

Executive Summary

Inspire Excellence in the Coming Year

by E. Lander Medlin

I recently came across a book titled *Why Pride Matters More Than Money* by Jon R. Katzenbach. It is a fascinating title given the current financial situation of our educational institutions and organizations and the fact that many salaries have been frozen longer than we care to admit. However, it is a new year and, by all accounts, the economy seems to be turning around, although ever so slightly. For me, this new year poses the opportunity for personal reflection and a deeper understanding of how my actions and reactions impact or influence others. Interestingly enough, Katzenbach's book provided some insights on the importance of staff pride and self-esteem that seemed very timely to me.

As a result of reading the book, I began to realize how little I understood about pride and how much I had underestimated the role of pride in building the long-term sustainability of an organization. Feeling proud is a high motivational power since most people (myself included) are motivated by feelings of accomplishment, approval, and camaraderie. This emotional attachment fosters a level of individual commitment that money just can't buy! Frankly, instilling pride in employees should be viewed as an investment in motivation for an organization because the benefits recur over time. Hopefully the following thoughts and ideas will influence you as much as they did me and inspire you to make some changes in the way you impact people in your organization during the coming year.

Lander Medlin is APPA's executive vice president. She can be reached at lander@appa.org.

In general, Katzenbach highlights **four fundamental themes** to support his premise that pride matters more than money.

First and foremost, **"personalize the workplace."** Make a personal commitment by getting involved and truly understanding what your staff are doing on a daily basis to make the workplace a productive and effective environment. The focus here is on the affective, emotional connection you make with each individual. It may sound like a tall task, but little things done daily can make a huge difference in creating a long-lasting bond with the staff. Gary Cowger, president of GM North America, said, "You can mandate mediocrity but you need to inspire excellence."

Moreover, the only thing that separates us from the mediocre is passion and pride in what employees do and how they do it. For example, we have all engaged in "staff/management retreats" in one form or another. The value to the bottom line has been proven over and over again or we would not continue to do them. However, the real value comes from the personal connections you make with your staff while in a different setting, engaging in different activities.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Your actions speak so loud I can't hear what you are saying!" Much can be gained by the example you set yourself. In this regard, **"always have your compass set on pride, not money."** In other words, motivating is more about a journey than it is a final destination. In fact, I'm not sure we ever truly "arrive." It is more about celebrating the steps of our accomplishments along the way rather than the final goal itself. An emphasis on connecting with, learning from, and listening to your staff will repay

itself many times over. You must value their ideas and their knowledge and have confidence in their ability to get the job done. It shows that you really care and that they really matter.

Again, it's the little things you do every day and demonstrate through your own behaviors that make the difference in establishing pride throughout the organization. Instill the three "Rs" of respect, recognition, and rewards on a daily basis. Make no mistake about it, the benefits both individually and to the organization are phenomenal and ultimately measurable. Tom Peters and Bill Waterman emphasized this point years ago when they suggested that "early wins" are essential to achieving excellence.

Perhaps the most interesting testimony to the performance value of . . . celebrations came in a recent article in Fast Company entitled "Andy Person Finds Love." As the article recounts, when Person was CEO of PepsiCo several years ago, he was named one of the ten toughest bosses in America. Now at Tricon, Pearson has reportedly found a new way to lead . . . one based on personal humility and employee recognition . . . focused on a different, more positive emotional agenda: "You say to yourself, if I could only unleash the power of everybody in the organization instead of just a few people, what could we accomplish? We'd be a much better company." At Tricon, he has established a culture that elevates the common worker in a way that brings out the emotional drive and commitment that is at the heart of good work. As a result . . . Pearson now recognizes emotion for what it is: the secret to a company's competitive edge.

“Localize” as far down in the organization as possible. Getting to the frontline employee and understanding how he or she thinks and acts, works, and behaves is critical. Knowing family ties and engaging in community events outside the workplace can also prove enormously beneficial. This past July our immediate past president, Phil Cox, asked Board members to describe an activity they had engaged in within their departments that they considered important to the organization's overall success. Jim Roberts specifically identified the importance of personal visits to the hospital of a staff member or attendance at a family funeral. The emotional bond being created is well beyond mere words to describe. You should know all the staff by name and face and be knowledgeable of some of their triumphs and tribulations. This type of personal involvement and encouragement is what really develops the relationship, builds trust, and instills a sense of pride.

Finally, when speaking to your staff, **“make your messages simple, direct,**

and meaningful.” Always clarify what matters and why it matters. Frankly, I know of no individual who tires of good stories faithfully told and sincerely recounted. Simple stories created about real people doing good things for the organization strengthens the culture. In addition, we all make mistakes; however, recognizing our own imperfections honestly and openly goes a long way to opening up solid lines of communication over the long term.

Recognize that what instills pride in one staff member does not necessarily work for others. Therefore, developing a personal relationship with each person or establishing a leadership system that connects with all the staff through your actions and behaviors will go a long way in developing and instilling pride in the workforce during the bad times along with the good times. Secondly, recognize that it is always more difficult to instill pride or to create emotional commitment to performance within a traditional environment. It takes time, effort, and much

patience, but it's well worth it in the long run. The effort you put forth lays the groundwork for higher levels of performance and long-term sustainability for the organization. Disciplined attention to maintaining a dynamic balance between organizational performance and worker fulfillment is key.

Katzenbach provided a wonderful summary of these themes and his key points by stating: “Set aspirations that touch the emotions; pursue a meaningful purpose; cultivate personal relationships of respect; become a person of high character; and look for humor along the way.”

I recognize that I have probably not told you anything you did not already know. However, I hope I have served to rekindle your thoughts about yourself and your staff in this important area and reminded us all of the little things we can do to instill pride and make a difference in the lives of our staff during the coming year. 🏢

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