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Minds at Work: **LEADERS AS INSPIRERS**

Presented by David Bracken, Ph.D.

HOST: Welcome to Minds at Work, where our job is to help your mind become inspired by your work.

I'm your host, Drew Hoffmeyer.

In today's episode entitled Leaders as Inspirers, David Bracken, who is known for his expertise in leadership development and decision-making, speaks to us about inspirational leadership. Dave defines inspirer according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. He provides examples of historically inspirational leaders, and he illustrates the kinds of behaviors that are truly inspirational and often quiet leaders exhibit. Finally, he wraps everything up with a new definition of inspiring leadership. Rudy Karsan, Community Leader, Chairman of Junior Achievement's Board of Directors in the Delaware Valley and CEO of Kenexa, co-authored this piece. We hope you enjoy it.

DR. DAVID BRACKEN: When someone is described as a leader, the fact that he or she has followers is implicit. Followers may choose to follow the leader because they strongly believe in the leader's ideology, or simply because they lack a better choice, or, then again, because of a combination of belief in both the ideology and charisma of the leader. When it is the last of these reasons, the leader is a true inspirer of the people.

What does being an inspirer mean? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word inspire means to influence, move or guide by Divine or supernatural inspiration to exert an animating, enlivening or exalting influence on; to spur on, impel, motivate or to affect. Many inspiring, historical leaders were flamboyant, full of rhetoric, and able to seize the moment and enthuse people even to risk their lives for a cause.

Martin Luther King Junior's, I Have a Dream speech is one of the best known speeches in history and has gone on to inspire not just the people that listened to him speak, but countless others in future generations as well. Similarly, Winston Churchill's speeches during World War II were great inspiration to the men fighting in the trenches. What dispirited soldier could fail to respond to words such as "We shall fight on the seas and oceans. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing ground. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender." Mahatma Gandhi managed to inspire an entire nation to fight for independence without deviating from his creative nonviolence. His memorable speech on the eve of the Gandhi march exhorted followers to continue their protest even if he were to be arrested. Said Gandhi, "I believe there are men in India to complete the work begun by me. I have faith in the righteousness of our cause and the purity of our weapons. And where the means are clean, there God is undoubtedly present with his blessings; and where these three combined, defeat is an impossibility."

Many leaders have inspired people, usually during times of crisis. However, contrary to popular belief, an inspirational leader is not always the most charismatic, outgoing person. In fact, many inspirational leaders are introverted or somewhat quiet people. Their strength lies in being able to inspire people on a daily basis, literally by walking the talk. Their followers learn from observing how they take their daily problems in stride and manage to remain unswerving from the direction in which they are headed. They are able to communicate their values and vision clearly and simply without resorting to dramatic speechmaking. Yet in times of crisis or growth, they are able to motivate their followers with their passion. They are good story tellers. They are able to illustrate what they say with relevant examples. They are excellent listeners who encourage others to think creatively and express themselves and are able to intuitively

recognize good ideas and follow up on them. Many people need to be inspired to achieve things they otherwise would not have believed possible. As someone put it, without inspiration, we might never believe in the extraordinary. At the workplace, they look to leaders to provide inspiration along with the competence required to pursue their aims effectively—so truly inspiring leaders are those who first know the way. They usually have broad knowledge they can bring to bear to solve problems and create new solutions. They are also open to other perspectives and are willing to take risks and not shut down the contributions of others. They are excellent at bringing out the best in others. One of their main strengths is having the wisdom and ability to empower others and help them envision the importance of their individual roles in the larger scheme of things. This empowerment instills in people confidence in their abilities, and a sense of being vital to the success of the team, which leads to a desire to excel.

Second, inspiring leaders point the way. They have a clear, inspiring vision that they can, in turn, communicate in plain language and create ownership across the organization. They exemplify the values of the organization in a way that enthralls everyone to strive to achieve the same. They are easily accessible to all employees, which can inspire great loyalty.

Third, inspiring leaders show the way by their actions as well as words. They demonstrate the right way to do things. They're not only able to help followers envision an attainable vision, but also articulate how to achieve it. They are typically highly principled with a firm set of values for themselves and for the organization. They are also humble and not afraid to show their vulnerability or lack of knowledge. They understand and firmly believe in the significance of continual learning. At the same time, they have self-confidence in their abilities, which is essential to sustaining their followers' confidence in them. Another important facet to showing the way is that they do just that, encourage independence, rather than dependence.

Fourth, inspiring leaders lead the way. They show their commitment and passion by actively participating in the leadership process. They are seen carrying the flag at the head of the charge, rather than sitting on their horse overseeing the battle from behind the lines. This helps make them accessible and visible. They are able to go the extra mile, which spurs others to follow. By showing that they are doing their best, they inspire others to give their best. Inspiring leadership is about unlocking potential by helping people realize their capabilities, rather than issuing orders about using other skills, rather than trying to be a know-it-all, and about inspiring passion and commitment for work and the organization. In times of change and turbulence, the inspiring leader is able to communicate the need for change and the best way to tackle the change. This enables the leader and followers to move forward with the least amount of disruption to the organization. There are inspiring leaders of all personality types, but most have some things in common. They make an indelible impact on others, empower people to realize their dreams, intend to illustrate Chinese philosopher, Lao Xi's words on leadership, "But of a good leader who talks little when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, we did it ourselves." Those are the leaders who make a difference.

HOST: We hope you enjoyed hearing today's episode, and thank you for joining us at "Minds at Work," where we offer you insight into becoming better employees, parents, partners, friends and neighbors. Visit our website at Kenexapods.com to find the original transcript of this episode or just to drop us a line. That's Kenexapods.com. This episode was brought to you by Kenexa, a leader in building the world's greatest workforces and serving humanity every day.

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