, friendships, volunteer activities) and their professional or work life (e.g., in relation to work colleagues, subordinates, customers).

Leaders will want to narrow the items they personally checked in Table 7.2, and select only two or three high-priority behaviors that will produce the highest impact on positive-leadership effectiveness. These behaviors should be applied first to the relationships about which leaders care most deeply and that will have the highest impact. Achieving extraordinary performance is the objective of these strategies, and abundant empirical evidence exists suggesting that a few positive-leadership strategies can significantly enhance the probability that positively deviant results will occur. Amplifying effects can be instigated with a few well-chosen positive-leadership behaviors.

In sum, positive leadership is an aspiration to which almost every individual can seek, and the advantages of such an approach can be remarkable. Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu's statement highlights why positive leadership is so advantageous in a world in which it is not very common (Tutu, 1999: 263):

TABLE 7.2 Implementing Positive Leadership		
Positive Leadership Strategy	**Personal or Family Life**	**Professional or Work Life**
Encourage compassion		
Notice & share information		
Express emotions & feelings		
Enable appopriate compassionate responses		
Encourage forgiveness		
Acknowledge harm		
Identify a positive purpose		
Maintain high standards		
Provide personal support		
Use forgiving language		
Encourage gratitude		
Conduct gratitude visits		
Write gratitude letters		
Keep a gratitude journal		
Foster positive energy		
Provide opportunities for serving others		
Personally model positive energy		
Diagnose the unit's energy network		
Recognize & reinforce positive energizers		
Manage negative energizers in stages		
Capitalize on others' strengths		
Spend time with the strongest performers		
Provide opportunities for others to do what they do best		

TABLE 7.2 Implementing Positive Leadership

Positive Leadership Strategy	Personal or Family Life	Professional or Work Life
Frequently celebrate positive outcomes		
Provide best-self feedback		
Obtain information from associates on unique personal contributions		
Help others develop a best-self portrait—when they are at their best		
Utilize strength recognition cards		
Use supportive communication		
Provide 5 positive for every negative piece of feedback		
Habitually use supportive communication		
Use descriptive statements in providing negative feedback		
Remain problem- not person-focused in providing negative feedback		
Enhance the meaningfulness of the work		
Identify the work's direct impact on other people		
Associate the work with a core personal value		
Clarify the long-term effects of what is being accomplished		
Reinforce contribution goals more than achievement goals		
Implement Personal Management Interviews		
Hold a role-negotiation meeting with direct reports		
Hold regularly scheduled, one-on-one meetings with direct reports		

(continued)

TABLE 7.2 Implementing Positive Leadership		
Positive Leadership Strategy	**Personal or Family Life**	**Professional or Work Life**
Provide regular personal-development opportunities for direct reports		
Ensure regular accountability for continuous improvement		

> The world is hungry for goodness and it recognizes it when it sees it—and has incredible responses to the good. There is something in all of us that hungers after the good and true, and when we glimpse it in people, we applaud them for it. We long to be just like them.

For more information regarding positive leadership and positive organizational scholarship, visit www.bus.umich.edu/positive.

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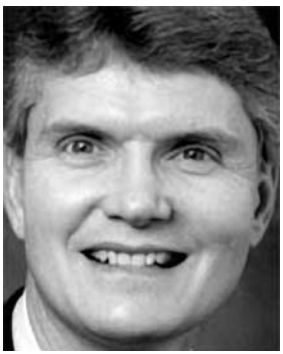
About the Author



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Kim is one of the cofounders of the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship at the University of Michigan—a research center focused on the investigation of positively deviant performance, virtuousness, strengths, and practices in organizations that lead to thriving and extraordinary outcomes. He received BS and MS degrees from Brigham Young University and MA and PhD degrees from Yale University. His research on organizational virtuousness, effectiveness, quality culture, downsizing, and the development of leadership skills has been published in more than 100 scholarly articles and 10 books. They include: *Coffin Nails and Corporate Strategies* (with Robert Miles, Prentice Hall); *Organizational Effectiveness* (with David Whetten,

Academic Press); *Paradox and Transformation* (with Robert Quinn, Ballinger Publishing); *Organizational Decline* (with David Whetten & Robert Sutton, Ballinger Publishing); *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (with Jane Dutton & Robert Quinn, Berrett-Koehler); *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture* (with Robert Quinn, Jossey Bass); *Leading with Values* (with Edward Hess, Cambridge University Press); *Competing Values Leadership* (with Robert Quinn, Jeff DeGraff, & Anjan Thakor, Edward Elgar); *Making the Impossible Possible* (with Marc Lavine, Berrett-Koehler); and *Developing Management Skills*, 7th Ed. (with David Whetten, Prentice Hall).

Kim is married to the former Melinda Cummings and has seven children.

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