

The Passionate Leader

I have never seen results accomplished without passion.

Peter Drucker

James L. C. Taggart

This article examines why passion is an essential ingredient of a leader's effectiveness and success. Having a broad repertoire of leadership styles is important in order to meet the needs of one's followers. And so is organizational "know-how" – the small "P" politics (how work gets done), a comprehensive understanding of the organization, and the big picture of where it is moving and the key external influences affecting it. But for a leader to really achieve a high level of performance, this is next to impossible without a passion for a cause that relies on the collaborative efforts of people.

When we speak of "walls" that inhibit collaboration and organizational learning, we are referring typically to the functional silos that separate people—physically and emotionally. At a deeper level, we may even be referring to the unconscious, shared assumptions (our mental models) that contribute to these walls.

But there is another level to this, and that is the personal one: what we perceive as the safe and familiar routines with which we are accustomed. Breaking through our personal barriers to take that leap of faith to openness, inquiry, and acceptance will lead to new insights and practices. Within the context of the web of relationships in an organization that is striving to become a learning organization, the performance outcomes are indeed impressive. This leads to further reflection and inquiry, in turn generating new knowledge and enhanced organizational performance.

To propel an organization forward, it is not its structure and processes that are called upon. Rather, it is the core values and purpose of the organization. The passionate leader is able to inspire and enroll her followers by sharing her passion and vision. What is most compelling about this is that it has nothing to do with compliance. Instead, people feel part of a cause, but at the same time they are free to choose.

This is an extremely important leadership lesson: the subtle yet distinct shift from compliance to enrollment. But to achieve this requires a very different approach to leadership. Having a burning passion is a requisite to instilling a sense of mission among one's followers.

Reflect upon the following questions as you proceed on your own leadership journeys:

1. *When am I most energized?*
2. *How could I spend more time in this "state?"*
3. *How can I infect my followers, superiors, and peers with my energy and enthusiasm?*
4. *When will I take the first step to live my passion?*