

# The Best Leaders Have a Contagious Positive Energy

This post references the [HBR article](#) titled “The Best Leaders Have a Contagious Positive Energy” by Emma Seppälä and Kim Cameron.

Take a few minutes to read the whole article [here](#), but one of the key takeaways for me in the value of emotional intelligence and empathy, informing your engaged leadership style. We are all hungry for leaders who care and have a positive energy, you see it in high performing teams where there is an associated high degree of trust. The effort required to project energy and enthusiasm is well worth the investment, but it must be authentic – not the cheerleader style that is empty of real engagement.

Energizers’ greatest secret is that, by uplifting others through authentic, values-based leadership, they end up lifting up both themselves and their organizations. Positive energizers demonstrate and cultivate virtuous actions, including forgiveness, compassion, humility, kindness, trust, integrity, honesty, generosity, gratitude, and recognition in the organization. As a result, everyone flourishes.

[HBR - THE BEST LEADERS HAVE A CONTAGIOUS POSITIVE ENERGY](#)

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## Project Aristotle - Making Great Teams

Google researchers undertook a project to understand what makes a good team. The project was called Aristotle, after the quote “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. I find the results intriguing, as it was not stacked with what you might classically think of as drivers for team performance. The full story can be found [here](#), but I will hit the highlights in this post.

The group went through the first step of defining what is a team, and from there, moved to what defines an effective team. The researchers measured team effectiveness in four different ways:

- Executive evaluation of the team
- Team leader evaluation of the team

- Team member evaluation of the team
- Sales performance against quarterly quota

The qualitative evaluations helped capture a nuanced look at results and culture, but had inherent subjectivity. On the other hand, the quantitative metrics provided concrete team measures, but lacked situational considerations. These four measures in combination, however, allowed researchers to home in on the comprehensive definition of team effectiveness.

SOURCE: [THE REWORK STUDY](#)

The team ran studies across a large population of teams and narrowed down the determining factors to a handful of key attributes. Following is a summary from that section of the research.

*The researchers found that what really mattered was less about who is on the team, and more about how the team worked together. In order of importance:*

**Psychological safety:** *Psychological safety refers to an individual's perception of the consequences of taking an interpersonal risk or a belief that a team is safe for risk taking in the face of being seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive. In a team with high psychological safety, teammates feel safe to take risks around their team members. They feel confident that no one on the team will embarrass or punish anyone else for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a new idea.*

**Dependability:** *On dependable teams, members reliably complete quality work on time (vs the opposite - shirking responsibilities).*

**Structure and clarity:** *An individual's understanding of job expectations, the process for fulfilling these expectations, and the consequences of one's performance are important for team effectiveness. Goals can be set at the individual or group level, and must be specific, challenging, and attainable. Google often uses Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) to help set and communicate short and long term goals.*

**Meaning:** *Finding a sense of purpose in either the work itself or the output is important for team effectiveness. The meaning of work is personal and can vary: financial security, supporting family, helping the team succeed, or self-expression for each individual, for example.*

**Impact:** *The results of one's work, the subjective judgement that your work is making a difference, is important for teams. Seeing that one's work is contributing to the organization's goals can help reveal impact.*

1

## Psychological Safety

Team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other.

2

## Dependability

Team members get things done on time and meet Google's high bar for excellence.

3

## Structure & Clarity

Team members have clear roles, plans, and goals.

4

## Meaning

Work is personally important to team members.

5

## Impact

Team members think their work matters and creates change.

**re:Work**

The fact that the number one item on the list is psychological safety is a big clue as to how to grow strong teams. When there is room to fail, and room to try without judgement, team members are much more likely to be creative and take the risks that might make the difference. Your mileage may vary on this one, depending on the personality types involved, but it seems a pretty safe generalization in corporate America based on the data set used in this study.

Also informative, is the collection of factors that made little difference in this study, though again, your mileage may vary based on context, background, etc...

The researchers discovered which variables were not significantly connected with team effectiveness at Google:

- Colocation of teammates (sitting together in the same office)
- Consensus-driven decision making
- Extroversion of team members
- Individual performance of team members
- Workload size
- Seniority
- Team size
- Tenure

I find the co-location one to be a surprise, as I have repeatedly heard that as a key factor to effectiveness and cohesiveness. I imagine access to technical tools to close the gaps would help in this, but still, to see it at the top surprises me a bit - I find face to face communications a very effective tool in building strong inter team relationships.

I encourage you to [read the full article](#) and form your own thoughts around it - I am posting about it here as I find it relevant and helpful, and worth keeping track of and sharing.

There is a worksheet you can use to get started on this evaluation [linked here](#), and also available on the reWork site.

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## Imposter Syndrome - Channeling the noise for growth

An [article in Harvard Business Review](#) titled "Mentoring Someone with Imposter Syndrome" resonated with me. The article covers the topic well and offers the following main points for guidance in mentoring:

- Empirically challenge negative self-talk
- Affirm, affirm, and affirm some more
- Deliberately counteract stereotype threat
- Share your own imposter stories
- Do not allow your mentee to give you all the credit

Reflecting on my career, I remember too well the feelings of being an imposter when I started in the industry! I came out of the US Marines, and bounced around a few jobs before landing at a steel mill as an automation electrician and team lead. While there, I felt out of my depth a number of times as I learned on the job, but at

that time, I did not have the advantage of the internet and the world at my fingertips that I do now. I started my own business while in that role, teaching myself development focused on the emerging world of websites and web applications. Again, switching my frame of reference, I had to present myself with confidence, and at the same time, learning a whole new lexicon and way of thinking. From there, I joined a consulting firm in the marketing department, again learning a new vocabulary and thinking pattern before jumping again into a global consulting practice and eventually leading the internet practice. I learned to keep my mouth shut unless I had something valuable to say, and to work my tail off in the evenings to answer all the questions I accumulated during the day! I ran 17+ servers in my home and taught myself multiple programming languages while others just assumed I knew the space and had worked it for years as they had.

I lived with the regular feeling of potentially being “discovered” to be inadequate. I channeled those feelings into work and self improvement, leading to constant growth. Over the years since then, I have continued to change my path many times and coming to the point where it felt unnatural to not be outside my comfort zone to some degree.

As I grew more comfortable with the feeling of “being inadequate”, and learned to embrace the feeling of being outside my comfort zone, I transitioned to a place where I started to seek out those experiences for high growth opportunities. I am now in a mentoring role for a number of people in my industry and outside it as well. I find that the points outlined in this article are solid advice and I encourage a read through if you are feeling like an imposter, or if you are seeking to mentor someone.

The negative talk and feelings of doubt are one of the first things I try to tackle in a mentor relationship. I build on that with sharing much of the story in this article, with specifics about my journey. I try to make it clear that we all have times of doubt, and if we never do, we are likely not stretching ourselves nearly enough.

Mentoring is tremendously rewarding, and any mentor will be even more effective directly addressing the self doubt paradigm.

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## What makes a good manager?

A [project at Google](#) spent time researching what defines a great manager at Google, and through that identified the top 10 traits to grow. As listed they are:

1. Is a good coach
2. Empowers team and does not micromanage
3. Creates an inclusive team environment, showing concern for success and well-being
4. Is productive and results-oriented
5. Is a good communicator-listens and shares information
6. Supports career development and discusses performance

7. Has a clear vision/strategy for the team
8. Has key technical skills to help advise the team
9. Collaborates effectively
10. Is a strong decision maker

The last two were new additions to the list, and I believe reflect the need to both reach out to your broader organization to expand your thinking, while simultaneously understanding when the time has come to step in and drive to a decision – the leadership courage to make a decision in the face of a constantly shifting landscape, and then stand by and manage through that decision.


as our company grew in size and complexity, demands on our managers and leaders increased as well. From the results of our employee survey we learned that Googlers wanted to see more effective cross-organization collaboration and stronger decision making practices from leaders

- GOOGLE ARTICLE

As the Google team identified, there is a need for decisive leadership in a time where we are bombarded with more and more data and “facts” or opinions on every decision to be taken – this coupled with FOMO (Fear of missing out) can lead to a situation where teams spend an unfortunate amount of time in the unproductive state of spinning. This leads to a negative impact on moral and reduces productivity. Contrary to that, a decisive leader, who empowers a good team and uses strong communication skills to get thoughts drawn out from the team and discussed, often has the facts actually required for the decision in the first day of deliberation! The ability to collaborate quickly and communicate the rational, get confirmation and drive to the decision is the real differentiator and the combination for real productivity!

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## **Books to read: Sticky Wisdom: How to Start a Creative Revolution at Work**

 I got this book while working at Pfizer, and helping lead an innovation transformation in the consumer health division. We were looking to reboot our approach to product development and creativity in general, and as a part of that we invested in a great set of programs that I still benefit from now, long after those roles. This book is from the ?WhatIf! company, and has many little insights that can help unlock the creativity in you, and in your team.

The book asks a few key questions and offers accompanying insights to build on.

- What if you could spot what's killing creativity in your organization right now?
- What if you could stop yourself squashing ideas and start growing them instead?
- What if you could help everyone at work to be creative?
- What if you stopped talking about how important creativity is and started to take practical steps to make it happen.

But most of all.... What if there was a step-by-step guide that showed you exactly how to do it?

Instinctively we all know that creativity at work is important, but for many of us it feels either difficult or intimidating.

Sticky Wisdom delivers powerful insights that take creativity out of the hands of 'creative people' and puts it back where it belongs, with all of us. It breaks creativity out into six practical behaviours and shows how every one of us - not just the wacky geniuses - is packed with creative potential. We can start a creative revolution by adopting six behaviours:

1. Freshness
2. Greenhousing
3. Realness
4. Momentum
5. Signalling
6. Courage

These are the behaviours you can identify in highly creative and high-performing teams. These are the behaviours that you can start applying today to revolutionize your life.

Suddenly creativity isn't such a mystery. Sticky Wisdom makes it easy to talk about, easy to practise and easy to remember. Above all, it makes it easy to get on and do!

One of the points made in the book that makes great sense is the idea that creativity and innovation are not synonymous. Creativity only becomes innovation when the ideas are useful, or described another way, add value. The book is full of little stories and examples to make the point, as illustrated by an exercise with a food retailer team to have the team role play being a meal cooked in a wok. The book goes on to provide examples of the insights gained such as oil that changes color when ready, food that is pre-sliced and provided in numbered packages to sequence cooking properly, and more. These ideas came from the interactive role play and subsequent discussion. This type of activity generally takes me outside my comfort zone, as it does many, but that is the point.

In other posts, I reference the idea of stream jumping, which I got from this book and training. I also value the

idea of Green Housing, which is broken into a series of steps outlined in the book consisting of:

- **S**uspend Judgement
- **U**nderstand
- **N**urture
- **R**eact
- **A**ssume
- **I**Nsist

Another key concept from this book, though not unique to the book, is signalling. Part of the accompanying training is around the value of being intentional with signalling to a partner in conversation what your intentions are, or where you are trying to take the conversation. This has been a valuable tool in my kit now for years, as I have learned to be much more clear with my intentions in communication, setting up my audience or partners to better receive and understand my messaging.

## Why I recommend this book:

This book is full of great insights, and is a quick read. It can be used to bookmark and drop in and out of, or used as a reference to work through as a team. You cannot read this short reference without gaining value, even if you have extensive experience with change and innovation. It will spark ideas you have forgotten and give you new ones to build on. I cannot go into the full content of the book in a short post, but I encourage you to spend the few dollars it costs to buy this book. It was printed some time ago, but the ideas are as relevant today as when printed the first time!

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## Don't die of Innovation Indigestion!

I recently read an article from McKinsey, by Dr. Waguih Ishak, the division vice president and chief technologist at Corning Research & Development Corporation. You can find the full article here:

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/creating-an-innovative-culture> but I am referencing a portion of this piece. I encourage you to follow the link and read the rest.

He touches on an important point, and almost off handedly, hits another very critical point on the innovation journey. The quote I would like to focus on is this:

Conventional wisdom holds that organizations die of starvation from a shortage of good ideas and projects. In reality, they are much more likely to die of indigestion. A surfeit of projects with inadequate staffing makes delivering on anything less likely.

I have participated in, and led innovation efforts at multiple large enterprises over my career. When I read this quote, it resonated so strongly I felt compelled to draft this short piece. What grabbed my attention on this, is the idea that many leaders (including myself) have focused on ways to bring innovation in to drive more demand through improved engagement models and “cultural change”. This is often seen and celebrated as part of transformational change to drive business value, and all the other clichéd terms we like to use.

In reality, there is often more to be gained in focusing on first principles – focusing on the hard work of understanding our teams, understanding what we need to be successful, listening to our people and giving them room to innovate and explore the ideas they already have. We seem to celebrate work over value, and so often I see the valuable “thinking time” being driven out of our days.

We have an opportunity to stop – look at our teams and prioritize thinking. Learn to get to know the people we have and probe them for what they would do if they were the leader. Then we can select the best ideas and get out of the way – empowerment and space are unbelievably powerful innovation tools!

Demand without capacity is a fool’s errand, and creation of capacity comes through prioritization of value over work, and a recognition that innovation must be nurtured and given space. As value is created, it must be celebrated, as failures are seen, they must be dissected to pull out the value of the lessons. Keep the focus on the VALUE PRODUCED, not the IDEAS GENERATED. Value measures will vary depending on the effort, but they must be a part of each effort, and a part of the mindset and story to ensure innovation is meaningful, even when risky and / or exploratory.