



Motivational Leadership (Third Edition)

10 Myths Managers Must Debunk to Avoid a Disengaged, Dissatisfied or Unproductive Workforce

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Leadership coach Mark Oliver identifies 10 myths you must combat to enhance your leadership potential. Along the way, he says, discard the belief that people inherit leadership skills rather than acquire them. Knowing that people can learn to lead and that learned behavior plays an 80% role in leadership explains why companies must conduct proper leadership training. Although Oliver's elliptical style makes certain aspects of his information a little harder to absorb, he provides a useful, practical guide to the challenges of identifying and preparing future leaders.

Take-Aways

- Ten leadership myths can blunt your ability to lead.
- Myth 1: "Leaders are born and not made."
- Myth 2: "To be a good leader, I have to be charismatic."
- Myth 3: "My people are naturally resistant to change."
- Myth 4: "We lose good people because we don't pay enough."
- Myth 5: "It's impossible to motivate unmotivated staff."
- Myth 6: "My managers must have the technical expertise to lead their teams."
- Myth 7: "We don't have time to innovate."
- Myth 8: "I have to treat all my people the same to be fair."
- Myth 9: "There's nothing I can do about the stress in my role or my people's roles."
- Myth 10: "We can fix our leadership issues ourselves without outside help."

Summary

Ten leadership myths can blunt your ability to lead.

Your organization expects its senior executives to boost the performance of their teams. But your teams may have to deal with a very fluid business environment and inadequate resources. Several leadership fallacies blunt your ability to lead, especially in trying times, and prevent you from making the most of the link between leadership and motivation. Understanding and thwarting 10 leadership myths will help you boost your team's capabilities:

Myth 1: "Leaders are born, not made."

Most managers believe that they could improve their leadership capabilities, but they may wonder if you have to be born with leadership skills to become a really good leader. Actually, leadership is a skill you can learn, and the idea of the "natural leader" is a myth. Non-genetic issues play an 80% role in top-flight leadership. As leaders, women tend to perform better than men, but their way of operating as leaders derives, at least in part, from imposed cultural roles. For example, society encourages women to pay more attention to relationships. Therefore, women do better in leadership areas that include supportiveness, initiative, openness and communication.

"A 'Fortune' survey found that only 7% of CEOs think their organizations are developing effective leaders."

Training leaders works only if the training is done properly. American firms spend about \$14 billion a year on leadership development that seldom creates better leaders. Companies spend \$50 billion worldwide on developing leaders, with mixed results. Leaders command less respect today than they did in the past. Most people believe today's leaders don't care as much about ethics or effectiveness as earlier leaders did.

Myth 2: "To be a good leader, I have to be charismatic."

You can have charisma and still lack leadership skill. Or you can have no charisma but possess leadership skills in abundance. Unlike charisma, which is nice to have and does draw people to support you, the ability to inspire people is crucial to leadership. While charisma can uplift people's feelings, inspiration impels people to take action.

Myth 3: "My people are naturally resistant to change."

Most people don't like change even when they face a distressing situation. They fear change could affect them adversely. Leaders must inspire their colleagues to accept change. Most individuals feel optimistic about change, but they don't like it being imposed on them in situations in which they have little control.

“Although nearly 75% of managers in the United States have received some form of training in how to coach employees, only 27% of employees have ever been coached.”

Senior executives who formulate a change initiative feel good about it because they control it. Those lower in the hierarchy might feel the proposed reforms make sense, but if they feel railroaded or left with little control or influence over a change that affects them, they may oppose it.

Myth 4: “We lose good people because we don’t pay enough.”

Recruiters often say that people join and leave jobs because of their boss. According to one study, 70% of employees say they chose to leave a company because of their manager. Another study suggests that having a bad manager can boost the possibility of an employee having a heart attack by 60%. Organizations with bad managers suffer another downside: They could lose their best performers because those people seek jobs elsewhere.

“Research indicates the genetic component of leadership capability is, at most, about 20% and probably less.”

To ensure continual employee engagement, you must do more than make sure that staffers like where they work. There are four levels of engagement. Employees at the “Disaffection” level often quit. Employees at the “Satisfaction” level may mentally quit, but they stick around and don’t contribute. Self-determination theory holds that the next two engagement levels – “Motivation” and “Commitment” – are more influential. It suggests that extrinsic motivators like salary aren’t as persuasive as intrinsic motivators that satisfy three psychological needs:

1. **“Competence”** – These employees need the experience of mastery.
2. **“Relatedness”** – These employees need to interact with and care for others.
3. **“Autonomy”** – These employees need to select their tasks, understand the company’s business and have the scope to be authentic at work.

“Just pay people enough to get pay out of the way. Then lead them, so they can be happy at work.”

Capitalist societies often suggest that wealth and health lead to happiness. Studies find that when people receive a financial windfall, its impact lasts about five years. They then revert to their pre-windfall mental and emotional states.

Myth 5: “It’s impossible to motivate unmotivated staff.”

Command-and-control managers get frustrated because they believe that motivating employees demands a lot of effort. Being a leader and exerting authority aren’t the same thing. You can coerce people to do what you want, but that’s not leadership.

“Too many times, engagement measures are not valid as they confuse the four engagement levels: dissatisfaction, satisfaction, motivation and commitment.”

Many organizations use bonuses and tangible rewards to motivate their employees. But financial rewards don't influence everyone. For example, religious symbolism motivates believers, but it may have little influence on other people. Tangibles can't motivate everyone; only intangibles can do that. This means that your real motivation may come from your feelings about money, your religious beliefs, or how you relate to your spouse and children.

“Nothing tangible can make us motivated. All motivation comes from the intangible.”

Psychologist Edward Deci suggests that using tangible rewards could work against intrinsic motivation. Motivation that stems from the desire to get a reward actually lessens people's intrinsic motivation.

Myth 6: “My managers must have the technical expertise to lead their teams.”

Many executives believe that when they hire someone for a leadership role, they must ensure that the person possesses the necessary technical know-how. This belief could prove harmful. Managers often spend more energy on being sure they meet technical concerns than on handling the human aspect of their work. As a result, 65% of Americans feel that getting rid of their bosses would make them happier than receiving salary increases.

“It has been observed that you can use the carrot and stick to manage people, but treat people like donkeys and they will tend to act like donkeys.”

Managers need to establish and enhance rapport with employees. This requires managers to improve their emotional intelligence. Many people need to focus on professional skills when they begin work, whether those skills are in, for example, accountancy, engineering or the law, but then – once they're promoted into management, for instance – they need to learn how to supervise and how to relate to people. The organization should then evaluate how well the leader manages his or her team's performance, rather than focusing on the executive's individual performance.

“Have you heard the saying often used in recruitment circles: “You join a company, but you leave a boss?”

A person's leadership skills can determine how well his or her team works and its levels of motivation. To sum up the distinction between management and leadership, the late educator and author Stephen Covey suggested that you can manage resources, but you must lead people. Executives can get into trouble when they try to manage people by treating them like things.

“To be fair, we must treat people as they need to be treated and not necessarily treat everyone the same.”

Managing people can be more difficult than mustering the professional competence an assignment demands. A manager who has technical skills could gain more satisfaction from doing technical work than from providing leadership. Such managers might be tempted to solve technical problems themselves rather than delegating to their teams and relying on them. If colleagues come to them for guidance, such managers might suggest solutions rather than asking their teams to come up with their own answers.

“Charismatic leaders’ are often more arrogant and also more able to lead people to catastrophe.”

Technology is critical to a company’s success or failure. The launch of Netflix led to the demise of videocassette rental company Blockbuster, whose management thought the firm was in the business of distributing entertainment. In fact, its real business was giving customers temporary possession of content they didn’t want to own permanently. A decade prior to its collapse, Blockbuster had the option to buy Netflix for \$50 million, but Blockbuster’s executives turned down the deal. That alone illustrates the major role that inadequate leadership played in the company’s demise.

Myth 7: “We don’t have time to innovate.”

Refuting this myth introduces two attendant issues: 1) You might not set priorities as effectively as you could and, as a result, you might mismanage your time; or 2) you might not recognize how important innovation should be to your organization. You could believe that if your business performs successfully, you have no reason to do anything differently. However, that presupposes a static world. In today’s hyper competitive business world, if you don’t change, you face the possibility of extinction.

“Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible.” (Colin Powell)

Most analysts will assure you that change is going to happen. But they can’t tell you exactly when or what shape the change will take. Organizational leaders must prepare for change when things are going well. To make things more difficult, you could get your predictions wrong. Consider Decca Recording Company, which turned down a recording contract with the Beatles in 1962. Decca believed that the band’s musical style was no longer popular.

“Change management does not generally do enough to address the people issues.”

In 1932, Albert Einstein stated that modern science had little chance of extracting nuclear energy. Twelve years later, he helped make it possible. In 2007, Steve Ballmer, then the CEO of Microsoft, predicted that the iPhone wouldn’t win significant market share.

You must innovate. This doesn't mean that only leaders innovate. Every employee must recognize the importance of innovation and continual improvement. Senior management has to set the tone for this by being open to innovation, including accepting that mistakes can happen. Examine your organizational systems and culture to determine which changes would encourage employees at all levels to innovate.

Myth 8: "I have to treat all my people the same to be fair."

Most cultures around the world observe the Golden Rule, that is, to treat others as you would like to be treated. Leaders find it hard to act on this principle because people and cultures vary so much. People evaluate their own actions according to their intentions; others evaluate them on how they behave. Most people interpret others' actions through the prism of their own values.

"In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice, there is." (baseball legend Yogi Berra)

How people perceive situations depends on their cultural background and character. Consider this ethics question: Imagine that your friend's car hits a pedestrian. As a passenger in the car, you know that your friend exceeded the local speed limit. Your friend's lawyer tells you to testify that your friend was driving under the speed limit. No other witnesses observed the accident. With your testimony, your friend could get off without serious consequences. People from Australia, Canada and the United States generally don't believe that your friend should expect you to bear false witness and lie. By contrast, people from China, Indonesia and South Korea think that you'd be treating your friend shabbily if you didn't fulfill your friend's lawyer's request.

In your quest for equity, make sure you treat people the way you should, which doesn't necessarily mean treating everyone the same way.

Myth 9: "There's nothing I can do about the stress in my role or my people's roles."

Most modern organizations face a stress epidemic. Every year since 2009, more than 40% of British companies have seen a rise in mental health problems among their employees. About a third of the people working in organizations have dealt with a mental health issue. The leading stressors include fear of flying, public speaking, heights, the dark and intimacy. You can reduce your stress by practicing meditation. Seek the help of a skilled meditation teacher. Consistent meditation practice can foster significant positive change.

Myth 10: "We can fix our leadership issues ourselves without outside help."

Have you successfully tried to resolve issues related to your organization or work group? Have you asked if your organization has the leadership resources to deal with its challenges? Leadership development is an important part of dealing with organizational problems.

Well-planned and thought-out training programs emphasize behavioral learning. They try to modify participants' perceptions to achieve better decision making. They help participants understand themselves, so they can deal more effectively with their personal and professional issues. The right leadership development providers can assist you immeasurably. Make sure that the methods and models you select provide applicable insights, and that your participants can use them practically and effectively.

About the Author

Mark Oliver founded MarkTwo Consulting in 2002 to train organizations in leadership development, talent management, coaching, and using online resources for both groups and individuals.



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