

Serenity in Leadership

How to Act Powerfully from a Place of Inner Peace

5 steps to more resilience, serene and motivated leaders, enthusiastic employees and a work environment that promotes performance and joy at work.



by Martin Laschkolnig

“Serenity in Leadership”

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Many companies are top in terms of technology and processes. But what about the resilience of their employees? “Our employees are our most important asset” is something that many companies emphasise over and over - unfortunately, practical reality obviously looks quite different all too often.

A quote from Roxanne Emmerich describes it perfectly:

“You can buy a person’s time, their physical presence, even a certain number of physical movements per hour. But you can’t buy enthusiasm and loyalty, any more than you can buy devotion of heart, mind or soul. These have to be earned.”

-- Roxanne Emmerich

Year after year, the Gallup Engagement Index has been surveying employees' emotional bonding to their company around the world.

And for years, the picture has been rather bleak. Of course one may argue that the way questions are formulated are very US culture centric – and yes, they are, but still it is an indicator of how things are changing over time. E.g., in Germany it hasn't changed very much over the years – whether it was 13% of all employees in 2008 or 15% in 2016 – only a minority of employees are reported to be highly engaged in their company. In the survey during the pandemic at the end of 2020, the number rose slightly to 17% - but two-thirds are still “on duty” and 15% show no engagement at all, i.e. they have either already resigned inwardly or they have already actively gone into "sabotage mode", i.e. they poison the working atmosphere by leaving no doubt, even to customers and employees, why working in this company is sh.....

This is costing massive amounts of money - because only the 13% of your employees who put their hearts into it, the ones who enjoy coming to work on Monday - only these employees are really productive. These employees actively make an effort to do their job well, they bring all their skills to the table, they have a much higher

retention rate in the company, they are less often on sick leave, they bring significantly more creative ideas to the company and they actively recommend their products and their company as an employer to others. These employees are responsible for the bottom line profit that you can show at the end of the year. How high is this percentage in your company? And what would it mean for your company if these highly motivated, committed employees made up not 13% but 20% or even 25% of your workforce?

It has also been found that these values fluctuate even within individual companies and change over time - and that these changes are related very often to promotions or transfers of immediate supervisors. This is hardly surprising, because if this distribution of motivation were already fixed when people entered the company, one would have to have a serious talk with those responsible for HR and recruitment. Quite the opposite, people are coming on board motivated when they start a job - they want to make a contribution and find fulfilment in their work. But then, for a variety of reasons, the above-mentioned disengagement tends to occur rather sooner than later.

In times like these, however, it is not so much about increasing profits - committed employees are more innovative and contribute significantly more ideas. And one top idea is enough to open new business areas and even a new horizon for the company.

There are 5 steps that help people develop self-confidence - including high self-esteem, increased stress resistance, a more serene approach to difficulties and inner motivation. People want to be happy and respected. And these measures

don't even cost a lot of money, it's more about a change in awareness.

With 5 steps to more self-confidence for your employees and managers, a better work culture & higher profits for your company

No one can give anyone else high self-confidence, resilience or serenity. This is ultimately the responsibility of the individual. But one can do a lot to create an environment in which the development of these qualities is made easier or more difficult. One's own self-esteem plays an important role: as long as one feels inadequate about oneself, one naturally cannot be open to the development and well-being of others. So this process needs a simultaneous development of the self-esteem of the leaders and the employees.

Very often, entry-level management positions are taken by junior staff who have just come out of

university and are now facing their first test. What is the likelihood that these young people can accept with an open heart the wealth of experience of their often long-serving colleagues - with all the uncertainty and insecurity that accompanies them in their first major task?

So a high level of self-confidence does not mean feeling superior to others, but being able to accept oneself as one is, to realistically assess one's own qualities and weaknesses from a positive mindset, and thus to have the inner space to also be able to show respect and appreciation to other people for their special qualities and experiences. Arrogance and snobbishness are always a sign of a lack in this area.

How can one now develop this oneself and then also make it available to others?

The 5 Steps in Detail

Sense of Security → Sense of Identity → Sense of Belonging → Sense of Vision and Purpose → Sense of Competence



For each of these five steps there are many possibilities for practical implementation. Here is an overview of the underlying principles and some brief examples. Creating an environment that enables team members to build their self-confidence and serenity naturally requires the leader to apply these principles themselves first. The steps for building one's own self-esteem and serenity are the same, but the activities one engages in are different.

Step 1 – Sense of Security:

Feeling safe is the most basic drive of human action - if you are not sure that the ceiling will hold, you will not enter that room. Employees will only show initiative when they are clear about how it will work out for them.

Define clear rules and expectations.

Define these for yourself and the team members. To what extent is personal initiative desired in your company? And what happens when it goes wrong? Create predictability. Your employees need to know what has to be done when and by whom - and who is responsible for it.

In today's globalised environment with its rapid changes, long-term predictability of external conditions is an illusion in many sectors. That is why transparency is important - the better all involved can assess the situation, the easier it is to adjust to it.

But where you can ensure predictability is in the decision-making flow within the company. Define clearly who is responsible for which decisions, which ones have to be made by the responsible persons alone, which ones can be delegated, and which ones can be made by the employees themselves. Once this definition has been established – communicate the rules – better still, develop them together with the team members. Rules that you have helped to develop and whose meaning you understand and accept are much more likely to be accepted by the team.

The frustration level for an employee rises abruptly if you receive different orders from two sides without being able to clearly recognise who has the right to say what and whose order is to be given priority.

It is better to have strict, crystal-clear and possibly restrictive rules than to expect employees to realise which way the wind is blowing today. This may sound exaggerated now, but it is still (often quite unintentionally, but still) common practice and one of the main reasons for frustration among staff. Often there are only vague guidelines, and the staff are then reproached for not having interpreted them in the way their superiors had in mind. There are only a few clairvoyants in any given company.

By the way, the more the organisation as a whole can be involved in the rule-making process, the better the acceptance of these rules will be.

Create a positive, uplifting environment.

Where there is openness and trust, honest and respectful communication, recognition and optimism, people will engage themselves unconditionally and with high commitment. Or is it also common in your company to complain to anyone else rather than to those who could actually solve the problem (or at least be part of it)?

Do you always find out about displeasure and lack of clarity in the workforce from behind the scenes, or are there clear channels of communication that people can use without immediately having a black mark in their mental personnel file. The critics can make valuable contributions - you cannot expect any further development from the yes-men.

Relationships built on trust.

Security is established where there is trust. Leaders who are predictable, keep their promises and act on the basis of agreed guidelines have shorter negotiation times and less stress when dealing with new challenges.

When employees have the feeling that they can trust someone, there is less discussion and more and faster implementation. Of course, this requires consistency on the part of the managers involved and also the ability to deal with one's own weaknesses and to stand by them.

No one can know everything - and leaders are not supposed to know everything. Their job is rather to bring the necessary knowledge to the table in an atmosphere of trust and collaborative effort for the greater good, and then bring out the best possible solution. This is an ideal, but the closer we can get to this state, the more we will be able to reap the benefits.

Serenity tip:

In crisis situations take a step back to see "the big picture" - we often succumb to the temptation to believe that we have to be in control and have everything under control, especially "when the heat is on". Recognising that this is an illusion helps to change our own perspective. There are so many variables in life that have to play together to achieve a certain result that we simply cannot control. Our responsibility, especially in crisis situations, is to take one step at a time to the best of our ability and also to acknowledge that we cannot determine the outcome. It is not without reason that our ancestors coined the saying: "Sleep on it for a night".

Step 2 – Sense of Identity:

Our sense of identity has been shaped by our parents, playmates and school. Today, the workplace is one of the most important social meeting points in the lives of many people. This makes it all the more important to know that it is an important source of identity for many people - use this factor positively.

Give (mostly) positive feedback.

Being honestly appreciated for what you have achieved creates deep satisfaction.

Nevertheless, recognition is used so sparingly in many workplaces, as if it were on the doping list. Make use of this free resource. (Honest) recognition - even for a small thing - is less a matter for the HR department at the annual appraisal review but is much more effective when it comes as promptly as possible from the direct superior - and those who know that their own work is (deservedly) appreciated are also more serene and remain serene when the going gets tough.

Even if it's just about little things - it's important for people to be noticed for doing things well - and to have it expressed. This expression can look different for every employee - one likes public recognition in front of the whole team. Others are embarrassed by it and appreciate a nice word in a personal conversation more.

Feedback about mistakes is equally important though - find ways to critique the behaviour, not the person - by doing this you open up opportunities to change the behaviour and still allow the criticised person to feel recognised as a person and human being despite the mistake. Making mistakes is human. Mistakes in "real life" can often be attributed to lack of training or unclear instructions. Sometimes that what was meant to be conveyed is something different than what was received by the recipient.

Serenity tip:

Include "quiet time" in your everyday life - breaks (which don't have to be too long) in which you can breathe deeply, do a short mindfulness meditation or some other small ritual like Qi Gong or a short walk that helps you to find your balance again..

Step 3 – Sense of Belonging:

We humans are social beings. Contributing something to a greater whole and sharing common interests with others is of great interest to many people.

Promote teamwork.

Accomplishing tasks together unites people. Tom Peters found out more than 20 years ago that the increase in productivity triggered by motivated teams does not amount to two or five percent, but can be valued at 200 to 500 percent. For

successful teamwork, the aforementioned steps of security and identity are essential - they form the basis for a trustful cooperation.

Are Your Employees Proud of Being Part of Your Company?

Do your employees feel it is an honour to work in your company? If yes, why? If not, why not? People do not get involved in something that is not worth anything (even if only in their personal perception).

Let's take two statements for comparison:

1. "I am a car salesperson".
2. "I am a car salesperson at BMW"

Someone who automatically adds "at BMW" when asked what they do is obviously proud of what they do - they feel they belong. And this will naturally be expressed in their conviction and commitment to their work.

Find something you can all be proud of, too - and if you have something, communicate it to your people as well. Often staff are not aware of the positive impact of the products they produce - e.g., pumps that provide clean drinking water for many people, etc.

Serenity tip:

Sharing a common interest connects - create opportunities for real connection by creating a safe and appreciative framework for sharing more private information with each other. If you as a leader allow yourself to be seen as a vulnerable and human person, you indirectly give others permission to do so as well. We are not the roles we work in, and this helps us to perceive each other more as people again, not just as professionals. Also, for example, joint meditation rounds or the like for those who want to, create connectedness.

Step 4 – Sense of Vision and Purpose:

Only now, after security, identity and belonging have been established, can we go about inspiring our employees for our corporate purpose and the vision behind it. This is an extremely broad field about which much meaningful has already been written and also quite a bit of nonsense. 😊
Here now is just one suggestion:

Do not set yourself limits. Visions are big and outrageous.

After all, you don't want to rewrite the corporate vision every 2 years. When Kennedy said in the early 60s, "We'll put a man on the moon by the end of the decade" he had no idea what he was getting into. But the vision was tremendously powerful - and the rest is history ...

Use images rather than phrases.

If you cannot express your corporate vision in a way that an elementary school pupil can understand, it will probably not reach the hearts of most of your employees either. And to be fully behind it, they need to have it in their hearts - after all, the vision should be lived and not gathering dust on the wall somewhere and no one cares.

Bill Gates didn't say "We want to become the leading provider of productivity software for companies and individuals, blah, blah, blah...", he said: "We want to put a personal computer with Microsoft programs on every desk in America and revolutionise and improve the way people work!" Which of the two statements has more power? Which can you visualise better: "leading provider of productivity software" or "on every desk in America"? Which image is more powerful, more tangible? Which vision would you commit to? And how much power does your company vision have?

Step 5 – Sense of Competence:

The best vision is of little use if you do not have the necessary competencies to implement it and bring it to life. This often means further or ongoing training if these competences still need to be built or improved. The main focus here, however, is on a culture of encouragement and support in implementation, including review of progress and the feedback that goes with it. Specific and measurable goals have their place and justification here.

Serenity tip:

Create rituals - a steady drop wears away the stone, or as SunTsu wrote long, long ago: "He who sweats in peace does not bleed in war". In other words, if you build up your foundation of serenity repeatedly and in good time, you will not be thrown off course so quickly even in crisis

situations, or you will find your way back to your centre much more quickly if the worst happens.

And don't forget: When you achieve great things – celebrate it with everyone involved! Here's to your success!

I hope these few pointers were helpful and if you want 1-2-1 support to move forward in this direction and create more impact, meaning and joy, or explore the option of Martin speaking and/or training with your company, please reach out. You can schedule a free 15 minute consultation anytime via:

<https://tidycal.com/martinlaschkolnig/15>



Martin Laschkolnig is the founder and director of the Institute for the Development of Potential. His western-economic and eastern-philosophical education enable him to have a slightly different perspective on many things. Since 2003 he has been the Austrian representative of the International Council for Self-Esteem. Martin Laschkolnig has so far given lectures and trainings on topics such as "Serene Leadership in Turbulent Times", "The Success Principles - Smart Instead of Hard" and "Moving Mountains Together - 5 Steps to Inspiring Work Environments" on a total of four continents.

2015-2017 he was President of the German Speakers Association (GSA) and has served as President of the Global Speakers Federation in 2022-23.

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