



A Global Challenge: Building Passion-Driven Leaders

Richard Y. Chang, Ph.D.

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A leader's success depends on the ability to influence others. Leaders' work will be far easier and have more impact if those they lead are eager and willing to help achieve the collective results. Leading with passion is a trait that can help improve business performance and increase employee commitment on a global scale.

The concept of "passion" often causes skeptics to raise their eyebrows—interpreting passion from a romantic perspective rather than a business perspective. Though opinions are varied, I've come to one important conclusion: The greatest advantage a leader can possess is passion.

Skeptics might argue that a solid business plan or better products and services are of greater benefit, but that thinking is a bit too narrow. Certainly, both are critical to an organization's success, but while many organizations have the technology and even the ability to succeed, few have a workforce with the sheer emotional force and commitment to be the best.

For organizations that compete on a global basis, and especially those with a workforce located around the world, tapping into the passion of people is a universal business strategy that can help drive performance.

So what is passion? Passion is the underlying force that fuels our strongest emotions. It fills us with energy and excitement and heightens our performance. When passion is in force, we are carried away in our experience, losing track of time and effort, and performing otherwise-difficult tasks almost effortlessly.

This definition clarifies how leadership can leverage passion to help drive business performance. By predicating behavior and operations on passion, leaders can improve the quality and significance of their work, as well as the work of those they lead.

To further understand the power and importance of passion, let's take a closer look at it on three levels: the effect passion has on you as a leader, on those you lead and on the organization overall.

Before you can inspire and lead others, you must be passionate about your own work. If you don't have passion for your organization, you

don't belong in it. This may sound extreme, but you owe it to yourself and those you lead to love what you do. As a CLO, you may have a passion for helping others succeed or for creating strategies to help transform an organizational business model worldwide. While you may not be thrilled with all elements of your work role, hopefully there is something about it that strikes a chord in you, something that you are passionate about. By orienting your work responsibilities around what you are passionate about, you will be filled with energy and excitement and as a result, you will also inspire and energize those around you.

As a leader, you have the potential not only to enhance your personal performance through passion, but also to help others do the same. Passion is contagious. When you exude it as a leader, you gain the attention of those around you. You may already be aware of this in your organization; there are usually at least a few senior leaders who people want to report to because of the energy that pervades their department or business unit. As a CLO, you can help your direct reports discover and incorporate their personal passions into their work roles. In addition, you can strategize ways to incorporate and leverage "passion alignment" across the entire organization.

The effects of passion on your organization can have a powerful impact globally. An energized and committed workforce can accomplish remarkable things. Just as your own "passion-driven" leadership behaviors can turn a good employee into a great one, your efforts to incorporate and align passion across the organization can help turn an ordinary department, division or company into an extraordinary one. Ideally, as CLO, you will be in a position to help influence how your organization's top leaders define the organization's core passion and build the business globally. If not, you can still be instrumental in helping individual leaders create pockets of passion, which can eventually transform the entire organization.

Clearly, taking the lead to build passion-driven leaders globally will be more challenging, but the results will be that much greater. ■

Richard Y. Chang, Ph.D., is founder and CEO of Richard Chang Associates, and is author of "The Passion Plan." He can be reached at rchang@clomedia.com.