



TRANSCRIPT

Episode # 31: Inspire Others To Do Hard Things

You are listening to episode 31 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. As leaders, we often have to ask people to address challenges or solve problems that aren't easy. That means we're asking them to stretch beyond their normal comfort zone, and most people are reluctant to do that. But what if there's a way of making that request that would inspire and energize your team? In fact, there is and you can join us in this episode to learn more about that.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Hi, everyone. We've just had our last big snowstorm of the year here in Portland, Maine. And I'm recording this episode on a day that's beginning to

look downright like spring, I guess. Brilliant sunshine sparkling on a vibrant blue ocean, and the breeze is kicking up a lot of little whitecaps. So it's a particularly beautiful scene outside my window today.

It's an inspirational view in every way and it's got me thinking of all the things that can inspire us. Usually we associate inspiration with clearly beautiful or positive things. Or we think about a charismatic and compelling speaker whose words just sweep us off our feet.

We don't associate inspiration much with our day to day responsibilities in the work world. And we often don't think of ourselves as having the capability of being inspiring, but I believe that we all can inspire others.

And in fact I know that's true from my decades of coaching leaders on this topic. It's not a matter of your personality and the circumstances don't have to be fun and exciting. It's simply knowing the things that motivate and energize other people, and then simply saying them.

Today we're going to talk about a very common thing we have to do as leaders in the workplace, asking other people to do hard things. It's something we often dread, because let's face it, it's an awkward thing to do. No matter how well-intended people are, they seldom enjoy being stretched out of their comfort zone.

So when we ask them to do something hard, we know we're asking them to do something that they may not enjoy, and that knowledge makes us uncomfortable. And when we're uncomfortable, we can behave in less than effective ways when we deliver our request.

We can tiptoe around things and be less than candid. We can be apologetic. Or we can be completely rational. And some of us can even be a little brutal and just tell other people to suck it up.

Notice that I said all these different ways of asking people to do hard things are not particularly effective. Certainly some of these approaches are pretty common, and they're even accepted behavior. But none of them can be called inspirational.

And if you want people to really engage and be all in on something, you need to inspire them. You need to create an emotional state in them that gives them the motivation, and the focus, to do the thing that you require of them.

I'm going to walk you through what normally happens when we do this so you can better see why these approaches are ineffective. And then I'm going

to give you some very simple but powerful techniques to inspire and motivate others when the situation at hand is a challenging one.

When I first stumbled across these techniques, my work life and my career began to accelerate. And why was that? Well, I started to have teams working for me who would walk through fire when we needed to. They were motivated to be extraordinary. And imagine what you can do when you're supported by an extraordinary team.

It was an amazing experience for me. And I'm so grateful to the teams that enabled me to have that experience. And also imagine what happens to each person who is part of an extraordinary team, because they now have a deep understanding of their own capabilities and how to tap into them. Their own career trajectories often begin to accelerate as well.

That's what happened to several members of teams that I lead during my corporate life. They became well known and respected leaders in their own right, independent of me. But before we get to the techniques, let's talk about what I mean by hard things and then how we typically talk to our teams about this.

So here are some actual examples of hard things that some of my current clients are asking their teams to take on. They're asking them to become

change agents in order to prepare for future market conditions, even though the current company culture is firmly immersed in the status quo. Another client is asking the North American team to take its performance to a new level, even though that team feels unappreciated by the European parent company and is somewhat defensive.

Yet another client is asking the team to do more with less because there are current economic headwinds. And still another client is asking the team to develop a culture of healthy candor and accountability, when previously the culture was consensus driven and conflict averse. And finally, this is a very common one, I have a client right now who's asking a team of functional experts to not only deliver their expertise, but to actually wow the rest of the company with their value.

I think we'd all agree that these are hard things for a team to do. It's not that they're unnecessary, these are all probably very valuable objectives. And it's not that these things are impossible to do. Certainly, other companies and teams have found ways of doing these things. But if any of these teams are going to be successful, they definitely will need to be operating outside of their comfort zones.

So how would you ask these teams to do that hard thing? What would you do to increase the odds that they tackle these issues successfully? Well, if

you consider yourself to be a good leader, there are two typical ways you might approach this.

The first is that you treat your team in a very objective way. You show them the data and the analysis, you make a logical argument, and you tell them why this change is good for the company. In other words, it's just a matter of good sound business, we're all professionals here. And this particular hard thing comes with the territory of being a leader.

The second way of talking to your team is slightly different, you give your team the data and you make the logical argument. But you also sympathize with their position. You tell them that you know this will be a hard challenge, and you apologize for the necessity of putting them through this.

Now, neither of these ways are inherently bad, but each of them is flawed. The logical and objective approach, of course, ignores the human impact of the hard thing. It's dry and it ignores what the challenge might feel like for each member of the team. And if you remember from episode four of this podcast, taking into account the likely feelings and emotions of others is an essential part of being good at persuasion.

Of course, the second common way of talking to your team does take emotions into account. But there's a problem with that, and I hope you see

that. You're also inadvertently creating a victim mindset in our team. You're telling them that you wish life didn't have to be hard in this way. And you're unintentionally encouraging them to be demoralized, and even sometimes resentful about having to do the hard thing.

So what's the solution? It's to make your team see itself as a band of heroes as it faces this challenge, not a band of victims. I call this creating an aspirational identity because the truth of the matter is when we have a hard thing to do, each and every one of us on the team gets to choose how we feel about it. We get to choose what role we're going to play in this little work drama.

So, if you're the leader and you're telling the team to do a hard thing, give them a choice. Remind them that they don't have to see themselves as demoralized victims, there's another and more powerful way of seeing themselves. They actually might be an elite team of heroes, taking on a challenge that no one else is taking on. If they begin to see themselves in that way, not only will they become inspired and energized, they're going to inspire and energize others.

Now, this isn't a concept that I just made up, although I like to think that I've added some powerful refinements to make it useful for the workplace. This is actually a concept that's been used successfully for hundreds of years,

in real life and in fictional settings. Most of you have run across this in sports related movies and TV shows, for example.

Some recent instances of this can be found in the TV series, Ted Lasso about the American coach of an underrated UK soccer team. It's the come from behind speech that every coach gives in the locker room during halftime to re-energize and motivate the team. The situation is looking pretty difficult. But instead of haranguing the team, or at least in this version of the locker room talk, the coach pauses and the coach tells the team what he or she sees in them.

The coach essentially says, I know you and I know what you're capable of. I'm proud of you when you're the best versions of yourself. In this version of the speech, the coach reminds the team of the best version of themselves. And then the coach invites them to step into that.

And if you're a student of history and literature, like I am, you've also seen versions of this speech there. Lincoln, and also Churchill, are both known as inspirational speakers. Yet they both also arguably lacked what we would regard as typically charismatic styles and personalities. On the other hand, they knew this powerful secret, telling people who they are and who they can be, inspires them and gives them energy to do the hard and sometimes impossible thing.

So, my favorite inspirational speech of all time, it's actually probably the original speech that everyone else who I've mentioned has since copied. It's called the St. Crispin's Day speech and it's found in a semi-historical play by Shakespeare called Henry the Fifth.

In the play the English troops are on French soil in the year 1415. And they're about to start the battle of Agincourt. They're vastly outnumbered by the French army, and they know it. So the character of King Henry tells them that things will be hard, but he also points out the inspirational side of that.

He talks about their situation with a phrase that you've probably heard before, if not in its entirety then in the titles of books and movies that have come out ever since. He calls his army as he talks to them, we few, we happy few, we band of brothers. And then he goes on to tell them that they are heroes with the capability of doing something truly glorious, winning victory in the face of overwhelming odds.

In fact, if they pull it off, future generations will be disappointed not to have had the opportunity to be there with him that day and be equally heroic. Needless to say, they go on to win the battle, which is now regarded as one of the most revered events in British history.

Now, for those of you who want to attend a masterclass in how to inspire others to do hard things, I highly recommend that you look this up and you study this speech. That's not just my advice, it's the advice of a lot of well-known and highly respected leaders.

So if you want to do that, we'll drop a link to the speech in the show notes for this episode. But regardless of whether you check that particular speech out, here's a list of phrases and tips that you can use when you want to tell your team to do a hard thing.

So first on this list, you can ask the rhetorical question, where else would you want to be? Or where else would you rather be? In other words, some teams don't want to take on big challenges. But you, you're the sort of team, you're the sort of heroes who do. Where else would you rather be?

Here's another phrase, we hold ourselves to a higher standard than other teams because we can. This is a great phrase to use when your team is feeling that it's unfair that they have to tackle a big challenge when other teams don't have to. When you say this phrase, essentially, you're telling them that they're better than those other teams. Those other teams aren't capable of tackling big challenges, but we are.

A slightly different version of that statement is to say, we don't have to do this, we get to do this. In other words, we aren't victims who are being forced to do hard things, we're heroes stepping up to show other people how to achieve hard things.

And yet another technique is to remind the team of the future, as Shakespeare did in that speech, the St. Crispin's Day speech. Tell your team the wonderful stories that they'll be telling each other once they all pull this hard thing off. Tell them about the respect, and even envy, that other people will have when they see what you've done.

And by the way, let's not just think about the team. Let's also look at what it does to you, the leader, to talk in this way. After all, you are the one who is ultimately responsible for doing the hard thing. And on top of that, you also have to keep everyone else inspired and motivated. That's a heavy burden. So you also need to inspire yourself.

Speaking in this way and creating this sort of environment for your team is also a gift to yourself. It keeps you energized, focused and goal oriented in a positive way, versus a negative way.

And finally, one of the more important aspects of being inspirational is ensuring that the energy and the motivation that you ignite in the beginning

is sustainable. It's not just enough to inspire people at the beginning of a long, hard thing, you have to help them maintain their energy and focus along the way. So how do you do that?

Well, there are a variety of ways. I'll give you some of them, but I bet you can think of some on your own too. First, it's important to acknowledge the reality of the situation as things unfold. There will be times when people are exhausted or frustrated. A hero isn't a hero without some suffering involved.

When that happens, you'll want to tell your team that you see their pain. And you'll try to give them moments of relief from it. An unexpected day or two off, for example, or a fun break. Show them some compassion when they need that and give them a chance to recharge their batteries.

You'll also want to regularly remind them of how far they've come. If your team is filled with high achievers, they can get overly focused on what hasn't yet been achieved and what challenges still need to be surmounted. The emotional stress of thinking that way all the time is really energy draining. And ironically, it can erode the effectiveness of your team.

So it's your job to turn their attention to what's working, versus what isn't working. Regularly reminding them of what's been accomplished so far and

how much closer that moves them towards a successful finish line. And, of course, celebrate and applaud their wins as often as possible.

And finally, repeat your inspirational remarks from time to time to reignite your team and get them fired up again. Celebrate not only what they've accomplished, but who they are. Remind them that they have within themselves the capacity to be heroic. You see that in them, and you're holding a mirror up so that they can see it too.

When a team reconnects with its capacity to do hard things, it's a beautiful thing to see as a leader, not only because they'll start walking through walls for you, but because you're teaching them how to walk through walls for themselves. You're helping each and every one of them grow to be more and more powerful.

All right, my friends, go out there and do a little inspiring. And in the meantime, I hope you have an awesome week ahead and I'll see you in our next episode.

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