

Spotlight on Encouraging



A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success.

Unknown (cited in Wong, 2015)

Why Encouragement?

Encouragement is one of the most widely used and successful ways by which people show support for each other. When you encourage your team members, it is as though you instil courage into them. A leader's encouragement is emotional energy that gives team members strength to look ahead, reach forward, and strive for their next goal. The fraught or negative emotional atmosphere of challenging circumstances can be made brighter and more positive by encouraging people, help them to go further than they thought possible and sustain their commitment to the organisation. It also helps them to keep focus on its goals.

Everyone needs encouragement, recognition, and energy from others. Some leaders encourage in an outgoing, noisy way with lots of hugs, cheers, celebration and applause. Other leaders encourage in a quiet, kind and understated manner. Whatever your personal style as a leader, the definition above reflects three essential features that you need to bear in mind when considering how best to encourage your team members:

You always communicate encouragement through language or other symbolic way (e.g. hand gestures, pictures)

Your encouragement focuses either on challenges or potential in people or situations

Your encouragement expresses affirmations with a present or future focus that instil courage, perseverance, confidence, inspiration, or hope in your team member

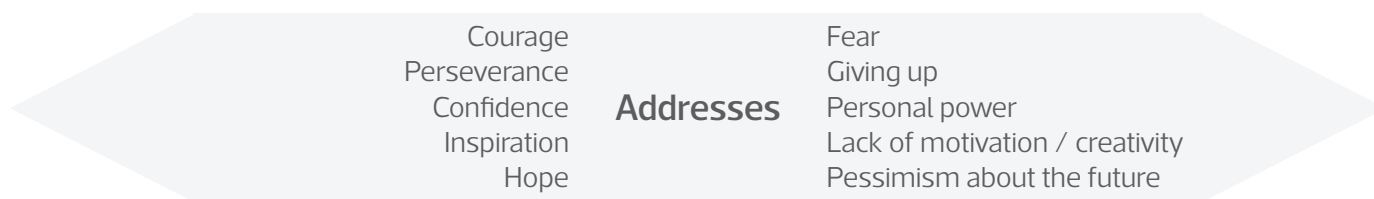


Encouragement is the expression of affirmation through language or other symbolic representations to instil courage, perseverance, confidence, inspiration, or hope in a person(s) within the context of addressing a challenging situation or realizing a potential

Y. Joel Wong (2015)

Encouraging always means communicating positive statements about a person, their actions, output or situation. You may explicitly encourage – by saying, for example, “I have confidence in you”, or you may implicitly encourage – for example, by asking questions that build team members’ confidence in their strengths, achievements or undertakings.

You may want to encourage a team member(s) who is facing a challenge such as indecisiveness, solving a problem, stressful situations, heavy workload or other situations requiring effort. By successfully encouraging your team member you address their limitation(s) and shortcoming(s) by bringing into play a strength(s) that helps them to deal successfully with their challenge:



Alternatively, you may want to encourage a team member in whom you have noticed potential. You could say something like:

“You may never have thought of managing a project yourself before but I think you would do a really excellent job”.

Know your team members individually

Observe and listen to your team members at work. Get to know each team member as an individual with a unique combination of personal characteristics. Notice what challenges and motivates them. Notice any signs of fear, lack of confidence, giving up, poor motivation or despondency. Notice when they are out of their comfort zone. See the best in each team member and believe in their potential. Evaluate each person carefully and distinguish between them in terms of their individuality. What represents an exciting achievement for one team member may be seen as a fearful or insurmountable obstacle by another. Do not make assumptions or use the same approach for the whole team. (Wong (2015) suggests that different genders, cultures and ethnic cultures may respond differently to encouragement, proposing that it is likely to be more important to the success and well-being of women, minority groups and some non-western cultures.) Your encouragement should give each person greater belief in them self.

Who would benefit from your encouragement? Why?

Encouraging effectively

Research has shown that there are three factors that determine how successfully your encouragement will impact upon the recipient. Consider them carefully when you are deciding how best to encourage your team members:

How the message is framed	If the encourager is trusted	When the message is perceived as credible
e.g. more effective when it reflects recipient's progress rather than shortfall from a goal	e.g. authority figures or people who know recipient well	e.g. believable, sincere and realistic, or based on views provided or endorsed by recipient

Encouraging your team members effectively will:

- Make them feel valued, included and motivated
- Let them know they are on track in challenging or confusing times
- Build trust and loyalty

References

Kouzes, J.M and Posner, B.Z (2003) **Encouraging the Heart: A Leader's Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others** Jossey-Bass
 Wong, Y.J (2015) "The psychology of encouragement: theory, research, and applications" **The Counselling Psychologist** Vol. 43, Issue 2, pp.178–216