

# Don't overlook the value of positivity as a leadership skill

A positive mindset is typically seen as a desirable trait in the workforce across all professionals and job levels, but it's often overlooked as a leadership skill. Positivity can help leaders create a better work environment, build stronger business relationships, and navigate the often tumultuous business landscape with an optimistic outlook. A positive outlook can also have internal benefits for leaders such as managing stress and avoiding burnout.

Here's what you should know about positivity as a leadership skill and how you can implement it as part of your own leadership style.

## Components of positive leadership

### Modeling positive attitudes

One important component of leadership is acting as a positive example to those that you lead. Positive leaders create positive employees. Even more importantly, they create positive middle managers.

Transformational leadership is a popular theory of leadership in which the goal is to inspire positive change and motivation amongst employees. A transformational leader is meant to evoke a sense of purpose in employees in relation to their work. In theory, this will empower them to take initiative, work harder, and achieve their full potential. In order to evoke that positivity and motivation in others, you need to find it within yourself as well.

By modeling positive attitudes in your daily work life, you can demonstrate to others how to approach challenges, interactions, and everyday business activities in a positive way. Ultimately, this benefits everyone's professional development and well-being and allows the organization to cultivate a stronger culture.

### Using positive language

Positivity is not only a great leadership skill in general, but also an important communication skill for leaders. How you deliver a message plays a big part in how it will be received. Leaders need to be able to evoke excitement when delivering news on new products, strategic shifts, and more. They also need to be able to uplift their teams during hard times in order to keep the business moving forward.

A large component of using positive language is understanding how to communicate feedback effectively. Feedback should be used to empower employees by highlighting their strengths while also providing tools and actionable examples of how to improve their performance. Feedback delivered using overly negative language can be discouraging, but when it is framed more positively it can help them feel acknowledged and supported.

Many great leaders use the compliment sandwich technique to deliver feedback. This involves leading with something that the employee is doing well, then segueing into an opportunity for improvement, and then circling back to something positive. This allows the leader to provide some critique, while ensuring that the employee leaves the interaction feeling largely positive about the conversation.

## Emotional intelligence

In order to be a positive and effective leader, you need to possess a high degree of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has five key components.

- **Self-awareness.** The ability to understand your own emotions and how your emotions can impact others.
- **Self-regulation.** The ability to regulate your own emotions. In leadership, this helps leaders avoid acting on impulse, directing anger or frustration towards staff, and maintaining a positive and professional attitude even under stress.
- **Motivation.** The ability to keep yourself motivated and maintain a high quality of work.
- **Empathy.** The ability to see things from someone else's perspective and share their feelings
- **Social skills.** The ability to communicate well with others, manage conflict, and thrive in different social situations.

Emotional intelligence in itself is a great leadership skill, but it is also a great tool for leveraging positivity as a leadership trait. When you are aware of and know how to manage your own emotions, you can act as a better example to your staff and communicate more effectively.

## Benefits of positive leadership

When most people think of the benefits of positivity, the internal benefits typically come to mind. Most people practice positivity in order to feel better. Leaders will also likely experience this, but there are also a lot of business benefits as well.

### Improved employee engagement and morale

Leaders set the tone for their workplace. A leader that is negative or harsh with their words or actions will create a work environment that is stressful or discouraging.

The power of positive leadership is that you can use it to help employees feel more connected with the company's purpose, mission, values, and overall culture. Employees today want to feel a sense of belonging. They want to know that the company and leaders that they work for share their values. These are the things that make the latest generation of employees excited to go to work. When you leverage positivity in your leadership style, you can keep morale high by instilling that sense of purpose, representing your organization's values well, and making employees feel valued.

One thing that can be helpful for leaders to do is to share positive outcomes transparently with their staff. These aren't always going to be sales numbers. Often they may be customer reviews sharing how much the product or service has helped them. They may be the results of a charitable initiative that the company undertook. It could be highlighting sustainability or accessibility practices or features. These are great ways to spread positive messaging and help employees feel good about the work that they're doing.

## **Better change management**

For high-level leadership roles such as executive positions, the way that you announce or communicate major changes or events will largely determine how your employees react to the news. Positive leaders that communicate with employees in a positive, uplifting manner when announcing and communicating change will produce better results.

Change often creates feelings of anxiety and uncertainty within workplaces, but using positive language and highlighting the benefits of the change will help ease these fears and keep morale strong. If change is handled poorly, it can lead to employee disengagement, turnover, and lowered productivity or job performance.

## **More effective problem-solving**

Many people get overwhelmed or catastrophize when they run into a large problem. Leaders have a great responsibility when it comes to approaching and solving problems on behalf of their teams and the company. However, maintaining a positive attitude can help leaders better approach a problem. If you see a problem as an opportunity or a temporary setback that your team will be able to overcome, then you'll go into the problem-solving process with a clearer head.

## **Meaningful relationship building**

Most leadership roles require some level of networking or relationship building. Positivity can help with this in a few ways.



The first is that positivity is typically associated with improved confidence. If you believe that someone is going to like you or be excited to hear about what you have to say, going up to them to start a conversation won't be as intimidating. Building confidence as a leader will help you network, speak to clients, and handle press engagements if needed.

Another benefit is that being positive can help you leave a good impression on others. If you are at a trade show with tens of thousands of other people, it can be hard to stand out. However, if you are the person that had a great attitude or made a boring activity fun, people will probably remember you — and they'll want to do business with you.

You'll also build better relationships within the company. Approaching issues with a positive and kind perspective helps managers and leaders build trust with their employees. Employees are more likely to come to you with concerns or when they need help if they know that you'll react in a supportive non-judgemental manner. This open communication is really important, as it provides leaders with better insight into what is going on within the organization or their teams and provides them the opportunity to problem-solve with employees before the issues get bigger.

## **When you shouldn't stay positive**

Maintaining a positive outlook and using positive language as a leader is great. However, there are a few caveats to keep in mind.

### **Toxic positivity**

Positivity is great, but you do need to make sure that you don't cross over into toxic positivity. Toxic positivity occurs when you take your positive mindset too far by demanding positivity in all situations and refusing to allow or experience negative emotions. The problem with this is that it isn't healthy for the leader or for their teams.

From a leadership perspective, toxic positivity can make leaders less open to feedback or concerns as they may be perceived as negative. For employees, working in an environment filled with toxic positivity can make it hard to speak up when issues need to be addressed. There needs to be space for team members to also share negative emotions. Expressing negative emotions in the workplace can help businesses in a variety of ways including:

- Identifying pain points in products or processes for employees or customers.
- Addressing issues in your company's culture. If a certain person or group is feeling underappreciated or disrespected, they should be allowed to feel frustrated or angry. Speaking up on harassment or discrimination can be a tough and emotional process and it would be unfair to expect victims to smile and put a positive spin on their experiences.
- Working through periods of internal or external change. Leaders will sometimes need to address sensitive subjects whether they be large-scale layoffs or outside issues like the coronavirus pandemic. It's good to approach these with positivity and optimism, but you should also acknowledge the fear, sadness, and uncertainty that others may be feeling and provide them with space to work through those emotions.

It's also worth noting that while positive emotions are great, it has been shown that people that feel a wider range of emotions tend to actually be happier on average. UC Berkeley's [Greater Good Science Center](#) reports that emotional diversity, or emo-diversity, may lead to higher levels of overall happiness than purely experiencing positive emotions throughout your day.

This doesn't mean that leaders or employees should be exuding negativity, and there's still a way to address negative experiences or issues in a positive manner. However, it does mean that you should work to avoid falling into the trap of toxic positivity.

### **Seeing things through rose-colored glasses**

When it comes to leadership, positivity should guide how to approach situations and communicate with others.

What it shouldn't do is cloud your judgment.

Try not to sacrifice practicality for positivity. Practicing positive leadership to highlight the business' and your employees' achievements and approach challenges with a positive outlook is great. However, there are times when you do need to acknowledge more serious issues and take action that may not be perceived as positive or optimistic.

Positive leaders should still be willing to make tough and potentially unpopular decisions such as firing or laying off people, changing policies to ensure the success of the business, rejecting ideas or ending projects that are not working, and taking disciplinary action as needed. Overly positive leaders sometimes have difficulty admitting that a business strategy, initiative, partnership, or employee is not working out and needs to be cut. However, effective leadership sometimes requires making difficult decisions if they are in the best interest of the business.