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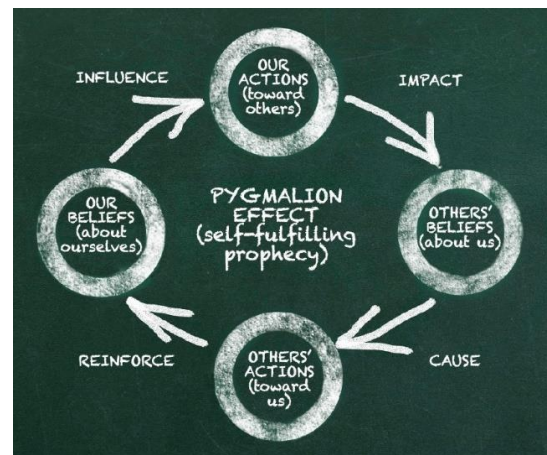
Transformational Leadership and Setting the Bar for Success

By Lori A. Hoffner

Do you know the difference between transactional leadership and transformational leadership and why it makes a difference in EVERY industry? As the saying goes; “the times, they are a-changin’,” and if it’s important for you and your organization to move into the future with positive growth and a thriving staff, you will want to understand how to support this change.

Transformational leadership is a style where leaders inspire and motivate employees to exceed their own self-interests for the good of the organization and to achieve extraordinary outcomes. This is achieved through the strength of vision and personality, which changes expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work towards common goals. In contrast, transactional leadership focuses on routine, regimented activities and relies on established processes, rewards, and punishments to motivate employees. While both styles have their place, transformational leadership is more effective in driving change and fostering a positive organizational culture.

The Pygmalion Effect, studied at the University of North Dakota and Harvard University by renowned social psychologist Robert Rosenthal. This psychological phenomenon where higher expectations lead to an increase in performance, is a crucial component of transformational leadership. When leaders have high expectations of their employees, they communicate those expectations through nonverbal signals, warmth, and positive feedback, resulting in improved performance.



In a fantastic [article](#) by Dr. Robert Brooks, he refers to the writings of psychologist Daniel Goleman. According to Goleman, Rosenthal attributed the Pygmalion Effect to subtle factors. Teachers, for example, expressed greater warmth towards some students, offered more specific feedback on their performance, taught them more challenging material, and gave them more time to respond. Rosenthal said, “The same factors operate with bosses and their employees, therapists and their clients, or parents

and children. The more warmth and more positive the expectations that are communicated, the better the person who receives those messages will do.”

So how does this impact today’s workforce? The millennial workforce is the second largest in our nation’s history, and right behind them, in even larger numbers, is Generation Z. With a powerhouse workforce that comes with a desire for change, the outdated style of transactional leadership no longer satisfies the expectations of prospective employees. It is imperative that leadership starts to reflect the prerequisites and connections needed for retention, growth, and sustainability.

The book **The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life** by Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander introduces a concept called “giving an A.” This concept suggests that we choose to see everyone, including ourselves, as having great potential. By giving an A to anyone and everyone—your spouse, children, employer, co-workers, and even strangers—you create a positive expectation that can lead to improved relationships and outcomes.

People often rise (or fall) to meet our expectations. It’s easy to fall into the habit of judging others for not living up to our standards or behaving as we think they should. We might label them as C’s, D’s, or even F’s. But what if we focused on their potential instead? What if we gave them an A from the start and treated them accordingly? By setting the “expectation bar” high for performance, productivity, and a stronger work environment, we can foster better relationships and achieve remarkable results. Consider the impact you could have as a transformational leader who sets high expectations and provides the necessary support.

Here are a few ideas to help set the bar.

1. Set High Expectations and Communicate Them Clearly

- **Articulate Vision and Goals:** Clearly communicate the organization's vision and the high expectations you have for each team member. Make sure everyone understands how their role contributes to the larger picture.
- **Regular Feedback and Recognition:** Provide regular, constructive feedback and recognize achievements. This helps employees understand what they are doing well and where they can improve, reinforcing the high expectations you have set.

2. Foster an Inclusive and Positive Environment

- **Encourage Open Dialogue:** Create a safe space for open communication where employees feel comfortable sharing ideas, concerns, and feedback. This promotes trust and transparency.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Use positive reinforcement to encourage desired behaviors. Celebrate successes, big and small, to build a supportive and motivating atmosphere.

3. Provide Opportunities for Growth and Development

- **Continuous Learning:** Offer training and development programs that help employees enhance their skills and knowledge. Encourage them to take on challenging projects that stretch their abilities.

- Mentorship and Coaching: Implement mentorship and coaching programs to provide personalized guidance and support. This helps employees see their potential and strive for excellence.

4. Lead by Example

- Model Desired Behaviors: Demonstrate the behaviors and attitudes you expect from your team. Show commitment, integrity, and enthusiasm in your work.
- Empathy and Support: Show genuine concern for your employees' well-being. Be approachable, listen actively, and provide support when needed. This builds strong, trusting relationships.

Transformational leadership and the Pygmalion Effect are powerful tools for fostering employee success and satisfaction. By raising expectations and providing positive reinforcement, leaders can inspire their employees to achieve higher levels of performance. In today's evolving workforce, embracing these concepts is essential for organizations that want to thrive and retain top talent. As the times change, so must our leadership styles, moving towards a more inclusive, positive, and transformative approach.

Lori A. Hoffner, Organizational Development Speaker & Trainer helps people and organizations create open, positive, and inclusive environments through her speaking, training, and consulting. Since 1997, Lori has had the pleasure of working with audiences across the country to help them learn, grow, and develop positive practices for their organizations. If you want to learn how Lori can support your team, give us a [call](#).