

# 101 Leadership Quotes

November 24,  
2015



How do you thrive at work? How to engage the others? How to make organizational change work? How to create a great organizational culture with positive leadership? These 101 leadership quotes help you answer those questions and amplify your positive impact.

That is – if you are up for the challenge!

Even if you have little time and little influence. Even if your workplace is the worst. **Even if you think you can't make a difference – you can. Whatever your role – as a leader, consultant, coach, professional or employee.**

**Let's amplify your positive impact. It starts with you. You'll inspire just enough others to make a positive difference too, and together, we will develop the workplace and the world.**

## Leadership Quotes

1

Positive leadership is often interpreted as touchy-feely. But the evidence over the last 10 years is clear: if you implement it, performance and customer satisfaction go up. The duty of a leader is to create an organization where it is easy to practice kindness.

***Kim Cameron, professor and author***

2

You choose how you show up to work: will you give it your best or just occupy space? This is also a choice for your

team. Everyone is a volunteer. When you realize that, every person on your team becomes a gift. Your work as a leader shifts from force to invitation, from control to influence, from fear to gratitude.

**David Dye, coach and author**

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3

I have learned that people are more motivated by what they can give than by what they can get. Yet for years we have engaged people the other way around.

**Jeremy Scrivens, workplace futurist and consultant**

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If anything's relevant to your effectiveness: it is your body. It not only determines how convincing or trustworthy you seem to others, but also how you feel and how much energy you've got left at the end of the day.

**Steve Sisgold, coach and author**

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Discipline is remembering what you want.

**Margo Boster, consultant and yoga teacher**

6

The quality of results achieved by any system depends on the quality of awareness from which people in the system operate.

**Otto Scharmer, researcher, consultant and author**

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7

That you are only a drop in the ocean, is a linear point of view. How are you to judge whether your results are insignificant? Tiny acts of empathy and understanding cause ripple effects. The world is changed because you are here.

**Marcella Bremer, consultant and author**

8

I believed that achievement would lead to success, which would lead to happiness. If I kept climbing, I would eventually enter Nirvana. But the higher I rose on the corporate ladder, the bigger became the disconnect with what I truly wanted.

**Henna Inam, consultant and author**

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9

Wholehearted people cultivate courage, compassion, and connection. They wake up knowing: I am enough. They go to bed thinking: I'm imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change the fact that I'm brave and worthy of love and belonging.

**Brene Brown, researcher and author**

10

Reorganization to me is moving boxes around. Transformation means fundamentally changing the way the organization thinks, the way it responds, the way it leads.

**Lou Gerstner, former CEO of IBM**

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11

Parents may want to initiate positive change in their family, like the kids take more responsibility for chores in the house. That can be a tough change issue. If you know how to do this, you can change IBM.

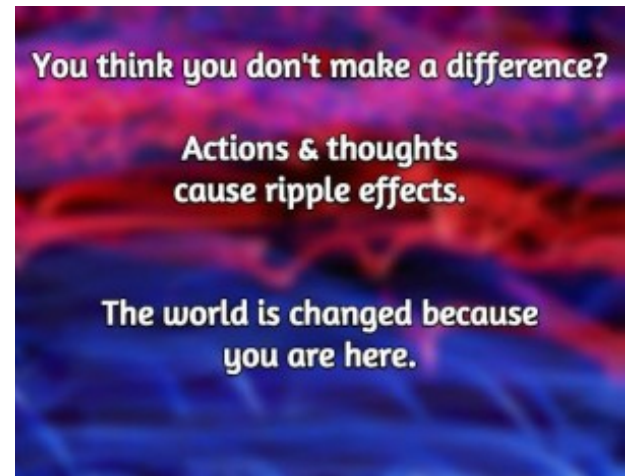
**Terrence Seamon, consultant**

12

Most of us were taught that it's selfish to pursue what we love. Thus, we set aside what makes us different and unique. While when we offer our unique contribution, we are at our best and we can make a difference. Withholding who we are becomes the selfish act!

**Peggy Holman, consultant and author**

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13

Every time an organization uses a 'tax haven', pollutes the environment, cuts corners because of profit pressures, someone somewhere is harmed or robbed in some way, something is taken away, either directly or indirectly.

**Graham Williams, consultant and author**

14

Globally, in the macro, we feel hopeless and helpless. But individually, we are powerful. Individually we make a huge difference. We each must decide to take responsibility for the difference we will make in the world.

**Mike Henry, leader and blogger**

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15

The ideal leader's characteristics are the same in all cultures: being motivational, communicative and trustworthy, to articulate tangible vision, values, strategies, to be a catalyst for strategic and cultural change, to achieve results, to empower others and to exhibit a strong customer orientation.

**Caroline Rook, researcher**

16

Beware the barrenness of a busy life.

**Socrates, philosopher**

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17

You first have to take care of yourself because if you don't, there's no way to take care of anyone else – especially if you're dead. If you're out of balance you can't lead your organization and take care of others.

**Mike Figliuolo, consultant and author**

18

Our role as change practitioners grants us more than an opportunity to earn a living; it comes with responsibilities. Our timing couldn't be better. We are change experts during an era when more transitions are being thrust upon our species than at any period in recorded history.

**Daryl Conner, consultant and mentor**

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19

What looks like leadership is often based on artificial power. Enlightened leaders are operating from authentic power, which is love.

**Danna Beal, speaker and author**

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Service and selflessness will lift your organization. We are happiest and most productive when our sense of time disappears and we are oblivious of ourselves. We are most satisfied when we are in service of something bigger than ourselves.

**August Turak, entrepreneur, consultant and author**

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21

African people are living closer to nature and family than Westerners. That naturally causes a focus on long-term relationships and sustainability. We can learn from them.

**Leontine van Hooff, entrepreneur and speaker**

22

Shower your coworkers and customers with authentic attention – which will stand out in our attention deficit society.

**Kevin Kelly, entrepreneur and author**

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23

You have to actively pursue negative feedback from the people around you. I spend a small amount of my time on good news, but I pay attention to the bad news.

**Elon Musk, entrepreneur**

24

People can act as givers, takers, or matchers. Givers work for the team, but takers for themselves. Do you want to detect a taker? Check how they treat subordinates and people “who can do nothing for them”.

**Adam Grant, professor and author**

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25

We can't always do what we love. But we are free to love what we do.

**Mary Jaksch, Zen master and author**

26

Storytelling in leadership is opening the minds and hearts of people. Storytelling makes leadership more personal and easier to follow. Leadership is telling a powerful narrative.

**Mary-Alice Arthur, story activist**

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27

Why is it so important to learn to ask better questions? In an increasingly complex, interdependent and culturally diverse world, we cannot instantly understand and work with people from different occupational, professional and national cultures.

**Edgar Schein, professor and author**

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28

I have always wanted people to feel free and comfortable in their clothes. I've wanted them to be comfortable at work, too. So, we take listening seriously, we have collaborative circles, and people care for their teams.

**Eileen Fisher, clothing designer**

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29

Most of us lead lives filled with too much stuff, too much to do, too much clutter. Our time and space is limited. The box will break if you cram more into it. Our problem is living without limits.

**Leo Babauta, Zen blogger**

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30

Grace is "Giving the other guy the benefit of the doubt, even if we don't think they deserve it." We've also been (or will be) in need of some grace.

**Brian Fulghum, consultant**

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31

Things take their own time. As much as we set goals, and deadlines and strive to keep people on task, things take their own time. My learning was to set goals but be open to the rate of change not being mine, and to let go of my agenda.

**Leslie Yerkes, consultant**

32

In organizations with effective idea systems, 80 percent of the potential for performance improvement comes from front-line ideas. If you don't tap these ideas at the bottom of the organization, you're undermining your organization's potential.

**Alan G. Robinson, researcher**

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33

If you want to be free, you have to give your employees the autonomy they need to do their work. It's not easy. People often forget that freedom comes with discipline and accountability. The job needs to be done.

**Ricardo Semler, entrepreneur**

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34

"Soft skills" implies that the people side of management is easier than welding steel beams or managing IT projects. But human relationships create the most complex challenges. As Albert Einstein said: "I worked in mathematics, because people are too complicated."

**Jim Bohn, consultant and author**

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35

The Nonessentialist thinks he must be everything to all people – and sacrifices what matters most. The Essentialist stresses "the unimportance of practically everything" and goes after that one thing that matters to him.

**Greg McKeown, consultant and author**

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36

Authentic leadership is the fullest expression of me for the benefit of we.

**Henna Inam, consultant and author**

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37

Before you become a leader, success is all about yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about others.

**Tal Shnall, manager**

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38

Mindfulness has nothing to do with being calm or thinking happy thoughts or being undisturbed. It is the synchronization of mind and body. It gives you a sense of open relaxation and confidence.

**Susan Piver, author**

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39

The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you, whose presence calls forth your best.

**Epictetus, philosopher**

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The way of the mystic is to understand not only through factual information but through energy and intuition as well. The mystic transforms situations with love and knows that there's something good about the problem.

**Max Schupbach, Deep Democracy Institute**

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41

Rulers need three resources: weapons, food and trust. The ruler who cannot have all three should give up weapons first, then food, but should hold on to trust at all cost: Without trust we cannot stand.

***Confucius, philosopher***

42

Leaders who are honest and act in alignment with their values produce consistently high performance almost any way you can measure – gross sales, profits, talent retention, company reputation and customer satisfaction.

***David Watkins, consultant***

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43

40% of the things we think about never occur. The next 30% have already happened. 12% is needless stuff about our health and 10% is about what others think – while we cannot do anything about that. That leaves 8% for legitimate concerns: these are the things you can deal with.

***Andy Andrews, author***

44

Deep inside all of us, we know there is someone we were meant to be. And we can feel when we're becoming that person. The reverse is also true. We know when something's off and we're not the person we were meant to be.

***Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, researcher***

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45

It takes courage to be a creator instead of a critic. You put yourself and your work out there, for all to see. Creating is a move toward something. It's a Yes, ultimately. In its core, criticism is a move away from something. It's a No (not yet).

***Marcella Bremer, consultant and author***

46

The biggest leadership challenge today is that our awareness is fragmented and focused on ego: what's in it for me? Real leadership work is to help people see the whole and change their perspective from "me" to a systems view of "we".

***Otto Scharmer, researcher, consultant and author***

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47

I see three types at work: the Contributors, the Compliant and the Subversives. The Compliant works for Deficit Mindset managers who focus on control, efficiency and performance. The Contributors work for leaders who encourage, coach and develop kind behaviors. The Subversives are not just unhappy, they act out their unhappiness at work.

***Jeremy Scrivens, workplace futurist and consultant***

48

The number one obstacle to success for major change projects is employee resistance and the ineffective management of the people side of change.

***The Prosci Best Practices in Change Management Benchmarking Study (2009)***

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49

You can only lose what you cling to.

**Buddha, philosopher**

50

As a leader, allowing others to take responsibility is letting go so that they become more empowered. Simultaneously we are freed of our fear of losing control, of a drive to be perfect, of getting the credit. We are able to let go if we have self-confidence.

**Graham Williams, consultant and author**

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51

Diversity is beautiful and dramatic if you don't manage it well. But we're not well prepared for diversity. We seem to prefer bipolar thinking – we create models that represent the world on mutually exclusive scales. Diversity includes and reconciles dilemmas.

**Fons Trompenaars, consultant and author**

52

If there were no outdated beliefs, we consultants wouldn't have a job. If all leaders did the things that you and I know work best, they would have no need of our services.

**Terry Dockery, consultant and author**

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53

There is nothing like the feeling of working really well on something important, accomplishing a goal. It is like a drug, or alcohol, or sex, or food, or anything else that can be addictive. I am still recovering from my work addiction.

**Greg Richardson, author**

54

The question for leaders is: who will you involve? Those who plan for the future are the ones who will end up getting it done. If leaders figure it all out the implementation will likely end up on their personal to-do list. Leaders must involve more people to create inspired action.

**Steven Cady, professor and consultant**

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55



Listening is the most critical business skill of all. The difference between great and mediocre business leaders is the ability to listen.

**Bernie Ferrari, author**

56

Remember: What got you here, won't take you there. To increase profitability, return on assets, market value, return on equity, and sales growth, organizations need to hire more women.

**Kathryn Heath, coach and author**

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57

In the traditional organization, the role of leaders is to create vision and strategy. In new organizations, our role as leaders is to listen where the organization wants to go. We don't play God but respond to what emerges – and then go with that flow.

**Frederic Laloux, researcher and consultant**

58

When planning to change things – find out what is already working well. Help the others to deviate positively, too. Don't bring an outside solution into the system.

**Terrence Seamon, consultant**

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59

When we treat man as he is, we make him worse than he is; when we treat him as if he already were what he potentially could be, we make him what he should be.

**Goethe, philosopher**

60

If you check your email 26 times per hour – what happens to your adrenaline levels? Your organism is aroused: it is hurry, and fight-or-flight. Thus, what happens to the way you perceive the world?

**Marcella Bremer, author and consultant**

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61

70% of executives believe they are in the top 25% of their profession in terms of performance. Many top executives are surrounded by people who tell them what they want to hear.

**Caroline Rook, researcher**

62

Wherever you look, there you go. Whether on snow skis, riding a motorcycle, and in life. If we keep our eye on the fear, that is the direction we will go. If we keep our eye on what we desire, that is the direction we will go.

**Margo Boster, consultant and yoga teacher**

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63

Knowledge will always give you enough reasons not to act. Not enough time, money, support, skills – you name it. What matters is not what you lack, it's what you do. Execution helps to work through fear and builds confidence.

**Kevin Kelly, entrepreneur and author**

64

96% of people believe culture change is needed in their organization in some form and 51% need a major culture overhaul.

**Booz & Company Survey**

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65

Leaders always assure they are open. But in most cultures, speaking up to a person of higher status ranges from taboo to not-easy. Leaders must learn the art of humble inquiry and do the first step in creating a climate of openness.

**Edgar Schein, professor and author**

66

Change practitioners must be confrontational when necessary, willing to handle the deep emotions of change, and have tough conversations. The willingness to be provocative is essential, not optional. If you are not functioning as a provocateur when that's what your client needs, you're not doing your job.

**Daryl Conner, consultant and mentor**

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67

People don't work to earn money, but to feel good, to belong to a group and to contribute.

**Ricardo Semler, entrepreneur**

68

The leader is not the guy at the top – instead, everyone must be involved to find solutions and respond. Leadership is not about individuals – instead, leadership is the capacity of a system to sense and shape the future. Leadership is not about a vision – instead, leadership is above all about listening.

**Otto Scharmer, researcher and consultant**

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69

The workplace is an excellent learning laboratory to develop yourself and find out who you are and why you are here. The workplace challenges you to connect with others and to achieve individual and collective goals together. Through the workplace we develop the world.

**Marcella Bremer, author and consultant**

70

Businesses often confuse the map with the terrain. Instead of watching where they're going, they've got their face in the map. Let's go back to our senses – away from our spreadsheets.

**Mark Powell and Jonathan Gifford, authors**

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71

Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do.

**Steve Jobs, entrepreneur**

72

If you view people with mistrust and subject them to all sorts of controls, rules and punishments, they will try to game the system, and you will feel your thinking is validated. Meet people with practices based on trust, and they will return your trust with responsible behavior. Again, you will feel your assumptions were validated.

**Frederic Laloux, researcher and consultant**

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73

Enlightened leaders can be identified by their vision, courage, compassion, integrity, and humility. Honest self-reflection is the crucial step in strengthening your inner spiritual greatness. You might find out how unacknowledged fear is disguised as anger, impatience, grandiosity, or self-righteousness.

**Danna Beal, speaker and author**

74

Use the power of switching off! Make sure you get Return on Intuition (ROI)

**Kevin Kelly, entrepreneur and author**

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75

We examine organizations using tools that place artificial boundaries around any given situation. In a quantum-inspired approach, this is called making an “agential cut.” When we draw a box around a system or a problem, using a tool, we are picking one of many possible perspectives.

**Tonya Henderson, consultant, author and yoga-teacher**

76

I have never seen a shame-free school or organization. The Workplace Bullying Institute estimates that 37% of the US workforce has been bullied at work. If employees are constantly navigating shame, you can bet that they're passing it on to their customers, students and families.

**Brene Brown, researcher and author**

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77

We find overwhelming support that high trust levels seem to be the critical ingredient to promoting Intrapreneurship and innovation within established organizations. Another important factor is work refuge: a feeling of safety and job

security.

**Rune Ellemose Gulev, researcher**

78

Don't get too excited when people say great things about you, or too down when they say horrible things about you. What people say about you says more about them than it does about you.

**Margo Boster, consultant and yoga teacher**

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People can approach change from a reductionist perspective: believing that simplistic linear causality will get them from A to B. Change from a systemic perspective acknowledges that everything is connected and that an action doesn't always result in what you expected.

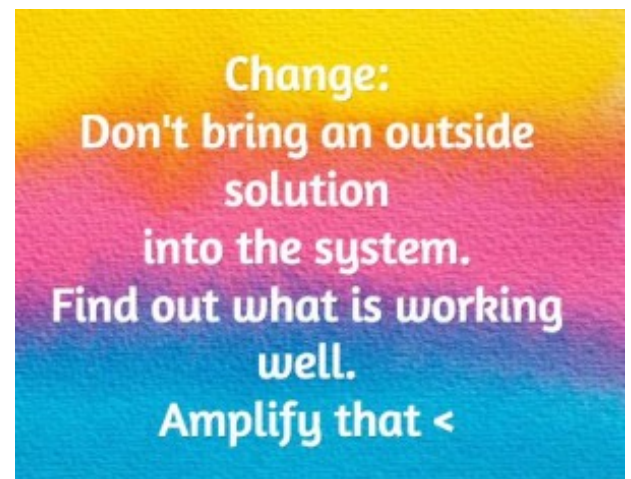
**Eugenio Molini, consultant**

80

This is my leadership: I listen to the propositions of the musicians when they play – they are the professionals. Then I adjust. I don't start with a fixed idea: "Mozart should sound so and so." I see what emerges from the group and go with that.

**Jos van Immerseel, conductor**

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81

You can't prepare for the details of every single possible thing that might come your way in the future. The external events are just details... the real thing to prepare yourself for is what happens internally. Learn to deal with change and accept reality and you'll be prepared for anything.

**Leo Babauta, Zen master and blogger**

82

Leaders don't have to spell everything out. Action speaks louder than words, or: presence speaks louder than words. Be present when you lead professionals. Hold the space and let the team unfold itself – don't get in their way – but facilitate their focus in the same direction.

**Marcella Bremer, author and consultant**

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83

Don't perform for people who don't like it, don't try to convince them, or play only requested songs. Don't play so crowds will show up. Play for true fans who praise what you play, respect how you play, and are impacted by your music. Don't measure yourself by the number of people you reach, but by how many you touch to think, feel, act differently.

***Daryl Conner, consultant and mentor***

84

Don't ask, how long can I stay awake? Rather count how many times you woke up.

***Eckhart Tolle, guru***

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85

Living an inauthentic life has an invoice. It may bring in money but also despair. You're paying with your life.

***Daryl Conner, consultant and mentor***

86

Ask all your staff members what their core values are. What matters so much that they want to make it come true? Next, how can their job be a vehicle for achieving their goals and living their values? Make everyone the CEO of something.

***Julian Bolster, coach***

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87

Instead of boxes on an organization chart, buildings with walls, and isolated groups of people, try to see organizations as processes. Consider each organization as an organic, living, breathing, changing process unfolding in time.

***Tonya Henderson, consultant, author and yoga-teacher***

88

If you don't like an organization, don't work with them.

***Max Schupbach, Deep Democracy Institute***

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89

Five values are present in almost all national constitutions: human dignity, cooperation & solidarity, ecological sustainability, social justice, and democratic codetermination & transparency. Let's apply those to business, too.

***Christian Felber, researcher, entrepreneur and author***

90

Every organization already has most of the resources they need in order to evolve – they “just” need to find them, and tap their potential.

***Ulf Brandes, consultant and film maker***

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91

Don't get drawn into the story the other tells you. Better look at how they are and who they are. The key is to notice their patterns and help them wake up and learn.

***Sue Knight, NLP coach***

92

Three demons jeopardize a person's effectiveness: muscle tension, inner noise and tunnel vision.

**John Grinder, NLP guru**

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93

Our world of abundance, with seas of wine and alps of bread, has hardly turned out to be the place dreamed of by our ancestors. Now United Biscuits attempts to meet the need for sympathy with cookies.

**Alain de Botton, philosopher**

94

Reality is so infinitely complex. There are so many facts, connections and influences that we are unaware of, that you can't always predict which way a cookie will crumble. If reality is this elusive, why not choose the explanation that empowers you most? That is what I do, being a "positive pragmatist".

**Marcella Bremer, author and consultant**

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95

The old-fashioned organization with its hierarchy, procedures, and control-paradigm enhances inauthentic behavior. Positions and perks are limited. That feeling of scarcity enhances a zero-sum game. When I win, you lose. Games and office politics may secure my stakes better than showing myself and being "whole" at work.

**Marcella Bremer, author and consultant**

96

Change facilitation and leadership come down to holding the space for others. Creating a space in which they can learn – in which the process can unfold. It's more being than doing, or the tools we use.

**Daryl Conner, consultant and mentor**

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97

My advice to busy executives with pressing problems is to run away from them for a while. Walking increases blood circulation and the soles of your feet make of walking an acupuncture session that stimulates the brain.

**Graham Williams, consultant and author**

98

I believe that a smile is contagious and a greeting helps to create a warm climate. The way we live life influences that of others. Don't underestimate the effect of authenticity on your coworkers.

**Christopher Bezzina, professor**

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99

Leaders are like WiFi broadcasting a signal that gets picked up by roaming wireless network connectors in the brains of coworkers. Research shows that working in the vicinity of a positive leader, makes you positive.

***Steve Gladis, consultant and author***

100

Positive leadership starts with one person displaying "normal" human kindness and offering a positive perspective. We can uplift the others regardless of our formal position. All it takes is you, the best version of you.

***Marcella Bremer, author and consultant***

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101

Positive leadership does not mean you're a fake positive person. You can be authentic and express doubts. Critical thinking is allowed. Your default attitude is to look for the positive.

***Marcella Bremer, author and consultant***

## Which quote did you like best, and Why?

Let me know in the comments.... I find it hard to choose, but #99 has a special place for me. It underlines that leaders have a special responsibility to help create a workplace where people thrive. Which is your favorite?

