

Engaging Star Performers

Imagine yourself having fun—what comes to mind?

Now, consider what causes you to want to perform well at work. Does work trigger the same emotions that playing does for you?

I've asked these questions of hundreds of people. One conversation jumps out at me as I reflect on all the ways people have answered these questions. A bit of background before I share the conversation I had with John as I was volunteering at an Odyssey of the Mind (OM) state competition. I am a passionate volunteer for Odyssey of the Mind. OM is a national creativity building competition for teams that are focused on solving long-term and spontaneous problems. On this particular day, I was matched with a partner whom I had never met before—this was John. He was 20-something and a recent college graduate. In our volunteer role, we were responsible for checking in teams for events and giving them the details about what they would need next. John had a *very* casual style of communicating, and he often appeared uninterested in whatever he was doing. However, after observing him for a while, I realized he really was on top of every detail and knew where each team was in the lineup and what information the team needed next. Despite the opposite appearance, he did feel a sense of accomplishment in what he was doing. John had the process and pace down pat 1

even though he was not projecting himself confidently. His communication and body language with people did not match the results he was producing. He was a star at the tactical work we were doing, but no one would have thought that during an individual conversation with him.

Sometimes John and I were very busy. Other times there was nothing to do. That is when I asked the question, “John, in your work, what causes you to want to perform well?” I could tell from the flash of his smile that he knew his answer immediately: “When my boss is watching, or when the girl I have a crush on is watching. The girl I want to date works in the same place I do.” I asked, “If they were here today, what would have been different?” He replied, “Oh, . . . um, I would have shown that I knew what I was doing, and I would have been more friendly to everyone who came up to our table for information.” Then I asked, “John, when you are working, do you feel the same feelings that you do when you are playing?” He immediately said, “No! Work is work. I am glad when it is time to go so I can then relax and have fun.”

In these conversations in which I’ve asked people what causes them to want to perform well, I’ve received two types of responses. Some people, like John, have said they wanted to please or perform for others. John paid attention to his impact only on those he wanted to impress, to people outside himself.

Other people have said they wanted to perform well because they had their own internal standard to live up to. When I asked Olivia the question, “What causes you to want to perform well?” she pulled out a personal statement about what she is committed to in everything she does. Her statement included these points: “Deliver outstanding service in everything I do, remember that I have choices and I can make my own decisions, and be aware of my own feelings and allow them to inform my actions rather than create reactions.” Her statement has been a reminder to her of the person she aspires to be every day. She has been internally motivated by this commitment she made to

herself. Keeping the commitment has been like a game she plays with herself. For Olivia, it has been fun. She knows she is capable of being a star for her own enjoyment of the feeling that comes from having lived up to her own standards. Olivia has had a conversation with herself about the person she wants to be and how she wants to perform. She has used this personal commitment to meet her own standard for her own performance, while John has been using someone else's views of him to determine his star-ability.

Olivia is playing, and John is working.

John was not focused on or aware of challenging or impressing himself, while Olivia wanted to challenge and impress herself every day. In the long term, Olivia's consistent commitment will cause her to surpass John's level of productivity. As a manager, coach, or leader, what can you do to help your team members internalize the desire to perform well? Ask them! Ask, "What causes you to want to perform well?" After you have heard everything they have to say, ask, "When was the last time you had fun at work? What were you doing?"

Can you get a picture in your mind of your favorite coach?

If you are a manager or a leader who is responsible for developing people, imagine yourself as a coach. Why? Coaches are focused on the following:

- Building effective teams
- Engaging people in their own growth and learning
- Building new skills
- Developing high-potential performers
- Helping performers who want to achieve higher levels of success

Coaches ask questions like the ones I've been asking so that reflective learning occurs. They also explain and demonstrate how to accomplish desired goals. Being a great coach and manager requires knowing how to focus your team members on the right things to produce the desired results.

An Emotional Wake

When I was 20-something, I had a boss who asked me and the other members of the team to write our own individual statement for what each of us wanted to accomplish in the upcoming year. He asked us to think about what we wanted to be outstanding at doing and to write a personal statement of commitment. Then he asked us to use the Be, Do, Then Have formula. Who would we need to *be*, what would we need to *do*, so that we could *have* the desired results? A week later, the boss videotaped each team member sharing his or her own Be, Do, Then Have statement. We watched the videos together, and he gave us our own copy. This activity enabled each person to internalize his or her own motivation to be the kind of performer who would produce the desired results no matter who was watching. It made our work seem like playing a game that was fun. Our emotions were engaged in achieving our goals at work.

Richard Boyatzis, PhD, a distinguished professor from the Department of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University, walked on stage to deliver the keynote address to an audience of executive coaches (including me) with Aretha Franklin's voice blasting in the background:

What you want, I got it. What you need, you know I got it . . . All I'm asking is for a little . . . R-E-S-P-E-C-T . . . Find out what it means to me . . . R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Take care, ohhhh, Sock it to me . . . A little respect, oh yeah.

As he danced wildly, clapping his hands above his head on stage, he shouted that great leaders move us through our emotions. Learning retention is higher when we engage the brain with music and humor. As a manager and leader, you may often wonder how to inspire people to work on what would be beneficial to them. Great leaders understand that emotions are the connectors that engage people. Employees are not persuaded by your logic and data. Instead, they take action based on their

emotions, and then they use the research to justify their actions. Emotion is what causes change.

For over 30 years, Dr. Boyatzis has been researching what causes sustained desired change. He says that arousing, invoking, stimulating, and provoking the desires to develop and change require openness, adaptability, and tolerance for ambiguity. To get to the place in ourselves where we are open like this, we are triggering what he calls the “parasympathetic nervous system, or the Positive Emotional Attractor.”

Whom do you most enjoy coaching and developing? Who is drawn to your inspiring words of wisdom? When you reflect on your own expertise and content, what is it specifically that you help others to achieve in an excellent way? Being inspiring and sharing new skills are foundational to being a world-class coach because that is what triggers the Positive Emotional Attractor.

You know how to solve problems. The people you are developing have a problem or challenge that they want assistance in moving through. Your perspective, your past experience, your know-how are valuable to giving clarity and direction in solving challenges, right? People do not believe the message or the learning if they do not believe the messenger. Have you made the connection yourself about the ways in which you can confidently add value by sharing your research or experience? I’ll show you how to do this and how to be an outstanding coach!

Change is at the heart of all development because in order to develop new abilities, we take new actions. In my coaching and seminar Talent@Work, I ask participants to identify someone who changed them by bringing out the best in them. Who created a climate that changed your desire so that you wanted to be the best version of you that is possible? Do you notice that when this happened, you were focused not on merely getting by, but rather on being a shining star? Think about managers or leaders who have brought out the best in you. Then think about people who did the opposite, people you went out of your way to avoid:

CHAPTER 1

- Who brought out the best in me?
- Why were they able to do so? What did they do?
- How did I feel when I was with them? Or after I left them?
- Which leaders have brought out the worst in me?
- Why were they able to do so? What did they do?
- How did I feel when I was with them?

On the list of descriptions of people who have brought out the best in you, you probably said something like the following statements:

1. She was growing and sharing what she was learning with the team.
2. He was collaborative and listened to my ideas.
3. I felt valued by him.
4. She was passionate about the work.
5. She was confident.
6. He was future oriented, and he focused on solutions and how to implement them.
7. He asked great questions that encouraged me to think in new ways.
8. She was thoughtful and showed interest in what I was doing.
9. Trust built up in our relationship over time.
10. I felt hope and a sense of possibility.

On the other list, the people who have brought out the worst in you, we would likely see some of these comments:

1. He was very critical and judgmental—I always felt like I was doing something wrong.
2. She was distant and aloof, and she seemed cold or unwilling to engage.
3. He was too rules focused.

4. She seemed exasperated, frustrated, and annoyed much of the time.
5. He was self-absorbed.
6. I felt controlled by needing to please her.
7. He seemed angry and constrained, often complaining.
8. She focused only on problems and risks and what was being done wrong.
9. I did not feel like he cared about what I was doing.
10. She compared me to others and explained how great they were, but she did not share with me how or why this was relevant to me.

Notice how these reflect an emotional wake? When people inspire and lead us, they usually have a positive emotional wake. Emotions are contagious, and we catch the other person's emotional marinade as it spills over onto us. On the other hand, when someone shuts us down and squashes our growth, we experience a negative emotional wake. Leaders who know how to be effective coaches inspire us to new, higher levels of performance (see the box "Are You Inspiring?").

Are You Inspiring?

The word *inspire* literally means to breathe life into. To inspire others, you have to know what motivates them, and you have to be inspired yourself about the topic you are discussing. To be a leader and developer of others, you have to be inspiring. Motivation creates momentum. Flat, monotone, boring, same old same old is not inspired leading. Do you lift people up emotionally by the conversations you have with them? Do you inspire them to see new possibilities for growth? Do your conversations develop star performers who create the next possible vision for your business's growth? That is leadership.

Do you help people connect their long-term goals to the work they are doing today? That is inspiring. That feels like playing. That gives work purpose.

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Neuroscience research shows that when we are using the part of our brain that is about analyzing numbers and data, we have to shut down the part of our brain that engages others emotionally. In other words, don't begin with the spreadsheet data. Instead, start with a conversation about why this project is important for your listeners' long-term goals and for the business. Let that conversation bubble up. After it is crystal clear why this topic is important for personal and business reasons, you can review the spreadsheet to identify the data's connection to the value that is important to the individual or team you are working with. Describe the connection between the two, and do not assume others have connected the dots in the same way you have. Too often we've seen managers begin their conversations with the spreadsheet data and the steps in the procedure manuals—that approach is not engaging.

Emotions are contagious. If you are feeling angry much of the time, your staff will know that. If you are feeling hopeful much of the time, your staff will know that too. Emotions are not hidden by a smile. The chemical marinade we are swimming in is making up our current emotional state, and it impacts our thoughts and word choices, whether we realize it or not. Human beings are hardwired to pick up others' emotions. What you are feeling inside is impacting the outside whether you want it to or not. Emotional intelligence is a foundation skill area for anyone who aspires to be a developer of star performers.

Employees do not trust managers who toe the company line but do not believe it. One of my coaching clients told me she has identified the phrase her boss uses when he does not believe what he is repeating from company information or when he is passing down something he has been told to say. When he thinks it is ridiculous, he conveys that without saying so directly. Then she has to decide how to handle this mixed message, and she feels jammed up and stuck.

We all have annoying things that happen every day—the customer wants it scanned, not faxed, and you don't have access to a scanner; then you spill cranberry juice on your fresh white blouse as you are walking into an important meeting. These little stresses trigger

cortisol, a hormone that will be released by the adrenal gland into the emotional chemical marinade we are swimming in. Cortisol has three nasty side effects:

1. Shuts down your immune system
2. Stops neurogenesis, meaning that the brain cannot heal itself by creating new nerve tissue
3. Makes you retain and gain weight

So how do you inspire someone to be open to explore positive change without triggering the levels of fear or anger that cause unhealthy, high levels of cortisol?

Many people may realize when they are feeling stressed, but they likely do not know how to make the shift within themselves into renewal, where they are marinating in positive emotions. Do you? Do you know how to inspire others to do this?

Expressing gratitude triggers a feeling of more gratitude and moves us away from the stress response. Look for times to say and feel, "Thank you!"

The Promise of Coaching

Are you curious about the changing landscape of business and how coaching has become an integral part of helping leaders to develop new competencies needed to adapt and meet today and tomorrow's business challenges? John Kotter in *The Leadership Factor* said that 53 percent of executives do not have the skills to do their job adequately. Most need to be coached to master how to build relationships that engage, develop, and inspire their employees.

It is not the analysis, auditing, or metrics that cause a company to be great. Consider this: the company Enron was audited monthly, yet it failed painfully. We want to add value and to make a difference. We want to feel like we are doing what we were born to do. Effective leaders create a relationship through conversations that engage their followers. The quality of the

relationship we have with our employees and teams is based on the intentional, developmental conversations we create with them over time. If you are someone who loves to look at and track measurement results, numbers, and analyses, it is vital that you also learn how to connect with people on an emotional level, not just on a numbers level, if you aspire to develop a high-performing team or organization.

Asking, “What can I do to be helpful?” is a nice gesture, but to make a difference, that sentiment needs to be part of an ongoing conversation. Just offering to help a person does not make a difference or produce positive change. Studies of drug and alcohol abusers show they can get detoxed in a matter of weeks, but if the relationships and the conversations going on around them do not change dramatically, they will be back at the same behaviors that caused them to land in rehab within six months. For their behaviors to change, there has to be a system of support around them. A one-time or one-week effort will not help them. The same is true in turning mediocrity into greatness or poor team performance into high team performance.

What does make a difference?

1. Creating and maintaining ongoing conversations that communicate the purpose of the organization
2. Having conversations that describe the key accountabilities and expectations of each role
3. Asking questions that cause people to explore and find the connections between their own motivation and the organization’s purpose
4. Inspiring hope and vision for a new possibility
5. Having conversations that demonstrate compassion, understanding, and empathy
6. Paying attention to health and wellness in the body, mind, and spirit
7. Maintaining ongoing conversations for learning—that is, conversations that help employees increase their

knowledge of their present roles and their possible future roles

8. Having conversations that trigger feelings connected to why people are doing what they are doing

Creating Positive Change

As a manager, you want everyone on your team to be experiencing a positive change and momentum. Moments of starts and stops—a few steps forward, then a sense that nothing is happening, and then moving forward again—are typical during the beginnings of positive change. When we develop, we are creating change. We need to be patient with ourselves during this scrambled time, which will have many steps forward accompanied by a step backward here and there.

Times of personal change are rather similar to cooking, say, scrambled eggs. We start with the yolks and the whites in the shells—not where we want them, so time for a change. We crack the eggs open, and runny liquid spills out into the pan. With a fork we mix the eggs together to create a new consistency and color in the liquid mixture—still not where we want it. We have to be patient and confident, knowing that the desired results are on the way. As the eggs begin to cook, lumps form, but the runny mess is still all over the pan and not where we want it. After waiting and stirring for a few minutes, the eggs take the desired shape and consistency as yummy scrambled eggs. When we go through a change in our abilities, the same process occurs. Discovering who you want to be—what kind of coach, leader, or manager you want to be—occurs in fits and starts as we go through, as I describe them to my coaching clients, the “scrambled egg phases.” This is development.

You can help this process along by creating your own learning agenda and finding a caring person to nurture you in your journey. Finding a role model to inspire a vision for your ideal self is useful. A role model can help you to see who you are or who you can be. A role model can help you consider

new possibilities for your development and growth. Find someone who is able to believe in you and help you grow, someone who knows how to develop and coach you based on your strengths and natural talents.

People don't want to be fixed! When we slip into trying to fix other people, it does not work because people don't want to feel as if they are broken and must be fixed. People do want to grow and learn. There is a subtle shift in the mindset behind these two stances.

How can you tell when you are in a positive state of development and growth versus a negative state of development and growth—that is, a fix-it state?

Here's a list of traits that go along with a Positive Focus on Development and Growth:

1. I have a vision of my ideal self.
2. I know what triggers my hopes and joys.
3. I am playing to my strengths and the ways I contribute best.
4. My development plan is based on my own goals to grow into the level of performance I desire for myself.
5. I am focused on creative solutions.

Here's a list of traits that go along with a Negative Focus on Broken and Must Be Fixed:

1. I am focused on what triggers my fears and anger.
2. My focus is pessimistic and criticism based.
3. I am working with a Performance Improvement Plan because I am not meeting others' expectations.
4. I am focused on problems.

To be receptive to new ideas and to develop and grow, we have to be in the first state—open and positive focused.

This is why I provide 360-degree assessment data AFTER the people I am coaching have created their own vision of the

people they want to be. Then I encourage them to review the feedback from others after they know what they want for themselves. After I see what they have written in their own learning journal, I ask them questions like these:

1. What do you want your life to be like?
2. What is your ideal view of yourself?
3. What is on your That's for Me! list?
4. What are the values that are most important to you?

At that point, they have an ability to internalize the feedback and look for ways it can help them reach their own goals.

There is also great power in *positive imagining*. Visualize yourself living your dreams. See it like a movie playing on the projector in your mind. We cannot inspire passion in others if we have not engaged it in ourselves. You have to be a life-long learner yourself to be an inspiring coach and developer of other people.

Summary

Fixing people does not work. Nor do auditing and measurement because they turn off the brain's relationship building switches. So how do you create sustainability and keep yourself moving forward? The answer is to remember the hope, joy, and love that will come from meeting the desired goal—this is what triggers passion and makes you feel most alive. When you do this, everyone around you will feel it too! The energy is exciting and contagious. We all want to grow.

Are you developing other people for their current roles or for future roles? Either way, you will find a direction and a path in this book. So let me now tie the themes together and point out the types of conversations we need to know how to create in order to help ourselves and others to develop. These are the types of conversations that trigger professional and personal development now and for the future.

Are you ready?

Begin Your Learning Journal

Since you are here to become a better leader and developer of star performers, I'd like to ask you a few questions. Learning requires taking time for self-reflection.

Imagine my saying to you, "I'll be a sounding board for you. I'm inviting you into a conversation that creates the space for your own self-reflection. Please create a learning journal to use during our conversations with each other."

Take the time now to write your own answers:

1. What is my goal (or goals) in reading this book and learning how to develop star performers?
2. What specific outcomes do I want to create for myself and others?
3. What possibilities are available for reaching my goals?
4. Looking at each option, I should consider it from this perspective: "If I do this, then what will happen? Then what?"
5. Reflecting on what I have written, I need to ask myself, "Where do I really want to begin now?"
6. What does Be, Do, Then Have mean for me now?
7. Am I willing to start where I am now? (When would "now" be the right time to begin being a masterful coach and developer of star performers?)

Update Your Learning Journal

As you read this book, update your learning journal. Consider this to be a conversation with yourself about your own growth as a star professional and coach. When was the last time you had a really good conversation with yourself? A learning journal sets the stage for you to grow by asking questions that enable you to reflect. Additional questions for you to answer over time in your learning journal include these:

- What do I enjoy doing?
- Where do I feel I add the most value?

- What are the successes I am most proud of?
- What worked well?
- What did not work well?
- What have I learned from the mistakes I've made?
- What do I want to accomplish next?
- What matters most to me?
- What matters to my boss, to my department, and to my team?
- What will it take for us to accomplish our goals as a team?
- What do I want to learn next?
- What do I want to do differently so that I can focus on the desired learning?
- What do I need to stop doing so that I can have what I desire?
- Imagine that I have been promoted to the next level: What would that look like? How would I need to think differently? What would I need to let go of?

And if you want to develop your emotional intelligence, ask yourself these questions:

- What am I feeling now?
- What triggered that feeling?
- What are the physical and mental symptoms of the feelings I am experiencing now?

Spend three to five minutes per day answering a question or two from this list. You may want to return to a question several times to let your answers keep bubbling up. I asked myself the question "What do I love to do?" over and over for months until the answer was crystal clear for me. I love to develop star performers!

Review Your Learning Journal

Each month, review your learning journal by reading past entries to observe the development of your thinking and beliefs during that time. At the end of the year, it is useful to reread the

whole journal and summarize which insights have held the most significance for you as you have learned to create meaningful conversations for developing star performers.

When you use this process, you will see a positive and dramatic step up in all aspects of your life. As you develop star performers, you will also continue to step up your own abilities and expand your own life.

If you are a coach or manager who is primarily focused on developing your team members or clients, I recommend that you keep your own learning journal and that the people you are working with do the same. This reflective learning space is invaluable in triggering deeply meaningful conversations during coaching meetings. Having your own journal will enable you to share your own stories of what you are learning. Perhaps most important, your stories will be inspiring to the people you are coaching to see that you are a committed life-long learner yourself.

And, yes, I do this! Every morning I begin the day by writing in my own journal what I want to create and my reflections on where I am and where I am going. This quiet time in conversation with myself sets the tone for the day. This conversation determines my emotional state. During this time, I also remind myself of what I am committed to. This is a powerful habit that keeps me focused on what I want to do to learn and live the life of my dreams. You can do this too, starting now!