Independent Banker  
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Portfolio

[tag] Leadership at All Levels

[hed] 7 ideas for cultivating inspiration

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The theme for ICBA LIVE 2023 is “Light the Fire. Light the Way.” As leaders, that’s a huge part of what we do: spark enthusiasm, encourage creativity and guide our teams on the paths to success. But inspiration doesn’t always happen spontaneously, or even daily, so it’s incumbent upon us to develop strategies and create environments that inspire and motivate our teams, all while making sure we stay inspired ourselves.

Here are some great tools for cultivating inspiration.

1. **Remove limitations**. Sometimes a project or task seems, on its face, to have restrictions. But we can often remove those perceived limitations, be experimental and think outside the box. Yes, this could result in a few errors, but it might also generate successful new ideas or strategies. Let your team know that it’s OK to fail.
2. **Don’t forget to dream.** This idea is inspired by the book *The Dream Manager* by Matthew Kelly, and it’s a powerful message to share with your team. Encourage everyone to start a dream book, to write down their dreams (both professional and personal), and to dream without limits. The book can serve as a resource to remind us of the dreams (big or small) that we have, and that reminder can jump-start the enthusiasm needed to begin or continue a task.
3. **Focus on strengths**. Lean into your employees’ strengths and talents, and they’ll feel naturally more authentic and empowered. Cultivating a strengths-based environment increases creativity and productivity.
4. **Focus on team bonding**. On average, a full-time employee spends 40 hours a week working with the same people. Don’t underestimate the value of team-building exercises to bring them together. If they’re in the thick of a project, invite them to take a break, pose a fun question to the group or play a quick game. Fostering camaraderie cultivates a stronger team. Colleagues who are invested in each other will look forward to working together.
5. **Make motivation a topic**. Adopt “Motivation Monday” and ask the team to talk about what motivates them. Ask them how they find inspiration personally. This can give leaders and fellow colleagues a beneficial understanding of what each employee values.
6. **Let people do their jobs**. No one wants to be micromanaged. Allow for autonomy where possible and be clear in your words so that employees know they are empowered to do their job. It shows a level of trust and respect, which generally leads to higher job satisfaction and greater productivity.
7. **Show appreciation**. We’ve said this before, but leaders <i>*must*<i> show appreciation for the work their team is doing. It goes a long way.

But above all, remember that employees are individuals. What inspires or motivates one may not be as powerful for another. So, tailor your tactics to suit both your team and the individuals within it.

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