

Inspiring Leadership

BY BRIAN TOWNLEY

After 25 years in banking, I believe it always comes back to our people. Not a single advancement in technology or shiny new banking product has ever replaced the results we get from highly-motivated employees who want the bank to reach its goals.

In my book, *Inspiring Leadership: Unleashing Motivation in the Workplace*, I discussed some of the amazing results my bank has achieved by inspiring our employees. Through adopting motivational strategies, we've discovered that people truly want to be successful and, if given the proper incentives and tools, they will achieve incredible results.

Statistics have shown that 51 percent of workers are unhappy with their jobs. Of those, 75 percent plan to change jobs within a year. Those are percentages no business can afford. Most bankers consider recruiting a qualified staff as one of their greatest challenges, and research bears out how hard it is to retain the best employees. For these statistics not to affect an operation, managers must bridge the gap between employer and employee.

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President Harry Truman once said, “A great leader is a person who has the ability to get other people to do what they don’t want to do and like it.” No disrespect to President Truman, but to me, a true leader changes lives and inspires others to achieve their goals. I’m grateful to have had such leaders in my career. While writing my book, it became clear to me that many of the traits I admire are the common threads of leadership. It’s true that leaders are not born—rather they earn this respected title through hard work and dedication. Good leaders generously bestow their vision to everyone they touch. They truly believe the mantra that “You always get back more than you give.”

As my Uncle Grady says, “The view is better from the top, we just need to keep climbing.” A leader is a firm believer in helping others so they can have a better view as well. A leader who sees the world from the vantage point of others knows that when we are improving the lives of others, we have found our true calling. This life lesson is always in the forefront of my mind. When we inspire others to motivate themselves, they will be great traveling companions on the journey to success. To me, that’s what an inspiring leader is—someone who takes pride in seeing the best qualities unleashed in others.

“Pull the String”

We must be leaders ourselves to create the leadership qualities we want in our team. As managers, we must embrace our role as a leader. I’m not talking about ordering people around or being the “boss.” I’m talking about distinguishing ourselves as a leader. President Dwight D. Eisenhower said it this way, “Pull the string and it will follow wherever you wish. Push it, and it will go nowhere at all.” Pretty sage advice, I’d say.

The higher calling of a leader is to unleash the motivation within his/her employees. We can do that through

incentives that produce results. We also can do that by recognizing ourselves as a coach—someone who guides and teaches and recognizes the strengths in others.

Coaching is consistent and constructive, but never condescending; what I call “the three Cs.” Coaching is the art of

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steering people toward finding their own solutions and giving them ownership. When they come to me with questions or issues, I turn the tables and ask, “What do you think the answer is? How would you handle the situation? What are your thoughts on the subject?” They may not always have the right answer, but they’re taking responsibility for their work and learning to solve their problems.

Banks invest a good deal of money in recruiting the best employees. Once they’re on our team, we are remiss if we do not nurture and coach them to be the best they can be. We hired them because we know they can do the “tasks,” but we must inspire them if we want them to be leaders. That’s when we truly reap the rewards of a fully-engaged employee.

Veterans to Millennials

In the current workplace, we are working with four generations: Veterans, Boomers, Generation X and Millennials (aka Generation Y). This segmentation creates a unique and interesting dynamic, as we see the loyalty of the older generation who desire face-to-face communication, and the tech-savvy Millennials, who experts say will spend 30 percent of their lifetime on the Internet.

This climate can leave managers scratching our heads as we try to inspire each of these groups to see how “What’s in it for me?” translates into “What’s in it for the bank?” We must be savvy enough to know that while paid time off may be the most attractive incentive for the younger generation, the older generation genuinely appreciates recognition.

We must offer programs to our employees that mix the groups together so they can benefit from one another. A computer basics class taught by Generation Xers and Millennials could benefit some Boomers and Veterans. Customer service basics, such as making eye contact and addressing people by name can be reinforced by the older set. We all have something to teach and to learn.

As banks, we must tap into the strengths of each generational subset and be cognizant of what we expect from them. We can certainly draw from them that which they do best to serve our customers. We have had an 80-year-old working

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beside an 18-year-old. The older employee has adapted to many changes in her lifetime. The younger employee is wired to expect immediate results. We know they come from different worlds, yet by balancing and appreciating these varied perspectives, we can benefit from the talents of each generation.

Powering the Sales Machine

While ‘sales’ may be the most dreaded word in banking, we can decrease the number of missed opportunities by cultivating a service-to-sales culture. We train our employees to acutely *listen* for sales opportunities and then to *act* upon them. We equip them with knowledge about all of our services and products so that when they hear an opportunity, they immediately know what to do. Our portfolio is diverse, and we are confident—and want our employees to be confident—that we can meet the financial needs of our customers.

One of the most rewarding moments for a banker is when we can step in and help our customers in their time of need. These are prime opportunities for sales.

Our front-line teller, Lisa, knew this when she was processing a deposit for a customer. By simply asking about his day, she learned that his car needed expensive repairs. He was distraught about how he was going to pay to keep his only mode of transportation running.

Since Lisa was familiar with the bank’s products, she was able to talk knowledgeably about loan options that would allow him to purchase a more reliable vehicle, instead of making the costly repairs. The customer learned that the bank’s payment plans would provide an affordable option, and he was soon behind the wheel of a new car. The bank gained a sale and deeper loyalty from a customer, who has since referred the bank to his friends.

Lisa’s willingness to listen strengthened the bank’s relationship with the client by providing a solution to his problem. Had she not been listening or was disinterested in this customer’s problem, an important sales opportunity would have been missed.

These kinds of opportunities walk through our doors every day. Not everyone is going to choose to buy a new vehicle, but many times they will consider what we offer, and they will know that we are there for them. Our mission is to train our employees to be our eyes and ears to reach out to each and every customer.

Sincere high-touch service is sensed by clients, and is something they can’t get online. While we know the marketplace is saturated with banks that offer many of the same products, customer service can be the determining factor in where they bank now and in the future.

Some estimates predict that banks will yield 80 percent of future growth from current customers. Attuned employees like Lisa can impact the bank now and in the future. We must train staff to become trusted advisors, not just sales associates. Empower them through education to be your competitive edge. Encourage them to ask questions and to serve customers efficiently and effectively.

Having inspired employees who are fully engaged with high-octane service attitudes can translate into more sales across the board. One employee with passion is better than 40 who are merely interested. Therefore, I feel the objective of a true leader is to inspire their employees to be passionate and to unleash the motivation within an entire team.

The Bottom Line

In the banking world, we juggle many balls as we strive to keep up with the latest technology, market to a diverse customer base, and manage a professional team made up of multiple generations.

We know that being on top of our game in every aspect is what makes us stand out in our respective markets. In today’s banking climate, competition is stiff and online banking (and other tools) customers want create unique challenges for us. That’s why we must be connected to our customers, aware of our competitors and keenly tuned into the basics of excellent service and timely products.

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It's a lot to juggle. So how do we bring these demands into focus so that we can be successful and not drop any balls? Here are some examples.

We set out to gain more profitable checking accounts with a sales campaign based on the popular CBS show 'Survivor.' We actually doubled our goal by using the "I Principle" to "Interest, Inspire, Improve and Influence Individuals." In other words, we provided incentives or benefits to employees that turned a "What's in it for ME?" culture into a "What's in it for US?" culture.

Given the success of the effort, we knew we were on to something, so we didn't stop there. We've had numerous successful campaigns since then by setting measurable, attainable goals and providing incentives that reward employees with inspiring prizes—such as vacations, house and car payments, cash and time off.

While those prizes may seem large, the results have been well worth it. Our new deposit campaign was set to gain \$10 million in a five-week period. We gained \$34 million in that same timeframe by using various incentives—including awarding one day off for every \$100,000 in deposits referred to the bank, and offering a vacation to Las Vegas for bringing in \$1 million in deposits. Our employees were so engaged that we extended the campaign by three months—bringing in a total of \$65 million in deposits.

The payoff for the bank has been substantial—not only in reaching goals by selling our products, but also the immeasurable benefit of creating an environment where our employees want to come to work and own their success. It's evident that when given a challenge, they will respond and will give us that extra edge in the marketplace.

By building on these successes, we've inspired our employees to develop their "motivational muscles." We know we can't motivate others, but we can inspire them to motivate themselves and push to reach their full potential.

A 2007 study by Towers Perrin revealed that only 21 percent of employees are fully engaged, with 38 percent being partly or fully disengaged. That costs us as bankers a lot of clients, deposits and referrals.

Consider for a moment what would happen if every employee was fully engaged, putting forth his/her best effort and being personally vested in the results we get each day. That should be our goal as managers—to inspire our employees we worked so hard to recruit to live up to their full potential.

With all due respect to our CFO, this is our true "bottom line." When we are successful in inspiring our team, the juggling act seems to naturally fall into a rhythm of employees wanting to provide excellent customer service, customers wanting to bank with us (and refer their friends and family), and competitors asking us how we do it.

Building Bridges

Whether we are working across the generational gap or fostering relationships with our customers, perceptions are extremely important to every successful organization. When managers see that every interaction with an employee is a chance to create a stronger relationship, those employees will

likely translate that into their daily interactions with customers.

In any relationship, the number one cause of problems is the lack of communication, or the manner in which you communicate. According to employee attitude surveys at Hewlett-Packard and GE, improved two-way employee-to-supervisor communication increases productivity and employee retention.

While we strive to inspire employees through fun and exciting sales campaigns, we truly show ourselves as leaders when we take the time to care and build relationships with them. We do this through considerate coaching, active listening and treating all employees with respect. In turn, the bank reaps the benefits of lower employee turnover and higher productivity.

We can learn a lot from other industries about what is meaningful to employees. For instance, on Google's top 10 reasons to work at their company, employees rated the company's benefit package at number five, behind 'connecting with the world' and 'doing something they believe in.'

Our reasons for working at our bank may differ because of the nature of our business, but we can certainly claim that

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what we do is important to the vibrancy of our community and security of our customers.

When we see our bank as a leader in the industry and our employees as leaders in our bank, we aspire to be the bank of choice for our customers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Townley, CFMP is Senior Vice President of The National Banks of Central Texas, where he serves as Director of Marketing and Director of Human Resources. He is also President of Motivational Management Group, which is a bank consulting company owned by The National.



Brian has been in the banking industry since 1987, when he began forming his rare blend of bank operations and bank marketing knowledge. He has created many successful motivational programs that have been incorporated within employee incentive plans, talent management solutions, employee sales campaigns and marketing plans, just to name a few. His expertise is based on his real world experience—where he has implemented strategies that create results and build morale, with an insistence on accountability.

In 2005, the Texas Bankers Association asked Brian to speak to Texas bankers about his bank's success. From that first event, word-of-mouth interest spread to the point where Brian has now become a popular national speaker, and has also been featured in various banking publications. He recently accepted an invitation to speak in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to bankers from nine Asian countries.

In July 2011, he published his first book, *Inspiring Leadership: Unleashing Motivation in the Workplace*, which shares his trademark leadership tactics that have played a major role in his personal achievements, as well as in the success of his bank.

Brian is a graduate of Texas Bankers Association's Operations School, Texas A&M University's Bank Operations Institute, American Bankers Association's Bank Marketing and Management School, and the University of Wisconsin's Graduate School of Banking-Human Resources School. He is also a Certified Financial Marketing Professional (CFMP) and serves on many industry boards and committees.

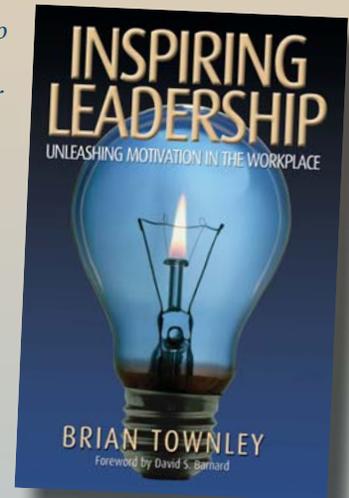
Want even *more* inspiration? Get your very own copy of Brian Townley's new book!

"Brian understands how critical it is to cultivate the talent in your employees and motivate them to perform to their potential. He knows you can have the finest systems and business plans in place, but without the ability to coach and inspire people, you will likely not succeed. This is what Brian does best."

Kathy Box, Texas Bankers Association

"Brian delivers his presentation with so much energy and enthusiasm that the audience leaves motivated and ready to implement his ideas into their workplace. Our association has hired Brian to bring his strategic messages to human resource directors statewide. After hiring him the first time, they said, 'Bring him back!' So we did, and will continue to do so!"

Donna Atkinson, West Virginia Bankers



Imagine if the untapped potential in your team was unleashed. Imagine if your employees saw your success as their success. Imagine if your highest goals were indeed reachable because the staff you hired were inspired to make them happen.

Brian knows that motivation is inspired by leadership, and he knows the difference between being a "boss" and being a "leader." It's about coaching, not preaching. It's about knowing the strengths and weaknesses of every team member. It's about preparing supervisors, not just promoting good workers.

From recruiting to talent management to succession planning, Brian believes that excellent management and a motivated team are what elevate an organization to "next level" results.

To get your very own copy of *Inspiring Leadership: Motivation in the Workplace*, visit BrianTownley.com.