

Chapter 2

Igniting the Spark: Creating Inspiration in Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the importance of inspiration in leadership and its value in ensuring organizations thrive. The value of being inspired and inspiring others is examined, as well as the ways in which inspiration is created. Through real-life examples, autonomy, mastery, purpose and connection are deeply explored as the conditions necessary for inspiration to germinate. The importance of self-awareness is conveyed, as well as the merits of a transformational leadership style in creating cultures that inspire. Providing opportunities for reflection throughout, as well as practical strategies, this chapter serves as a practical guide to move people and organizations forward to a place of profound growth and innovation, as it supports conditions for inspiration.

INTRODUCTION

It was almost winter break, four months into the school year of a new coaching role. My colleague, Julie, had just asked me to present at a state conference with her. In my head, I said, “Me?” and out loud I said, “Yes! I would love that!” She was one of the most inspiring individuals I had the pleasure of working with on my journey in education. When she walks into a room, her positive energy is infectious—warm, uplifting, and magnetic. She genuinely sees the good in every situation, even when faced with challenges. I aspired to emulate her in many ways: her knowledge, inter-

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-2402-9.ch002

actions with staff, confidence, and high emotional intelligence. She is truly someone inspirational that continues to motivate me as a leader, to this day.

And so we submitted a proposal, and we presented it together. We have now co-presented together four times and submitted our fifth proposal on a topic near and dear to our hearts: joy and inspiration in leadership. Everything about this experience—from planning and preparation, logistics, discussing our presentation styles, to the laughs and a new friendship that formed—reminded me of my “why” and connected so well to my purpose. It reminded me what inspiration feels like and how it creates motivation that can feel astounding at times. And out of these feelings, we find moments of great joy.

I had always enjoyed surrounding myself with positive, inspirational individuals because I felt it rubbed off and drove me to places that tapped into a more innovative side. I had always felt inspirational individuals in education were those people who presented nationally at conferences, delivering keynotes and receiving standing ovations as the audience blasts out social media post after social media post. In fact, I *know* they were inspiring because I was the audience member, and I was inspired. But as Sinek (2014) shared in his TED Talk on inspirational leadership, “People don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it.” This led me to some questions: How are we inspired? What does it take to inspire others? Is one leadership style particularly effective?

I found such inspiration in every corner when I began that new coaching role in which I met Julie. And it was not just from my interactions with her. There were inspiring people, interactions and moments everywhere I turned. Relationships formed that took me to new and incredible places, and I found myself at my peak for innovation, creativity and success in the role. Interestingly, while I was discovering what it meant to be inspired and what the conditions were that let me to be inspired, I began to recognize it in my own actions. We all have the ability to empower, inspire, and motivate those around us, and this chapter will focus on creating the conditions for this to happen.

While this chapter could have easily been about passion, courage, strength, balance, self-care, or a myriad of other values, inspiration shapes much of who we are, the decisions we make and the motivation we demonstrate. Together these can have the power to lead us to satisfaction, joy, and success.

So many of us are on a journey—a journey to find what inspires us, to find the environment that allows us to bring our true potential to fruition and in turn brings us joy. In order to experience and cultivate inspiration—and ultimately joy—in our personal and professional lives, we must understand the conditions that allow inspiration to flourish, how we ourselves are inspired, and how we can intentionally inspire others.

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