

# The Seven Secrets of Inspiring Leaders

By Carmine Gallo - Thu Oct 11, 8:08 AM ET

American business professionals are uninspired. Only 10% of employees look forward to going to work and most point to a lack of leadership as the reason why, according to a recent Maritz Research poll. But it doesn't have to be that way. **All business leaders have the power to inspire, motivate, and positively influence the people in their professional lives.** For the past year, I have been interviewing renowned leaders, entrepreneurs, and educators who have an extraordinary ability to sell their vision, values, and themselves. I was researching their communications secrets for my new book, *Fire Them Up*. What I found were seven techniques that you can easily adopt in your own professional communications with your employees, clients, and investors.

1. **Demonstrate enthusiasm -- constantly.** Inspiring leaders have an abundance of passion for what they do. You cannot inspire unless you're inspired yourself. Period. Passion is something I can't teach. You either have passion for your message or you don't. Once you discover your passion, make sure it's apparent to everyone within your professional circle. Richard Tait sketched an idea on a napkin during a cross-country flight, an idea to bring joyful moments to families and friends. His enthusiasm was so infectious that he convinced partners, employees, and investors to join him. He created a toy and game company called Cranium. Walk into its Seattle headquarters and you are hit with a wave of fun, excitement, and engagement the likes of which is rarely seen in corporate life. It all started with one man's passion.

2. **Articulate a compelling course of action.** Inspiring leaders craft and deliver a specific, consistent, and memorable vision. A goal such as "we intend to double our sales by this time next year," is not inspiring. Neither is a long, convoluted mission statement destined to be tucked away and forgotten in a desk somewhere. A vision is a short (usually 10 words or less), vivid description of what the world will look like if your product or service succeeds. Microsoft's (NasdaqGS:MSFT - News) Steve Ballmer once said that shortly after he joined the company, he was having second thoughts. Bill Gates and Gates' father took Ballmer out to dinner and said he had it all wrong. They said Ballmer saw his role as that of a bean counter for a startup. They had a vision of putting a computer on every desk, in every home. That vision -- a computer on every desk, in every home -- remains consistent to this day. The power of a vision set everything in motion.

3. **Sell the benefit.** Always remember, it's not about you, it's about them. In my first class at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, I was taught to answer the question, "Why should my readers care?" That's the same thing you need to ask yourself constantly throughout a presentation, meeting, pitch, or any situation where persuasion takes place. Your listeners are asking themselves, what's in this for me? Answer it. Don't make them guess.

4. **Tell more stories.** Inspiring leaders tell memorable stories. Few business leaders appreciate the power of stories to connect with their audiences. A few weeks ago I was working with one of the largest producers of organic food in the country. I can't recall most, if any, of the data they used to prove organic is better. But I remember a story a farmer told. He said when he worked for a conventional grower, his kids could not hug him at the end of the day when he got home. His clothes had to be removed and disinfected. Now, his kids can hug him as soon as he walks off the field. No amount of data can replace that story. And now guess what I think about when I see the organic section in my local grocery store? You got it. The farmer's story. Stories connect with people on an emotional level. Tell more of them.

5. **Invite participation.** Inspiring leaders bring employees, customers, and colleagues into the process of building the company or service. This is especially important when trying to motivate young people. The command and control way of managing is over. Instead, today's managers solicit input, listen for feedback, and actively incorporate what they hear. Employees want more than a paycheck. They want to know that their work is adding up to something meaningful.

6. **Reinforce an optimistic outlook.** Inspiring leaders speak of a better future. Robert Noyce, the co-founder of Intel INTC, said, "Optimism is an essential ingredient of innovation. How else can the individual favor change over security?" Extraordinary leaders throughout history have been more optimistic than the average person. Winston Churchill exuded hope and confidence in the darkest days of World War II. Colin Powell said that optimism was the secret behind Ronald Reagan's charisma. Powell also said that optimism is a force multiplier, meaning it has a ripple effect throughout an organization. Speak in positive, optimistic language. Be a beacon of hope.

7. **Encourage potential.** Inspiring leaders praise people and invest in them emotionally. Richard Branson has said that when you praise people they flourish; criticize them and they shrivel up. Praise is the easiest way to connect with people. When people receive genuine praise, their doubt diminishes and their spirits soar. Encourage people and they'll walk through walls for you.

By inspiring your listeners, you become the kind of person people want to be around. Customers will want to do business with you, employees will want to work with you, and investors will want to back you. It all starts with mastering the language of motivation.