

DEVELOPING POSITIVE ENERGY NETWORKS

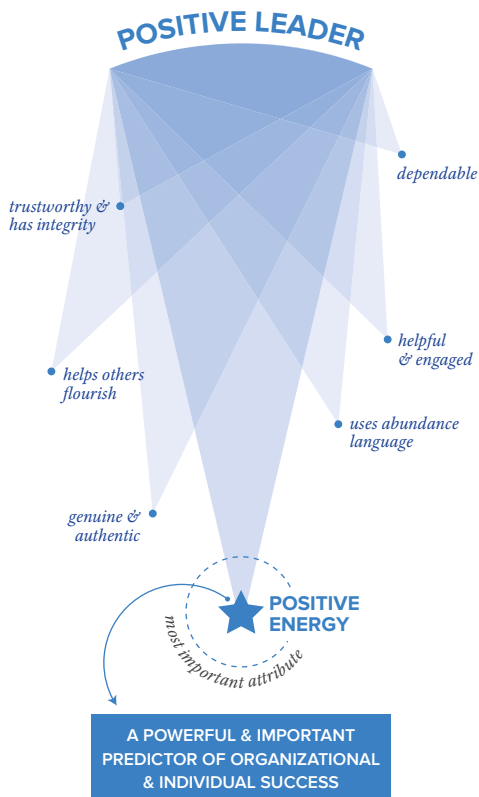
“A leader has the vision and conviction that a dream can be achieved. He (or she) inspires the power and energy to get it done.”

— Ralph Lauren

Chairman & CEO of Ralph Lauren Corporation

WHAT YOU’LL FIND IN THIS ARTICLE

- How to rewire your brain towards positivity
- How to create energizing personal and professional relationships
- How to bring fun and games to work



At the heart of positive leadership lies the concept of positive energy. Whereas much popular literature is dominated by discussions about the toll of stress, burnout, depression, tension, anxiety, fatigue, disengagement, and fear, less attention is paid to positive energy, even though it is one of the most powerful and important predictors of organizational and individual success. It is almost impossible to be a positive leader without also being a source of positive energy.

Positive energy is characterized by a feeling of aliveness, arousal, vitality, and zest. It is the life-giving force that allows us to perform, to create, and to persist. It unlocks resources and capacity within us and actually increases our ability to flourish. Positive energy is probably the single most important attribute of positive leaders.

Most people easily understand the concept of positive energy, but it is almost never consciously managed in organizations. The scientific research is clear: positive energizers are significantly higher performers than their colleagues, and

positive energy is, by a large margin, a more significant factor in the performance of individuals and organizations than people’s titles, the information they possess, the influence they exert, or their personality attributes. Positive energy is a dramatically underutilized resource and that identifying energy networks and highlighting the major sources of positive energy in an organization have been among the most important ways of improving performance.

“...positive energizers are significantly higher performers than their colleagues...”

CHARACTERISTICS OF POSITIVE ENERGIZERS

It is important to note that being a positive energizer is not the same as being an extrovert, gregarious, charismatic, or perky. Being the first to speak, the one who dominates airtime, or the social butterfly is not necessarily positively energizing for others. Rather, positive energy is associated with a set of behaviors that are mostly interactive and behavioral and which can be learned and developed.



BEING:
an Extrovert
Gregarious
Charismatic
Perky

POSITIVITY STARTS WITH YOU

One way to enhance personal positive energy is through contemplative practices such as meditation and purposeful self reflection. Now, before you dismiss this as a New Age detour from an otherwise scientifically based approach to positive leadership, consider some recent research that has examined the impact of contemplative practice, especially loving-kindness meditation, on positive energy, positive emotions, and positive relationships. Neuroscientists have recently discovered, for example, that the brain actually changes as the result of our thoughts and experiences (a phenomenon referred to as neuroplasticity).

Loving-kindness meditation is a well-developed contemplative practice that focuses on self-generated feelings of love,

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ENERGIZER	DE-ENERGIZER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Helps others flourish</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Sees mostly roadblocks + obstacles</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Trustworthy + has integrity</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Creates problems</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Dependable</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Doesn't allow others to be valued</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Uses abundance language</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Inflexible in his/her thinking</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Heedful + fully engaged</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Doesn't show concern for others</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Genuine + authentic</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Often doesn't follow through</i>

Listed above are attributes identified by executives when describing positive energizers in their organizations. It is not a comprehensive list, of course, but note that each of these attributes can be cultivated.

compassion, and goodwill toward oneself and others. Essentially, people contemplate their feelings of positive regard for people close to them and extend them outward to others not so close to them. Similar practices include keeping a “gratitude journal” (in which you identify one thing you are grateful for each day), engaging in personal prayer, and pondering spiritual inspiration. These practices essentially put people in a virtuous condition in which they represent the best of the human condition on a recurring basis.

Regular contemplative practices are linked to increases in gray matter in the areas of the brain that control learning, memory, emotional regulation, self-referential processing, and perspective taking. By taking these steps to ‘retrain’ your brain towards positivity, you will find that your leadership capabilities and tendencies will be similarly altered and this will enhance your ability to positively energize others.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Because positive energy is synonymous with relational energy, building and nurturing strong interpersonal relationships is another key to fostering and maintaining positive energy. Strong interpersonal relationships are most easily built on a

foundation of positive feedback rather than criticism. Rather than pointing out weaknesses and deficiencies, positive leaders highlight others’ strengths, capabilities, and contributions and enable others in the organization to do the same. This does not mean being inauthentic or oblivious to flaws, rather it means highlighting the unique expertise upon which others can build.

A common rule of thumb is the 5:1 ratio. When communicating with others, you should be conscious of making at least five positive statements to every one negative statement. This not only increases the positivity levels in your relationships, but also further rewires your thinking towards the positive similar to the contemplative practices discussed in the previous section.

MAKE IT FUN

In a variety of experiments in Europe, researchers demonstrated how making normally routine activities fun markedly altered the behavior and energy of people. Several of these experiments are visually described at www.thefuntheory.com. For example, 66 percent more people took the stairs than the adjoining escalator after experimenters made the stairs look like a piano keyboard with sounds associated

WHEN INCORPORATING GAMES AND FUN INTO THE WORK ENVIRONMENT,

there are some basic rules and concepts to keep in mind to ensure that the activity has the intended positive effect:

1. GOALS ARE POSITIVE AND CLEARLY DEFINED

Recreation is always associated with a goal—winning a game, shooting a low (or high) score, challenging a personal best, improving performance. It is fun to work toward a positive goal.

2. SCOREKEEPING IS OBJECTIVE AND SELF-ADMINISTERED

In recreation, we always know the score. When we do not keep score, we soon lose interest. Even on playgrounds, unorganized activity almost always eventually finds itself organizing into a game where scorekeeping occurs. Keep score at work.

3. FEEDBACK IS FREQUENT

In almost all recreation, we know how we are doing at any given moment. That is why organized athletics is played in the presence of fans. Their feedback makes it fun and rewarding.

4. PERSONAL CHOICE EXISTS

In recreation, we have the chance to modify our behavior at will. We are not constrained to a specific routine or process that cannot be modified. Being empowered to alter performance is positively energizing when we are doing fun things.

5. RULES ARE STANDARD AND STABLE

In recreation the rules are always clear. Out of bounds is always out of bounds. A goal is always a goal. Effort and difficulty do not determine the outcomes. In baseball, a spectacular catch still counts for only one out.

6. COMPETITION IS PRESENT

Competition can be against personal past performance or against others, but we always have more fun when we are tested against a standard.

7. SOCIAL INTERACTION IS FOSTERED

Bowling leagues arise because bowling alone is no fun. People play golf in foursomes because playing alone does not provide much positive energy. Recreation and fun are almost always associated with the chance to socialize and interact.

with each step. Over two and a half times more trash was deposited in a waste can that provided a sound simulating the deposit falling hundreds of feet followed by a boom than in a nearby ordinary waste can. The experimenters demonstrated that making routine activities fun provides a positive experience and alters behavior for the better.

Positive energy and fun are connected. Engaging in fun or novel activities not only breaks up routine and boredom but also fosters and enables positive energy, especially when the fun is connected with interpersonal relationships.

CONCLUSION

Most people easily understand the concept of positive energy, but it is almost never consciously managed in organizations. The scientific research is clear: positive energizers are significantly higher performers than their colleagues, and positive energy is, by a large margin, a

more significant factor in the performance of individuals and organizations than people's titles, the information they possess, the influence they exert, or their personality attributes. Positive energy is a dramatically underutilized resource and that identifying energy networks and highlighting the major sources of positive energy in an organization have been among the most important ways of improving performance.

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