

ENCOURAGING OTHERS

What do we mean by encouraging others?

Encouraging others refers to the consistent demonstration of the ability to give positive feedback and get behind your colleagues, clients and suppliers.

It means giving others an emotional lift that acts as either a reward for a job well done or a motivator to keep on track and not to give up. Note the origin of the word en-courage – to cause *courage*. When we encourage another person, we give them the courage to keep trying, to have another go, to take on the challenge and be their best.

Why is it important to encourage others?

If your goal is to be the most effective you can be and be a valued member of a team, it is crucial that you cultivate the habit of giving positive support and encouragement to other team members. This not only applies in workplaces, but also within personal relationships, friendships and communities.

Successful people are often people who have never been discouraged. John Travolta, who has succeeded as a singer, actor, comedian, pilot, entrepreneur, as well as appearing to have a very happy and rewarding personal life, was asked in an interview 'why do you think you have succeeded in so many things?' His response was 'No one ever told me I couldn't do anything. My parents only ever focussed on what us kids were good at. 'All they ever did was tell us 'you can' and encourage us to try anything we wanted to try'. In this example, we see the incredible power of encouragement when received unreservedly from an early age.

To encourage another person has an uplifting affect on them, which has a natural mirroring affect back on you. When encouragement becomes infused in workplace culture, there is a positive energy that flows through and unites all team members.

If growth and development are part of your goal in your workplace/team, encouragement is essential. When putting anyone into a situation that takes them outside of their comfort zone and stretches their abilities (which any developmental and learning situation does), it is inevitable that mistakes will happen, all teachings will not be taken on immediately, and further reinforcement of the new skills will be needed.

If you go about this process by purely focussing on mistakes, or areas not yet mastered, and if it is done without sharing the belief that the trainee is fully capable of mastering the skill, then the trainee is likely to become disheartened, their self esteem may become damaged, and they are more likely to stop putting in the necessary effort to learn something new. In extreme cases of lack of encouragement, such feelings as frustration, shame, inadequacy, and humiliation can occur.

In workplaces where no one encourages anyone, the culture becomes one of self-protection, defensiveness, fear and stagnation. Individuals will not want to be put in positions where their skills are challenged, due to fear of not getting it right. They will not put forward ideas in case they don't

turn out for the best; they will put guards around themselves, and have a self-protection focus rather than a focus on what they can contribute.

Alternatively, workplaces that foster encouragement as an operating principle empower people to have a go. The encouragement modelled by management filters through to every level. And it does not stop at the front door – suppliers become more responsive because of the encouragement they receive to keep delivering as they promised; clients become attached to the positive energy that they feel when dealing with anyone from your company and they too feel encouraged to keep coming back and are more likely to refer others to you; and employees take their habit of focussing on encouraging others out into their personal lives and communities.

Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of encouragement?

In our improvement-driven society, we tend to always be looking for ways to enhance our businesses, our performance, our profits and ourselves. As such we tend to take a critical view of ourselves and others, constantly asking the question “How could I/we/you do that better?” In itself this is fine, as this is how we identify where the improvement opportunities lie. A problem often arises, however, because instead of focusing on the improved process or behaviour that we can put in place we dwell on the aspect that we judge as not being up to scratch.

This is especially true when it comes to our selves as many of us are our own worst critics. If this is true for you, you may be aware that, by the time you get feedback from others, you have already picked your own work to pieces. So if external feedback we then receive focuses only on the areas for improvement, as opposed to also including feedback on what aspects are working well (i.e. encouragement), then our self criticism is magnified producing feelings of dejection, de-motivation inadequacy and low self-worth. We shift into an ‘I can’t’ mentality rather than an ‘I can’ perspective.

When improvement is our exclusive focus, we set up a situation in which we can never ‘win’, when winning would mean appreciating our achievements and taking time the time to give ourselves and others a pat on the back. If we don’t add this into our process we are liable to set up a downwards spiral that can lead to burn out or stagnations. In this way when our focus is *only* on where we need to improve, it can have very negative effects. So the better process is to look for areas worthy of praise and encouragement as well as areas for improvement (both in our self assessment process as well as our assessment of others).

If we work in a company culture where there is no encouragement, we are not having those behaviours modelled to us, so we forget to demonstrate this behaviour ourselves. In this environment we can also fall into the habit of thinking ‘Why should I encourage others when no one ever encourages me?’

Some people do not see it as their job to encourage. They may see themselves as too far down the hierarchy to encourage others. ‘I’m just the office junior, it’s not my place to encourage others’. Yet, everyone, in every position, in every business can bring positive results by actively encourage others. Imagine the following situation:

Bob is the CEO of the Asia-Pacific operations of a large multi-national company. On directives from the parent company he has to cut down on people costs by 10%. He loses much sleep over the decision and

holds long meetings with his executive team to decide the best course of action. He involves mentors and reads several articles to ensure that the decision he makes is for the best. Ultimately he decides to offer up the opportunity to the entire staff to all take a 10% pay decrease rather than having to have any lay-offs. Bob receives mixed responses from the staff. Some say they would have been willing to take a package if it was offered, others tell him he should have done something different, others tell him that his communication of the news could have been delivered better and others pass on word that morale is very low and people are losing confidence. The next morning, the mail-clerk quietly enters the CEO's office and, after placing the mail on the desk, awkwardly clears his throat and stands quietly waiting in front of the CEO. When the CEO looks up, the young man blushes and says "I just want to tell you that I'm glad I wasn't you yesterday. It must have been hard for you to do what you did. I think you did the very best you could have done in the light of things...I just want you to know you have my trust that you will keep doing the best you can."

Can you imagine what affect those words would have had on Bob? Can you see the ripple effects that could possible flow from those simple words of encouragement? This example demonstrates how vitally important it is for everyone in an organisation to have an encouragement mindset, and seek to inspire courage in others.

Evaluate your own ability to encourage others

- Reflect on the last 24 hours:
 - How many people did you encourage?
 - How many ways did you encourage them?
 - Were there any situations/conversations you had in which you could have been more encouraging?
- Think of the last ten people you have had contact with in business:
 - How many of them did you encourage?
 - Did you encourage only colleagues, or also clients, suppliers and others in business?
 - Were there any situations that you found discouraging? If so, what can you learn from that?
- Keep a record for a two week period:
 - List the people you encouraged
 - Next to their names note any specific identifying context (ie: what sex were they; were they of subordinate, equal or superior status; do they actively encourage you; do you personally like/respect them?)
 - Make any additional notes about people you interacted with whom you did not actively encourage or found hard to encourage.
- Make notes about people who have encouraged you, including:
 - How did the interaction feel at the time?
 - What ripple effects occurred after the interaction?
 - Did the encouragement feel genuine, and if so, what specifically was it about the interaction that felt genuine?
 - What could have been done to make the encouragement more meaningful and motivating?

- Think of someone you know who is always encouraging others and is very effective in that regard. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 10, what would you be)?
 - What's one thing you could do to improve how you'd rate yourself?
- Think of someone you know who has acceptable standards of encouragement. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 5, what would you be)?
- Think of the most discouraging person you have come across. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 1, what would you be)?
- In your next review with colleagues, clients, suppliers and peers, ask specifically about whether they feel you are an encouraging person to work with. Ask them if there is any particular area in which you are particularly good at offering encouragement and if there are any specific areas in which there is room for you to acknowledge and encourage more.

Improve your ability to encourage others

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Notice how it makes you feel when others encourage you. Notice the specific behaviours they do that cause you to feel encouraged. Allow this insight to provide behavioural guidance, added motivation and inspiration for you to commit to becoming exceptional in your own ability to encourage others.
- Make a list of the people you work/associate with who *need* your encouragement the most. Set a target to ensure you make time to encourage each of these people on a regular basis.
- Make it your rule of thumb to give at least TWO forms of encouragement along with every ONE form of critical feedback.
- Whenever giving critical feedback, always end on an encouraging and uplifting note.
- Make it a habit to ask trainees/subordinates after a training/managing session "How well equipped do you feel to walk away from this discussion and have a red hot shot at the task(s) we've discussed? Do you feel courageous or discouraged as a result of our discussion?"
- Create an encouraging culture in your workplace – talk to others about how you can, as a team, encourage each other more. Some ideas might be to:
 - Put up reminder notices saying "How courageous did I help you feel today?"
 - Build in 'encouragement' sessions to the end of training/supervisory sessions.
 - Do team building tasks that focus on encouraging and supporting each other.
 - Create 'great effort!' motivational cards to give team members when they have had a really good try at something (regardless of how well they executed the task).

- When you give critical feedback, ensure that you focus on the 'opportunity to grow/develop' rather than 'improve' – just that small turn of phrase could turn a discouraging conversation into an encouraging one.
- If there is someone in your workplace who is particularly good at encouraging others, use them as a role model/case study/trainer/mentor/coach. Openly praise the person in front of others so that they can see the encouraging individual being rewarded for their positive energy.

Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of responsiveness, the following books, courses and consultants may be worth considering. Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources, the list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- **Building the Happiness-Centred Business** by Dr Paddi Lund
- **Managing to Have Fun** by Matt Weinstein
- <http://www.mindtools.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it is an incredible resource to assist people in developing their own professional skills regardless of whether they run their own business or work for someone else.
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it offers both personal and professional self-development information and resources. You can type in any search word you want, such as "sustainable decision making" and you'll get a list of articles, blogs, resources and links to other sites which could assist you in your own development.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.

Author and editor acknowledgement

High Ideals would like to acknowledge and thank Karina Butera for her work on this document. Karina is the Managing Director of High Ideals, a life coach, sociologist and speaker. To find out more about Karina, please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

This document is part of the **High Ideals** Criteria Information Series, edited by Claire Stretch. For more information on Claire please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

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