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Live with Passion. Lead with Purpose. Leave a Legacy.

How to Create Contagious Positivity (And Be More Productive)

Emotions spread like wildfire. Every emotion is contagious, whether we like to admit it or not. One negative person can ruin an entire team, but the good news is that one positive person can affect the attitude and performance of an entire team, too.

More than a decade ago, I went through some leadership training at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, NC. One of the exercises was particularly powerful. Unfortunately it took me more than ten years to understand the lesson it taught me.

Each of the members of the training were asked to order the steps in a manufacturing process from one to twenty. None of us knew manufacturing and that was the point. Since none of us was an expert, we would all end up with different processes.

Then the facilitators divided us up into groups of five. We were sent to a room to discuss the steps and try to come up with the correct steps as a team. Unbeknownst to us, they were filming us the entire time.

Afterwards, we watched the videos and what I saw amazed me. For twenty minutes, the other four members of my group moved as a collective mass from one side of the table to the other. I remained still.

As a group we were:

- Unhappy
- Combative
- Uncooperative
- Unproductive (we didn't even finish the exercise)

What was most interesting to me *at the time* was how it was clear that the group revolved around me. One moment, they sided with me, the next, they collectively sided against me. I continued to remain in my position, unwavering and unmoved (AKA stubborn).

Today, however, I see it much differently. I was affecting the entire mood of the group. When I was up, they were up. When I was down, they were down. When I was adamant and forceful, so were they. When I was calm and spoke softly, so they did. My emotions spread to the entire group. In other words, I was contagious.

Contagious Positivity

The lesson I finally learned from that day showed me that all people, and especially leaders, can spread emotions, good and bad, to others. When we spread negative emotions, its performance suffers. But when we spread positive emotions, its performance soars.

This process starts with our body language. Others around us subconsciously mimic our movements. If your arms are crossed, soon their's will be, too. At the same time, others will mimic:

- Your tone of voice
- Your facial expressions
- Your posture
- Even your word choices.

What happens next is remarkable. Once they mimic your body language and speech patterns, they begin to *feel* the same emotions as you. That's right: Behavior precedes emotion.

Transmitting Emotions

I've written before about how we're wired to "fake it before we make it." If you smile more, you feel happier. If you are happier, you are more productive. Smiling literally tricks your brain into producing the neurochemicals that actually *make* you happy. How cool is that?

The same is true when we are around others. If we smile, *they* smile. If we smile, they smile and if they smile, they *feel happier*. You literally hold the power to transmit your emotions, like a disease, to the others around you. You hold the power to shift the emotions of an entire group of people, whether it be your team at work, the children you teach, or the family you're a part of.

That's something I'm only beginning to realize in my own life...just how much my attitude affects my family. I hold that power.

How Positivity Increases Performance

Yale psychologist Sigal Barsade proved this in a study called, *The Ripple Effect: Emotional Contagion and its Influence on Group Behavior*, If you're interested in the entire study, [you can download it here](#).

In the study, he did something similar to what I experienced years ago. But, this time, one person in the group was secretly placed with the intention of being "overtly positive." What he found from the video recordings is that when the positive person entered the room, the attitude of the entire group instantly changed. The positivity was contagious.

Here's the best part for you business leaders...the performance of the groups with the overtly positive person were much higher than the control groups. This mirrors what I shared here: [How to Get Your Team to Perform 31%](#)

The members of the groups with the positive person were:

- Happier
- Less argumentative
- More cooperative

- More productive individually and as a group

All because of one person. ONE PERSON!

That person can be you. It must be you.

You hold that power. How will you use it?