

“The Only Leadership Book You'll Ever Need”
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Book Note by Dave Kraft

If people do not willingly follow you, you will be a manager, but not a leader. You can't improve if you don't know your areas of strength, much less your areas of weakness. Companies that do not place much value on employee satisfaction do not conduct surveys.

Dealing with low morale is a time-consuming headache. Why do it when you don't have to? In most instances, people leave because they lack a meaningful working relationship with an immediate supervisor.

Contented Organizations were remarkably similar in three areas:

1. Aligning their people with their organization's purpose and objectives.
2. Caring about and recognizing people.
3. Enabling people to perform by providing necessary training, information, and tools.

Successful organizations separate themselves from less-prosperous organizations by providing employees with an understanding of the company's mission and vision, setting clear expectations, helping people understand the significance of their contributions to the company, and giving them the opportunity to learn and grow.

There are only 10 keys that distinguish Best-of-the-Best organizations.

1. A Compelling, Positive Vision With Clear Goals.
2. Communication—The Right Stuff at the Right Time.
3. Select the Right People for the Right Job.
4. Remember: We're on the Same Team.
5. Cool Stuff—Continuous Improvement and Innovation.
6. Recognize and Reward Excellent Performance.
7. Accountability Counts.
8. Every Employee Learns and Grows.
9. Problems...No Problem!
10. It's All About the Customer.

People join an organization for a job and leave because of a manager.

Key #1: A Compelling, Positive Vision With Clear Goals

A vision is like the picture on a jigsaw puzzle box that shows you exactly what you are trying to create. I love reading mysteries, but I do not enjoy working in the middle of one. Some organizations state a vision, but do not live the vision or bring it to a reality. Employees are motivated by what they see on a daily basis in the halls, not what they read on the walls. A structure that is most effective at assisting the organization to achieve its vision leads to superior results. A clear vision and strategic goals are forces that encourage and energize people. It's a vision because you can see it. If you want to increase motivation, raise morale, and promote even higher levels of productivity, define a compelling, positive vision.

Key #2: Communication

The right stuff at the right time. When employees do not feel that their opinions and thoughts are welcomed or valued, they eventually stop making suggestions or decisions and just do what they are told. That's not the attitude that brings success. Best-of-the-Best leaders make an effort to seek out the thoughts and opinions of employees.

Key #3: Select the Right People for the Right Job

Give an employee an excellent leader, and you radically increase your chance of being rated as a Best-of-the-Best organization.

Key #4: Remember: We're on the Same Team

It is the breadth of teamwork that separates Best-of-the-Best organizations from the rest.

Key #5: Cool Stuff—Continuous Improvement and Innovation

Organizations get what they expect and what they measure.

Key #6: Recognize and Reward Excellent Performance

People who truly feel valued want to stay in the relationship.

Key #7: Accountability Counts

The Best-of-the-Best are better at clearly defining what is expected from employees. Many employees have a double whammy going against them: They are not clear on their job responsibilities, and the performance standards are unclear.

To rise to the level of Best-of-the-Best organizations, you need to be good at three things:

1. Clearly defining job responsibilities and ensuring employees understand those job responsibilities.
2. Providing ongoing, timely feedback that helps employees learn and grow.
3. Holding people accountable to meeting those responsibilities.

Key #8: Every Employee Learns and Grows

Key #9: Problems...No Problem!

What makes Best-of-the-Best organizations so different is that they not only identify the problem quickly, but they do a considerably better job resolving the problem.

Key #10: It's All About the Customer

Being the leader who makes a difference. The difference in how employees feel about the organization is in direct correlation to the quality of their leaders. A compelling vision and clearly articulated goals are the foundation of Best-of-the-Best organizations. The ultimate goal of a manager with a status quo vision is to keep things from getting worse. It is impossible to keep levels of morale and productivity high if the leader is not a role model for a "can do" positive attitude. Clarify great performance for every employee.

In our experience, only about half of the managerial population is comfortable admitting an error.

"Outworking" others means you add value by: Bringing a compelling, positive vision, solving quality or service problems that no one else has solved, dealing with difficult employees or customers, and/or creating an environment where employees love coming to work.

People do not follow those they do not trust.

Trust-Building #1: Clarify, Crystallize, and Communicate Your Organization's Core Values

Trust-Building #2: Be Consistent

Trust-Building #3: Keep Your Word

Trust-Building #4: Ensure That Communication Is Open and Honest

Trust-Building #5: Involve Employees in Decisions That Impact Their Work

Trust-Building #6: Trust Employees

When employees know they are trusted, they find it much easier to trust management. A major contributor to employees' satisfaction, estimated in some surveys to be as much as 70 percent, is the relationship they experience with their immediate supervisor or manager. Great organizations know that it is the right relationships at work that attract the best employees and keeps them performing at peak effectiveness. The best employees leave because of poor leadership.

Stupid Behavior #1: Inability to control emotions. Being considered a moody or emotional person is one of the toughest labels to shed and change in the minds of employees and peers.

Stupid Behavior #2: Making Impulsive Decisions. These emotional and impulsive managers share a common characteristic. They seldom consider overall organizational or departmental priorities, and they hold little regard for the importance of someone else's work.

Stupid Behavior #3: Blaming others when you lack confidence in your ability to influence your environment and take the necessary actions to produce positive results, one way to compensate is to look for others to blame

Stupid Behavior #4: Thinking, "It's All About Me!" To attempt to motivate people to change by telling them how badly they handled things in the past does nothing but cause animosity and resentment toward the manager.

Stupid Behavior #5: Negativity. Poor visions with mediocre goals lead to a workforce with low morale.

Stupid Behavior #6: Failing to Communicate. There are several categories of communication blunders, including communication that is not timely, direct, or honest.

Stupid Behavior #7: Talking First, Listening Later. In reality, many managers commit leadership malpractice on a daily basis because they react without thinking and say something they later regret.

Stupid Behavior #8: Yearning for Acceptance. Managers who let a real or perceived friendship get in the way of identifying performance problems that affect the entire team are not likely to achieve the organization's vision.

Stupid Behavior #9: Exhibiting Poor Judgment. Talk negatively about one employee in front of another employee. Speak negatively about their boss or organization. Believe that direct reports have a desire to become personally involved in a relationship with them, and then act on these desires. Use foul language or say inappropriate things to others.

Stupid Behavior #10: Having Selective Hearing

Stupid Behavior #11: Not Trusting People

12-Step Recovery From Stupid Behaviors

You can develop your skills as a leader and increase your value to the organization by following the 12 steps:

Step #1: Stop the Behavior

Step #2: Admit You Made a Mistake

Step #3: Apologize

Step #4: Ask for Help

Step #5: Give Credit Where Credit Is Due

Step #6: Take Responsibility

Step #7: Focus on the Future. Asking these two questions: Where do we want to be? How do we get there?

Step #8: Take Action

Step #9: Think First and Then Speak

Step #10: Listen and Ask Questions

Step #11: Thank People

Step #12: Be Grateful

CREATING WORKPLACE EXCELLENCE

Key #1: A Compelling, Positive Vision With clear goals

Strategy 1: Communicate Your Organization's Purpose. To remain motivated, loyal, and enthusiastic, people need to be connected to a meaningful purpose.

Strategy 2: Get Excited About Tomorrow

Strategy 3: Have High Expectations. There will always be resistance to high expectations. "Unless a man undertakes more than he possibly can do, he will never do all that he can". —Henry Drummond

Strategy 4: Create a PLV (Personal Leadership Vision). If you want your team members to follow your lead, you've got to be absolutely clear about who you are and what you will or will not stand for.

"People are more inclined to be drawn in if their leader has a compelling vision. Great leaders help people get in touch with their own aspirations and then will help them forge those aspirations into a personal vision." —John Kotter

Strategy 5: Set goals to turn your vision into reality. We noticed that great leaders always have a set of clearly defined goals. The accomplishment of anything momentous begins with clear goals. Some studies have found that up to 90 percent of the population does not set goals. Without objectives, you spend the majority of your time reacting to—instead of creating—your environment.

"The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach." —Benjamin E. Mays

Strategy 6: Create a Sense of Urgency. "People don't resist change. They resist being changed!" —Peter Senge

Strategy 7: Align Structure for the best interests of the organization

Key #2: Communication—The right stuff at the right time

Strategy 8: Tell the Truth. "If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything." —Mark Twain

Strategy 9: Communicate Vision and Goals to Everyone—and Do It Often. In a survey conducted by Right Management Consultants, two-thirds of employees did not understand their employer's business strategy and were not passionate about their jobs.

"The very essence of leadership is that you have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet." —Theodore Hesburgh

Strategy 10: Create and communicate crystal-clear roles and responsibilities. Top performers do not like working for organizations where they are not clear on what is expected from them. "Good men prefer to be accountable." —Michael Edwards

Strategy 11: Lead with an open mind. Most leaders say they have an open-door policy, but employees find out quickly that, although the door is open, the mind is closed. Of all the skills of leadership, listening is the most valuable—and one of the least understood.

Strategy 12: Ask Instead of Tell “To promote cooperation, remember: people tend to resist what is forced upon them. People tend to support that which they help to create.” — Vince Pfaff

Strategy 13: Know Reality With MBWA (Management by Walking Around)

Strategy 14: Eliminate the communication lag time

Strategy 15: Invite HR to the Big Dance

Strategy 16: In times of crisis, get calmer. The greatness of a leader is in direct proportion to the size of the crisis that can be handled. People do not follow leaders who lack confidence to lead the organization out of crisis.

Strategy 17: Focus on what’s important. As a leader, your success is dependent on your ability to put things into perspective and focus on what’s important.

Strategy 18: Promise problems while promising solutions

Key #3: Select the right people for the right job

Strategy 19: Hire the best people you can find

Strategy 20: Know the needs and goals of your employees

Strategy 21: Ensure Each Employee has goals that align with the department, division, and organization

Strategy 22: Support a meaningful work-life balance

Strategy 23: Breathe life into your company with new blood

Strategy 24: Cut the Anchors!

Strategy 25: Formally introduce new hires to the company or division

Strategy 26: Pay people a competitive wage for the job they do

Strategy 27: Show employees where the money goes

Key #4: Remember: We’re on the Same Team

Strategy 28: Ensure that you’re loyal to the right team

“When we are debating an issue, loyalty means giving me your honest opinion, whether you think I’ll like it or not. Disagreement, at this stage, stimulates me. But once a decision has been made, the debate ends. From that point on, loyalty means executing the decision as if it was your own.” —Colin Powell

Strategy 29: Meet Regularly and Often. Productive meetings tend to occur more often, but for shorter periods of time.

Strategy 30: Let Out the Crawdads

Strategy 31: Aim, don't blame

Strategy 32: Value diversity

Strategy 33: Have a sense of humor. In more than 20 years of providing executive coaching services, we estimate that less than 10 percent of executives who are fired lose their jobs because of technical incompetence. The other 90 percent are let go for their inability to either build a cohesive team or get along with others.

Strategy 34: Just shut up and listen

Strategy 35: To see the whole team, get up in the balcony

Strategy 36: Honor people's time

Strategy 37: Go FISH and have fun!

Strategy 38: Do something significant for your community

Key #5: Cool Stuff—Continuous improvement and innovation

Strategy 39: Great leaders keep people uncomfortable

Strategy 40: Innovate and outperform your competition. The corporate graveyard is full of organizations with a prescription for success, but who did not anticipate or produce the next product or service the consumer would need.

Strategy 41: Personally change first. Simply put, change is the reality and the organizations that refuse to acknowledge that reality will not survive what some have called "The Age of Instability."

Strategy 42: Be a role model for leading the new change. Try following these actions used by leaders who have helped pilot organizational change and improve workplace excellence.

- Involve employees in the change process.
- Ask, don't tell.
- Get both negative and positive leaders involved.
- Employees are not so much against change as they are against being changed.
- Raise expectations.
- Ask employees for their commitment.
- Over-communicate. It is almost impossible to over-communicate.
- Stay positive.

Strategy 43: Encourage and reward employees' Ideas, suggestions, and recommendations It is difficult to create workplace excellence unless everyone on the team thinks about what needs to be done; specifically what each individual can do to improve the organization.

Strategy 44: Change what you reward

Strategy 45: Honor and cherish the past. A good strategy is to honor the past, and then communicate how your goals and actions can make the future even better.

Key #6: Recognize and reward excellent performance

Strategy 46: Take Recognition off Your Things-to-Do List. What Ventrice is asking all of us to do is to make praise and recognition a part of everything we do in our lives.

Strategy 47: Planned, spontaneous recognition works best.

“Nothing is more effective than sincere, accurate praise, and nothing is more lame than a cookie-cutter compliment.”

Strategy 48: Appropriately reward the highest achievers

Strategy 49: Find a reason to celebrate. “Celebrate what you want to see more of.” —Tom Peters

Strategy 50: Honor special days in the life of your employees and organization

Strategy 51: Recognition Is everyone’s job

“Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.” —Mother Teresa

Strategy 52: Be grateful for people

Strategy 53: Kill the “Employee of the Month” award

Key #7: Accountability counts

Strategy 54: Demand unwavering commitment. Exhibiting behaviors that undermine the achievement of goals should not be tolerated.

Strategy 55: Measure hard results

Clarity of mission and vision. Clarity of strategic direction. Clarity of the organization’s strategic goals. Employees knowing exactly what goals they are responsible for achieving. Holding employees accountable to defined performance standards.

Strategy 56: Be Fair: Hold everyone accountable for results. When people are not held equally accountable for producing results, employees do not perceive the manager or the organization as being fair. Holding all employees accountable to clearly defined outcomes is hard work.

Strategy 57: Take responsibility! When leaders admit mistakes and problems and provide a clear strategy to resolve the problem, employees find it easier to respect and follow the person who has control over the outcome.

Strategy 58: Resolve Conflicts Quickly. To resolve conflicts quickly, you will find it helpful to:

- Force communication.
- Meet face-to-face.
- Develop options.
- Use your organization’s vision as a guidepost.
- Agree on next actions.
- Follow up.

Strategy 59: Give Gossipers and whiners more work

Strategy 60: Deal with bullies or abusive people in the organization

Strategy 61: Enforce the company's policy on harassment

Strategy 62: Don't be held hostage or you'll need to have your business cards reprinted with a new title: Hostage.

"Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage." —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Strategy 63: Share your poorest performers with a competitor. People with performance problems deserve four things from their boss and the organization:

1. Clearly defined performance goals.
2. Timely feedback if the goals are not being achieved.
3. Crystal-clear knowledge of the consequences if the performance does not improve in a specific time frame.
4. Support to help the poor performance improve by, for example, training or mentoring.

Strategy 64: Smash the time clock. To create workplace excellence, set high expectations and focus on the results of the individual, not the hour hand on the time clock.

"Don't tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results."
General George S. Patton

Strategy 65: Do the right thing! There is never a right time to do the wrong thing.

Strategy 66: Swim with the dolphins

Key #8: Ensure that every employee learns and grows

Strategy 67: Ensure that everyone has a growth and development plan.

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership." —Harvey S. Firestone

Strategy 68: Be a Mentor

Strategy 69: Continuously delegate increased responsibility. Delegation frees you up from tactical tasks and allows you to concentrate on the strategic work that leads to innovation.

"No man will make a great leader who wants to do it all himself or get all the credit." —Andrew Carnegie

Strategy 70: Be a Pygmalion: Believe in people

Key #9: Problems...no Problem!

Strategy 71: Empower employees. Real empowerment means giving employees the information they require to make decisions without having to go to a supervisor or manager for approval. Companies who care about what their employees think will work hard to empower them to take responsibility and make the right decisions.

“The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.” —Theodore Roosevelt

Strategy 72: Identify and handle problems quickly

Key #10: It's all about the customer

Strategy 73: Create policies and procedures that better serve both the needs of your customers and your staff. The number-one goal is to create an environment where employees love to come to work and customers love to do business.

Strategy 74: Stop beating a dead horse.

“The single most important thing to remember about any enterprise is that there are no results inside its walls. The result of a business is a satisfied customer.” —Peter Drucker

Strategy 75: Recognize that the customer is not always right. As Gordon Bethune highlighted very carefully, customers constantly come and go, but your employees are with you day in and day out.

Strategy 76: Make your customer feel special

Priceless Outcomes

Priceless Outcome #1: Employees feel they are treated fairly. Holding everyone accountable to clearly communicated performance standards helps to eliminate the feeling of favoritism. Clearly, communicating performance standards and then holding people accountable to them helps to build an environment that is fair and absent of favoritism.

Priceless Outcome #2: Trust in management and/or the owners. Our data tell us that a lack of trust in managers, especially senior managers, strongly influences an organization's ability to establish workplace excellence.

Priceless Outcome #3: I Love My Job!

We have interviewed hundreds of people who proudly say, “I love my job.” The interviews revealed that four major features distinguished these people and their work environments.

1. First, engaged employees who love their jobs are competent in what they do and confident in how they do it.
2. Second, these engaged employees enjoy variety in their work.
3. Third, these employees are empowered to make decisions and take actions to get their jobs accomplished.

4. Fourth, people who love their jobs feel challenged to accomplish their work. People who love their jobs tend to believe that the work they are doing is important. When people feel competent and confident about jobs that provide them with challenge, empowerment, and variety, they will develop passion for and enjoy their jobs.

Priceless Outcome #4: Retention. Poor and marginal employees best serve Best-of-the-Best organizations by working for a competitor.

Priceless Outcome #5: Employees feel valued

Communicating the organization's vision and expectations for performance helps to set up employees for success.

Priceless Outcome #6: Positive Reputation for Workplace Excellence