



CHAPTER 12

Celebrate the Values and Victories

"LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO BE MISERABLE," says Charles Ambeling. "You want to have a work experience that allows you to engage with others, share a laugh, see the humor in a situation, and thank people for doing a good job." Officially, Charlie is the assistant vice president for human resources, Santa Clara University. Unofficially, he is HR's CEO—chief encouragement officer.

When Charlie took the helm of the HR work group, it was demoralized and fearful. The team was used to an environment where there was little recognition of success coupled with severe consequences for failure. As one of his constituents told us, "The HR team needed someone to appreciate our individual and collective efforts. Charlie focused on encouraging everyone to be a contributing member of the team and to work toward a collective commitment to deeply held values and service to the campus community."

Charlie regularly encourages members of the department by letting them know that he believes in them and has confidence that they will be successful. Charlie also does crazy, spur-of-the-moment things

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to celebrate the team's accomplishments, like going to the local grocery store and buying boxes of popsicles and ice cream bars. He'll return to the office with his booty of icy goodness, empty the mail cart, load it up with treats, and then play ice cream truck music on his smartphone while cruising through the office giving everyone their pick of a cool delight.

Charlie sets up celebratory outings for the team, such as an "HR at the movies" night. When a recent blockbuster movie was released, he bought enough tickets so each HR staff member could ask a family member or friend to join them for the film and then dinner afterward to discuss what they saw and how it translated back to their work. He organizes an annual Friday-night trip to the local minor-league baseball game for HR staff and their families. "It's a fun and relaxing way to end the week and spend time getting to know more about our fellow team members as well as their families," another of his constituents told us. Then there are the personal touches Charlie puts on the way he expresses gratitude for the team's work. For example, on a recent "Employee Appreciation Day" Charlie hand wrote over thirty thank-you notes to the staff and student employees and gave out small, personalized toys that he had selected as a reminder of how highly he regarded each individual.

Charlie took HR from a work group that was scared to say or do anything outside of normal channels to a team that works well together and supports one another. As individuals and work teams, everyone is empowered and encouraged to innovate and offer up ideas, and then to take the time to celebrate individual and team accomplishments. There is more team cohesion and cooperation than ever existed before. Here's how one constituent summed up Charlie's approach:

As the Chief Encouragement Officer of HR, Charlie has shown us that we all contribute to the success of the entire team, and he regularly and repeatedly comes up with enjoyable and unique ways to keep us fully engaged and doing great work. He has a talent for making work rewarding and fun!

The actions of Charlie Ambelang and the experience of the HR department confirm our research. Performance improves when leaders publicly honor those who have excelled and been an example to others when they demonstrate that “we are all in this together,” and when they make the work environment a place where people want to both be and stay. That is why exemplary leaders make a commitment to *Celebrate the Values and Victories* by mastering these essentials:

- ▶ *Create a spirit of community*
- ▶ *Be personally involved*

When leaders bring people together, rejoice in collective successes, and directly display their gratitude, they reinforce the essence of community. Being personally involved makes it clear that everyone is committed to making extraordinary things happen.

Create a Spirit of Community

Too many organizations operate as if social gatherings were a nuisance. They aren't. Human beings are social animals—hardwired to connect with others.² People are meant to do things together, to form communities, and in this way demonstrate a common bond.

When social connections are strong and numerous, there's more trust, reciprocity, information flow, collective action, and happiness—and, by the way, greater wealth.³ Some of the fastest-growing and most successful businesses these days are evidence of the need for social connection. Facebook, WhatsApp, QQ, WeChat, QZone, Instagram, Twitter, and Skype are only a few of the social networking sites with over one hundred million users.⁴ Researchers have found that “social networking site users have more friends and more close friends” than nonusers.⁵ Social capital is as significant a source of success and happiness as are physical and intellectual capital.

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Corporate celebrations are among the best ways to capitalize on the need to connect, to socialize, and to create a feeling of community. Research on corporate celebrations has found that they “infuse life with passion and purpose. . . . They bond people together and connect us to shared values and myths. Ceremonies and rituals create community, fusing individual souls with the corporate spirit. When everything is going well, these occasions allow us to revel in our glory. When times are tough, ceremonies draw us together, kindling hope and faith that better times lie ahead.”⁶ The gap in levels of pride, motivation, and commitment among employees we found is wide—almost 25 percent—between those people who report their managers *always* find ways to celebrate accomplishments and those whose managers *seldom* do so. With celebrations, leaders create a sense of team spirit, both building and maintaining the social support necessary to thrive, especially in stressful and uncertain times.

Sometimes celebrations can be elaborate, but more often, they are about connecting everyday actions and events to the values of the organization and the accomplishments of the team. Exemplary leaders seldom let an opportunity pass to make sure that constituents know why they're there and how they should act in service of that purpose. For example, Kurt Richarz, executive vice president of sales at Seagate Technology, uses regular monthly conference calls with the entire sales organization to shine the spotlight on people who have been given “Standing Ovations.” This program is very simple: peers nominate colleagues by filling out a brief form highlighting their contributions or an achievement. Monthly sales calls feature the recipient's photo and a summary of accomplishments, and Kurt reserves time to highlight and congratulate the “heroic efforts” of people in supporting the sales organization. Afterward, Kurt goes back to thank the nominators, because, after all, he says, these folks are all very busy, and he appreciates them taking the time to do this. This public, enthusiastic, and heartfelt recognition goes a long way in making both the recipients and bystanders feel that they are valued and building a positive, empowering community. Actions like these are especially important these days when seven in ten Americans wish they received

more recognition, while 83 percent readily admit they could do more to recognize others.⁸

Whether they're to honor an individual, group, or organizational achievement or to encourage team learning and relationship building, celebrations, ceremonies, and similar events offer leaders the perfect opportunity to explicitly communicate and reinforce the actions and behaviors that are important in realizing shared values and common goals. Exemplary leaders know that promoting a culture of celebration fuels the sense of unity essential for retaining and motivating today's workforce. Besides, who wants to work in a boring place that neither remembers nor celebrates anything? David Campbell, a former senior fellow at the Center for Creative Leadership, said it well:

A leader who ignores or impedes organizational ceremonies and considers them as frivolous or "not cost-effective," is ignoring the rhythms of history and our collective conditioning. [Celebrations] are the punctuation marks that make sense of the passage of time; without them, there are no beginnings and endings. Life becomes an endless series of Wednesdays.⁹

Celebrate Accomplishments in Public As noted in Chapter Eleven, individual recognition increases the recipient's sense of worth and improves performance. Public celebrations have this effect as well, and they add other lasting benefits for individuals and organizations that private individual recognition can't accomplish.

For one thing, public events are an opportunity to highlight actual examples of what it means to demonstrate that we "do what we say we will do." When the spotlight shines on certain people, and others tell stories about what they did, they become role models. They visibly represent how the organization would like everyone to behave, and concretely demonstrate that it is possible to do so. Public celebrations of accomplishment also build commitment, both among the individuals recognized as

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well as among those in the audience. When you communicate to individuals, "Keep up the good work; it's appreciated," you are also saying to the larger group, "Here are people just like you who are examples of what we stand for and believe in. You can do this. You too can make a significant contribution to our success."

The data shows that the extent to which leaders publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values correlates significantly with the degree to which they feel their organization values their work and that they are making a difference. Raymond Yu's experience underscores this finding. Ray is a manager in the new product introduction engineering team at Intuitive Surgical, and his division is responsible for surgical stapler instruments. He thought it would be fitting, creative, and fun to present a red paper stapler as an award. He took the initiative to order both a red stapler and a display case. At a weekly team staff meeting, Ray announced the Red Stapler Award and spoke about what it meant: "I explained that this was a means to foster expression and communication of values; to recognize peers who have demonstrated values that we admire."

Both his manager and the team loved the concept so much that they suggested that he open up the award to other departments within the stapler business unit. At the monthly stapler manufacturing review meeting, a large public forum, Ray again explained the Red Stapler Award:

The Red Stapler Award is a mechanism to appreciate and recognize peers, to encourage behaviors that model shared values, and to foster communication. To the grantor, it is a statement of "These are my values, and this is how I see your values." It shows public support for the contributions being made. A month after receiving the Red Stapler award the recipient will then pay it forward and recognize someone else.

This is not management dictating what your values should be from some DOP [department operating procedure]. This is for you and by you. Make it about what you want, what you value, and why you are here.

And so for this month, I want to give the Red Stapler to Sunny Ranu for taking the initiative in the data analysis tools effort using modern search tools even though the internal group is heading in another direction. It shows ownership and courage to do what is best for the company, not to be a bystander; and to do what is right and not simply accept what others have decided.

Sunny then came up to the stage to receive the award. He not only showed the data analysis tool he had created, but he also thanked many other people in the organization who had helped him on this skunk works project. The audience, Ray said, “was blown away by what transpired.”

The Red Stapler was a creative award that circumvented the limitations of the existing corporate recognition schemes. It meant more to the team members, according to Ray, than any of the company’s monetary awards: “After I had awarded the Red Stapler, Sunny told the assembled group that receiving it meant more to him because it was from a peer and not from management through a vetted approval process. It was real, sincere, and from the heart.”

Public ceremonies, like the one Ray described, serve as a collective reminder of why people remain with an organization, and of the values and visions they share. By making celebrations a public part of organizational life, leaders create a sense of community. The process of building community helps ensure that people feel that they belong to something greater than just themselves and that they are working together on a common cause. Celebrations serve to strengthen the bond of teamwork and trust.

Some people are reluctant to recognize others in public, fearing that it might cause jealousy or resentment. Forget these fears. All winning teams have MVPs (Most Valuable Players), usually selected by their teammates. Public celebrations are meaningful opportunities to reinforce shared values and to recognize individuals for their contributions. They give you a chance both to say thanks to specific individuals for their outstanding performance and to remind everyone of exactly what it is that

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the organization stands for, and the significance of the work or service they provide.

Private rewards may work fine to motivate individuals, but they have little impact on the team. Researchers have shown that people tend to pick up on the mood and attitudes of those around them, called "emotional contagion," and often in ways they don't consciously realize.¹⁰ Circuits in the brain are activated when people see others act in a certain way; it's as if they had taken action themselves. Watching someone else can impact the brain in ways that mirror experiencing it directly.¹¹

To generate community-wide energy and commitment for the common cause, you need to celebrate successes in public. Ceremonies and celebrations are opportunities to build healthier groups, to enable members of the organization to know and care about each other. Also, as Brian Dalton, finance manager with Rocket Fuel, observed, "it sets up an expectation that everything else that is done will be at that level or above." Which is why he realized that in "publicly acknowledging someone for doing a good job, you help to set a standard of what is judged to be good work. You want the recipient of the praise to feel valued and recognized for their contributions, but you also want to publicly celebrate those values and victories so that others can see and replicate them."

Provide Social Support Supportive relationships at work—relationships characterized by a genuine belief in and advocacy for the interests of others—are essential in maintaining personal and organizational vitality.¹² People who don't like the folks they're working with don't do their best work or stick around very long. Consider what studies have found about the differences between the task performances of groups of friends versus acquaintances. In groups composed of acquaintances, individuals prefer to work alone, and speak with others in the group only when necessary. Consequently, they are reluctant to seek help or point out mistakes being made by others. Groups made up of friends, on the other hand, talk with one another right from the project's get-go. They evaluate ideas more critically, give timely feedback when others are veering off course, and offer teammates positive

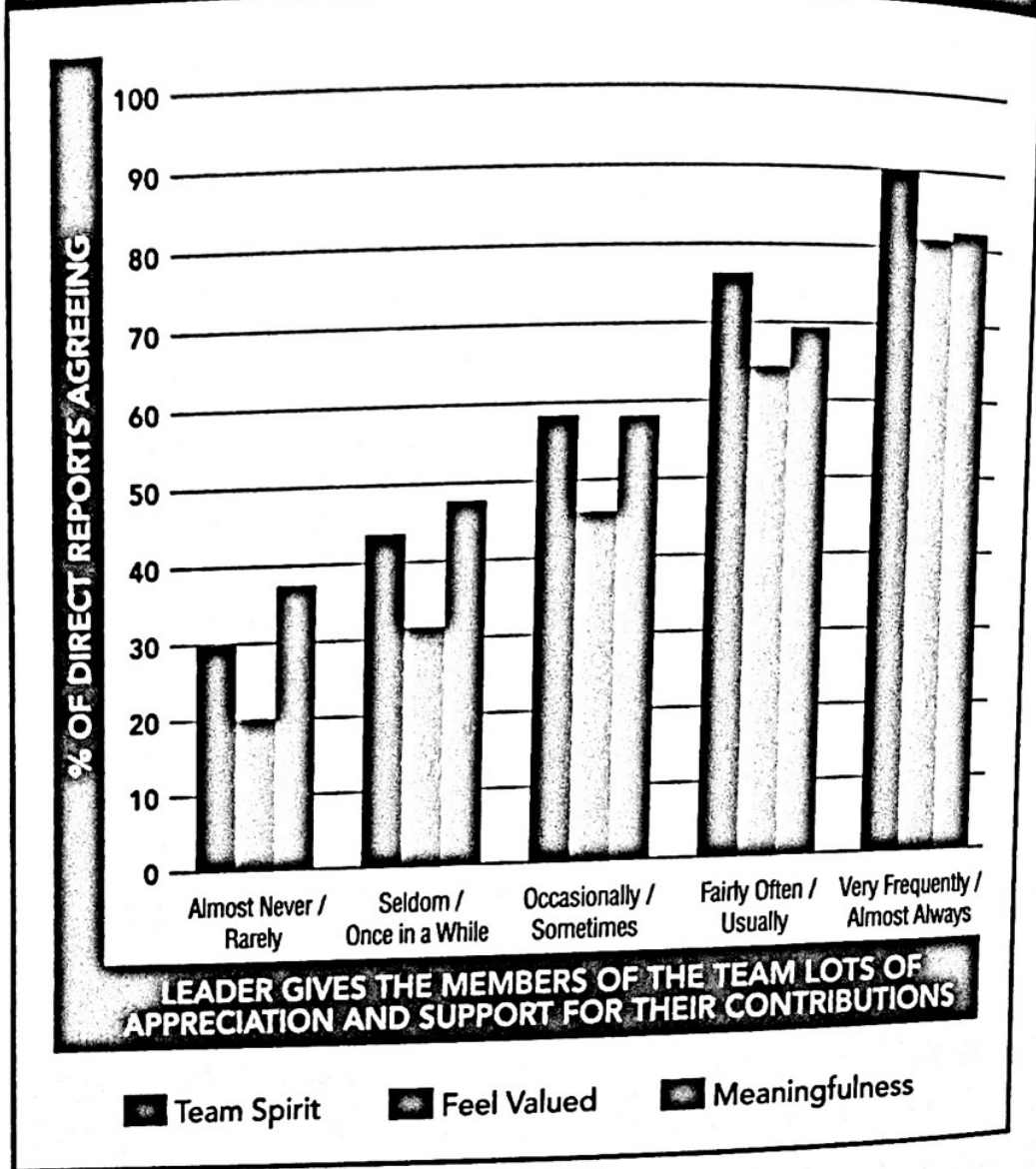
encouragement every step of the way.¹³ Feeling a sense of connection with co-workers fosters greater accountability, engagement, and commitment to the organization.

Employees with a best friend at work are seven times more likely to engage fully in their work than those reporting no such friendships.¹⁴ Longitudinal studies, in the United States and Europe, also reveal that people who make use of social support have higher incomes compared to those people who don't tap into the power of a social network. This was true both two and nine years after the study's baseline period.¹⁵ Lacking social support, individuals regularly ignored cooperative opportunities, distrusting other people and their motives. Studies involving more than three million people around the world show that social isolation is worse for people's health than obesity, smoking, or alcoholism.¹⁶

Our data shows that people feel connected and experience a strong sense of team spirit when their leaders provide lots of appreciation and support for their contributions. In turn, those same people report feeling highly valued, and firmly believe their work is meaningful and making a difference. These sentiments translate into people who are willing to go the extra step to meet organizational challenges and demands. Engaging in this leadership behavior also generates favorable evaluations of the leader from their direct reports. Figure 12.1 shows these relationships graphically.

These findings are aptly illustrated by what Ferhat Zor told us about his experience working on a performance management project with Borusan Logistics in Turkey. The Tuzla warehouse manager reviewed the performance of the various operational units at his monthly meetings and made the point that they needed to support and help one another. These meetings always ended with celebrating any accomplishments as an entire group. After successfully completing one very challenging project, the company congratulated each employee by hosting a "spontaneous" surprise party, where, Ferhat observed, "happiness and pride were evident." Lots of photographs were taken, which were later shared on the Web and in the company's newsletter, "in order," said Ferhat, "to show that each person makes an important contribution and each doing their best makes the company a success."

Figure 12.1 How Appreciation and Support Affects Team Spirit, Feeling Valued, and Experience of Meaningful Work



Research across a broad variety of disciplines consistently demonstrates that this kind of social support enhances productivity, psychological well-being, and even physical health.¹⁷ Social support not only improves wellness but also buffers against disease, particularly during times of high stress. This finding is true irrespective of an individual's age, gender, or ethnic group. For example, even after adjusting for such factors as smoking and histories of major illness, people with few close contacts were two to three times more likely to die at a younger age than those who had friends to turn to regularly.¹⁸

Social support is also vital to outstanding performance. Consider what researchers found when analyzing the speeches made by baseball players when inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. As elite athletes, they had achieved the highest recognition in a field demanding top physical skills. Yet for almost two-thirds of them, their words of appreciation were not so much about technical or practical assistance as they were about emotional support and friendship.¹⁹

What's true at home, in the community, and on the playing field is just as true at work. Researchers have found that people who indicate having a best friend in the workplace, compared to those who do not, "are significantly more likely to engage customers, get more done in less time, have more fun on the job, have a safe workplace with fewer accidents, innovate and share ideas, feel informed and know that their opinion counts."²⁰ Friends are not only good for your health but also good for business. And there are plenty of prospects for strengthening these relationships, because less than one in five people indicate that they work for organizations that provide opportunities to develop friendships in their workplace.²¹

Our files are full of personal-best leadership cases in which strong human connections produced spectacular results. When people feel a strong sense of affiliation and attachment to their colleagues, they're much more likely to have a higher sense of personal well-being, to feel more committed to the organization, and to perform at higher levels. When people feel distant and detached, they're unlikely to accomplish much of anything.²² When people are personally involved with the task and feel connected with their colleagues, they can achieve extraordinary feats.

Leaders understand that celebrations provide concrete evidence that individuals aren't alone in their efforts, that other people care about them, and that they can count on others. Celebrations reinforce the fact that people need each other and that it takes a group of individuals with a common purpose working together in an atmosphere of trust and collaboration to get extraordinary things done. By making achievements public, leaders build a culture in which people know that their actions

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and decisions are not being taken for granted. They see that their contributions are recognized, appreciated, and valued. "Public celebrations in my experience," Andrea Berardo, former technical project manager at Alstom (Switzerland), explained, "are crucial to the self-esteem of the employees, and they are essential in building that sense of community that allows people to see themselves as part of one team." In addition, he points out, "Public events are perfect occasions to reiterate the shared values and common goals."

Have Fun Together Fun isn't a luxury at work. Every Personal-Best Leadership Experience was a combination of hard work *and* fun. In fact, most people agreed that without the enjoyment and the pleasure they experienced interacting with others on the team, they wouldn't have been able to sustain the level of intensity and hard work required to do their personal best. People just feel better about the work they're doing when they enjoy the people they're working with.²³ One key leadership lesson that Shawn McKenna, the co-founder and managing director of a chain of American-style restaurants in Russia, shared with us: "Make sure that you and the team are having fun."

Similarly, Mike Sawyer, vice president of marketing with PerimeterX, explained that his Personal-Best Leadership Experience involved ensuring that his team had fun while not consuming lots of their outside-of-work time. One example was changing the character of department-wide planning meetings. "We set up an informal meeting area in the marketing department," Mike explained, "with couches, a TV, and other things that allowed both standing and ad-hoc meetings to seem more like a friendly environment. This area was in the middle of where everyone sat, so even if just a few people were meeting, it let everyone know what was going on, and they could freely join others if they wanted. We also did group 'fun' dinners semi-regularly around milestones to encourage camaraderie as well as to reward progress."

Having fun sustains productivity, creating what researchers refer to as "subjective well-being." Moreover, it's not all about parties, games, festivities, and laughter. Wayne Tam, a certified financial planner and principal of Generation Wealth & Investments, described a

former manager as someone who really had fun dissecting complex computer code or translating business processes into functional specifications. Wayne said that these tasks could be quite difficult, but his manager “was always positive and built up our skills so that we could meet these challenges with the same attitude he had and showed us how to have fun with this work.” Wayne went on to say, “I learned that though you get paid to do a job, it’s better to be able to enjoy what you do and have fun.”

Research demonstrates that having fun enhances people’s problem-solving skills. They are more creative and productive, which fosters lower turnover, higher morale, and a stronger bottom line. For example, the Great Place to Work Institute annually asks tens of thousands of employees to rate their experience of workplace factors, including, “This is a fun place to work.” On *Fortune’s* 100 Best Companies to Work For list, which the Great Place to Work Institute produces, employees in the best organizations responded overwhelmingly—an average of 81 percent—that they are working in a “fun” environment.²⁴ “Laughter,” says Robert Provine, a neuroscientist at the University of Maryland and author of *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, “is not primarily about humor, but about social relationships. In fact, the health benefits of laughter may result from the social support it stimulates.”²⁵

Leaders set the tone. When they openly demonstrate the joy and passion they have for their organizations, team members, clients, and even challenges, leaders send a very powerful message to others that it’s perfectly acceptable for people to make public displays of playfulness. They know that in today’s organizations work is demanding, and consequently people need to have a sense of personal well-being to sustain their commitment. It works for everyone when leaders show enthusiasm and excitement about the work performed. As Jeanette Chickles, director of telecom operations with Polaris Wireless, shared when relating her Personal-Best Leadership Experience:

I like to have fun at work. Since you spend so many hours of your life at work, you should be enjoying it! Be serious and work hard, but you can find ways

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to celebrate accomplishments and sneak in a little lightheartedness when things are really intense. If your team is enjoying the work they are doing and feel recognized for their hard work, they are more likely to go the extra mile when you need it most.

What you preach and what you celebrate must be one and the same. If they aren't, the event will come off as insincere and phony—and your credibility will suffer. Any celebration must be an honest expression of commitment to fundamental values and the hard work and dedication of the people who have lived the values. Elaborate productions that lack sincerity are more entertainment than encouragement. Authenticity makes conscious celebrations, and fun, work.

Be Personally Involved

We started our discussion of exemplary leadership with Model the Way, and we've come full circle. If you want others to believe in something and behave according to those beliefs, you have to set the example by being personally involved. You have to practice what you preach. If you want to build and maintain a culture of excellence and distinction, then you must be personally involved in celebrating the actions that contribute to and sustain the culture.

Mushfiq Rahman, contracts manager in Australia for ALS Industrial, noticed an immediate difference in performance when "I spent some time with everyone individually and thanked them personally for their contribution. People felt appreciated that I was spending a lot of time with them, and trying genuinely to understand their concerns." When it comes to sending a message throughout the organization, nothing communicates more clearly than what leaders do. Directly and visibly showing others that you're there to cheer them along, you're sending a positive signal. When you set the example, like Mushfiq, that says,

“Around here we say thanks, show appreciation, and have fun,” others will follow your lead. The organization will develop a culture of celebration and recognition. Everyone becomes a leader, everyone sets the example, and everyone takes the time to celebrate the values and victories. When this happens, organizations develop a reputation for being great places to work.

In case there's any doubt that being personally involved in celebrations has an impact on others or their assessment of your leadership, look at what we consistently find in our research. Direct reports who indicate their leaders *almost always* get personally involved in recognizing people and celebrating accomplishments consistently score themselves over 20 percent higher than their colleagues on various engagement variables, like motivation, pride, and productivity. This gap grows dramatically to between 40 and 50 percent when comparing the former to those leaders seen as *occasionally* (or less) being personally involved. Why people report feeling valued by their leaders—and how they rate the trustworthiness and effectiveness of their leaders—traces directly to the extent that their leader gets personally involved in recognizing people and celebrating accomplishments.

Wherever you find a strong culture built around strong values, you'll also find endless examples of leaders who live its values. Beth Taute, while a financial analyst with Citibank, observed how her manager (Jo) was personally involved in demonstrating appreciation. Jo would do small things such as taking the team out for a surprise lunch or letting team members leave early if she knew they had something special happening in the evening. She let team members with children come in late or leave early on special occasions like birthdays. She scattered small and silly gifts with hidden jokes or meaning on everyone's desks. Being personally involved at this level resulted in Jo's team, according to Beth, “being completely dedicated to her. She was an inspiration, and that meant they would work until all hours to ensure the project was completed.”

Because of her hands-on personal involvement, Jo's team wanted to show that they warranted her confidence and trust in their abilities and

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dedication. According to Beth, "Jo had such close relationships with a varied group of individuals that she knew how to get each person to perform beyond their comfort zone and to remain dedicated to the cause. She made coming to work and being there late seem fun and not like a hard slog."

The lesson from this experience for every aspiring exemplary leader, in Beth's view, is that you "have to be involved and connected with what's going on and that the best recognition is ongoing, without being expected or predictable." She went on to say, "To have done great work and be recognized by Jo was more valued than any other recognition team members wanted." Personal dedication and involvement earn leaders the respect and trust of their teams. It's what builds credibility and loyalty, and creates an engaged and productive workforce.

Show You Care People don't care about how much you know until they know how much you care for them. In other words, they believe that you want to ensure that they are safe and secure, feel supported and valued; that you want them to be successful, learning and growing; and you wouldn't ask them to do something where they could intentionally be injured or hurt. Demonstrating this isn't rocket science. For example, Jane Binger, responsible for leadership development and education for years at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, Stanford University, found that most of the medical and administrative staff just desired simple gestures showing that she and others cared about how they were doing. This usually took the form of a personal note or email, a comment during a meeting or in the corridor, or just a quick stop by their office. "They want to know that I value them. That I think they are doing a great job. That I am not taking them or their contributions for granted. This doesn't require any grand over-the-top actions," said Jane. Empirically, we found a strong and positive relationship between the extent to which a leader "praised people for a job well done" and their direct reports' favorable responses to the statement, "The people who are part of this person's work group feel that the organization values their work."

Showing someone that you care about them makes them feel that you have their best interests at heart. How direct reports respond

to a question about the extent their leader has “the best interests of other people at work” relates directly to their level of team spirit and pride. It’s also directly related to how favorably they evaluate the leader’s effectiveness and the likelihood that they would recommend that individual to a friend as a good leader. When the executive team at Australia’s Macquarie Bank made the decision to close their mortgage operation in the United States, Peter Maher, then group head of banking and financial services, could have delivered the news via email or even through a lower-level manager.²⁶ Peter realized that the best thing he could do to show he cared was to be completely honest and up front throughout the process and to treat his staff with respect and intelligence.

He flew to Florida and sat down with about 100 employees to deliver the news personally. Peter says of the experience, “It was how you did it, not what you did. I deliberately sat on a chair in front of the people and just talked about what was going on.” He admitted that “it was a really painful conversation,” but he believed that the best thing he could do was to “be real” with them. “I just told them everything that was going on. It was interesting that a number of them afterward, while disappointed, told me how they appreciated the honesty in the way the decision was communicated.” People who perceive their colleagues as caring, research shows, are most likely to be sought out for advice and be seen as a leader, and this, in turn, results in higher performance levels.²⁷ On the other hand, people indicate that when they feel they’re being treated uncaringly at work (for example, rudely by a colleague), they respond by deliberately decreasing their effort or lowering the quality of their work.²⁸

Showing up to deliver bad news in person, as Peter did, is an important way to demonstrate you care. So is just being *visible* in day-to-day undertakings. It not only demonstrates you care, but also makes you more real, more genuine, more approachable, and more human. Attending important meetings, visiting customers, touring the plants or service centers, dropping in on the labs, making presentations at association gatherings, being at organizational events (even when you’re not on the program), recruiting at local universities, holding roundtable discussions, speaking

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with analysts, or just stopping by your constituents' cubicles to say hello—all are instances that show people that you are interested in them, the work they do, and the contributions they make. Being where they are helps you stay in touch, literally and figuratively, with what's going on. It shows that you walk the talk about the values you and your constituents share.

Spread the Stories Personally getting involved in showing that they care gives leaders the opportunity to both find and convey stories that put a human face on values. First-person examples are always more powerful and striking than third-party examples. It's that critical difference between "I saw it for myself" and "Someone told me about it." You need to be constantly on the lookout for whatever is being done well so that you can both let that person know to keep up the good work and be able to tell others about it. That way, you can give "up close and personal" accounts of what it means to put into practice shared values and aspirations. In the process, you create organizational role models to whom everyone can relate. You put the behavior in a real context. Values become more than simply rules; they come alive. Through the stories that you tell, you dramatically and memorably illustrate how people should act and make decisions.

After studying professionals in life-and-death situations, cognitive psychologist Gary Klein concludes that stories are the most powerful method for both eliciting and disseminating knowledge.²⁹ The reason for this is that stories, by their nature, are public forms of communication. Storytelling is how people pass along lessons from generation to generation, culture to culture. Emory psychology professor Drew Westen argues that "the stories our leaders tell us matter, probably almost as much as the stories our parents tell us as children, because they orient us to what is, what could be, and should be; to the worldviews they hold and to the values they hold sacred."³⁰ Moreover, stories are tailor-made for celebrations. In fact, you can think of stories as celebrations—celebrations of adventure and accomplishment, of courage and perseverance, of being true to deeply held values and beliefs.

Leaders find numerous ways to perpetuate the important stories; for instance, by publishing an example in the company newsletter or annual report, relating a story in a public ceremony, or making a video

and broadcasting it on the internal television network, or streaming it on social media. Leaders shine the spotlight on someone who's lived out an organizational value and provide others in the organization with an example they can emulate.

Leaders who tell stories of encouragement about the good work of others have direct reports who feel personally valued, and believe that their leaders bring out the best of people's talents and abilities. The extent to which people would give a strong recommendation about their leader to a colleague relates directly to how frequently their leaders tell stories of encouragement about the good work of others. Leaders rated in the top 20 percent on this leadership behavior are four to five times more favorably recommended than their counterparts in the bottom 20 percent on this leadership behavior. Dustin Schaefer, regional account manager with Flexera Software, told us how he was surprised during an all-hands call when his vice president of worldwide sales recognized him and told a story about the way Dustin displaced a top competitor. The VP gave a very descriptive overview of how Dustin worked with the executive team to create enough uncertainty with their recent decision, and the current implementation, that they scratched the competitor's solution midstream. The VP went on to characterize the lessons from this experience—the moral of the story—and how the team could use the lessons from that success to create more wins in the marketplace. "He connected my win," says Dustin, "in a way that showed it was a collective win for the company. He got others to gather behind my story, in what was an otherwise competitive sales group, and realize we can all celebrate together, learning and growing from each other's successes. He also connected my results to the values and accomplishments of our company."

Dustin's story resonated with his colleagues, and after the call, several of them who had not engaged much with Dustin in the past reached out to him, and asked for more information on his experience. Says Dustin, "I found we were sharing and exchanging more information than we had in the past. This helped to strengthen our sense of rapport and community toward a common goal."

By telling stories, you accomplish more effectively the objectives of teaching, mobilizing, and motivating than you can through bullet points in

a PowerPoint presentation or tweets on a mobile device. Listening to and understanding the stories leaders tell does more to inform people about the values and culture of an organization than do the company policies or the employee manual. Well-told stories are much more effective in reaching people's emotions and pulling them along. They make the message stick. They simulate the experience of actually being there and give people a compelling way of learning what is most important about the experience. Reinforcing stories through celebrations deepens the connections.

Make Celebrations Part of Organizational Life You need to put celebrations on the calendar. These scheduled events serve as opportunities to get people together so that you can show people how they are part of the larger vision and a shared destiny. They are highly visible ways for you to affirm shared values, mark meaningful progress, and create a sense of community.

You probably already calendar birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries. You also should do it for the significant milestones in the life of your team and organization. Giving them a date, time, and place announces to everyone that these things matter. It also creates a sense of anticipation. Scheduling celebrations doesn't rule out spontaneous events; it just means that certain occasions are of such significance that everyone needs to pay particular attention to them.

In setting up celebrations, you first need to decide which organizational values, events of historical significance, or singular successes are of such importance that they warrant a special ritual, ceremony, or festivity. Perhaps you want to honor the group or team of people who created the year's breakthrough innovations, praise those who gave extraordinary customer service, or thank the families of your constituents for their support. Whatever you wish to celebrate, you need to formalize it, announce it, and tell people how they become eligible to participate. At a minimum, you ought to have at least one celebration each year that involves everyone, though not necessarily at the same site, and draws attention to each of the core values of your organization.

Leaders make celebrations as much a part of their organization's life as they can. Think about what might work for your organization. Here are

some examples that University of Southern California professor Terrence Deal and clinical community psychologist M. K. Key provide in their book *Corporate Celebration*:³¹

- ▶ *Cyclical celebrations* (e.g., seasonal themes, key milestones, and corporate anniversaries)
- ▶ *Recognition ceremonies* (e.g., public applause and acknowledgment for a job well done)
- ▶ *Celebrations of triumph* (special occasions for accentuating collective accomplishments, e.g., launching a new product or strategy, and opening a new office, plant, or store)
- ▶ *Rituals for comfort and letting go* (e.g., loss of a contract, layoffs of employees, and death of a colleague)
- ▶ *Personal transitions* (e.g., entrances and exits)
- ▶ *Workplace altruism* (e.g., doing good for others and promoting social change)
- ▶ *Play* (e.g., games and sporting events, spoofing and poking fun)

At Zeno Group there are many such celebrations during the year, such as the Friday after-work sing-alongs and other informal get-togethers and recognitions. They have an annual New Year's Eve party every June 30th, the end of Zeno's fiscal year. On that day, all the offices connect by teleconference. They pop champagne and raise a virtual toast. CEO Barby Siegel communicates with everyone via teleconference, reflecting on what they've accomplished, and talks about what's ahead in the future. Then all of the offices continue with their own celebrations.

Of course, celebrations don't have to be about a single achievement or for one person. Justin Brocato, senior manager for marketing operations at Cisco Systems, told us about the impact an annual awards banquet had at one of his former companies:

It was a wonderful way to celebrate our accomplishments and spread that sense of community. Significant others were encouraged to

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attend, so it was a nice way to get to know people outside of an office setting and further build upon existing relationships. It was also the perfect forum to publicly recognize all of the contributions of the team and reflect on what we had accomplished.

In reflecting further on this experience, Justin wondered, "What if management had just sent out an email to announce and congratulate the winners?" He concluded people would have appreciated it, but it would have paled in comparison to the roar of applause and whistles when someone goes on stage to accept their award and hears their manager tell that person and an audience full of his or her peers why these accomplishments were worthy of recognition. "Celebrating in public is so much more memorable," Justin felt, "and the impact that it has on the recipient and the team is longer lasting. People get energized, and suddenly they have a renewed sense of commitment for the year to come."

Whether they're to honor an individual, group, or organizational achievement or to encourage team learning and relationship building, celebrations, ceremonies, and similar events offer leaders the perfect opportunity to explicitly communicate and reinforce the actions and behaviors that are important in realizing shared values and mutual goals. Exemplary leaders know that promoting a culture of celebration fuels the sense of unity essential for retaining and motivating today's workforce. Celebrations, the data shows, significantly affect how people feel about their organization and their leader. The more people report their leader finds ways to celebrate accomplishments, the more effective they feel in meeting their objectives, and the more highly they rate the overall effectiveness of their leader.

There is no shortage of opportunities to bring people together to celebrate your organization's values and victories. In good times or bad, gathering together to acknowledge those who've contributed and the actions that have led to success signals to everyone that their efforts made a difference. Their energy, enthusiasm, and well-being—and yours—will be all the better for it.



TAKE ACTION

Celebrate the Values and Victories

Celebrating together reinforces the fact that extraordinary performance is the result of many people's efforts. Visibly and publicly celebrating accomplishments creates community and sustains team spirit. By basing celebrations on acting congruently with fundamental values and attaining critical milestones, leaders reinforce and sustain people's focus.

Social interaction increases individuals' commitments to the standards of the group and has a profound effect on their well-being. When people are asked to go beyond their comfort zones, the support and encouragement of their colleagues boosts their resistance to the possible debilitating effects of stress. Make sure that people do not regard your organization as the place where "fun goes to die."

Leaders set the example by being personally involved in celebration and recognition, demonstrating that encouraging the heart is something everyone should do. Telling stories about individuals who have made exceptional efforts and achieved phenomenal successes provides opportunities for leaders to showcase role models for others to emulate. Stories make people's experiences memorable, often even profound in ways that they hadn't envisioned, and serve as a marker for future behaviors. Making personal connections with people in a culture of celebration also builds and sustains credibility. It reduces we-they demarcations between leaders and constituents. Adding vitality and a sincere sense of appreciation to the workplace is essential.

(continued)

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To Encourage the Heart, you must *celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community*. This means you must:

1. Find, and also create, occasions to bring people together to publicly celebrate accomplishments.
2. Take actions that demonstrate that you "have people's backs" and ensure they feel "part of the whole."
3. Make fun a portion of your work environment—laugh and enjoy yourself, along with others.
4. Get personally involved in as many recognitions and celebrations as possible. Show you care by being visible in the tough times.
5. Never pass up an opportunity to relate publicly true stories about how people in your organization went above and beyond the call of duty.
6. Calendar celebrations and look, as well, for spontaneous opportunities to link shared values with victories.