



Plugging the holes in your bucket

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At conferences, I'll often tell very diverse groups of organizations in my seminars, "I don't care what your mission is, you're in the *energy* business."

For many that's a momentary charley horse between the ears, and it takes only a few seconds for some stares to become entirely blank with incomprehension.

But that's just my prelude to expressing a deep personal and professional conviction that the primary task of leadership and management is to ***focus energy on productivity.***

Stop to think about it a moment. *Seriously.*

This energy – a version of what the military has in mind when they speak of the “morale” of the troops – will never appear on your balance sheet or operating statement, yet it is arguably the most important asset your organization has. If you think of your organization as an energy system, you don’t have to be a physicist to understand the energy differential between a nuclear reactor and a dead battery when it comes to the power to drive productive outcomes.

When it comes to human motivation and productivity, I've found no formulas more instructive than Victor Vroom’s. His celebrated formula in motivational theory states that **“A x M = P”** – Ability *times* motivation equals performance. Multiply even great ability by minimal motivation and you’re toast (as in soggy milk toast). Multiply even modest ability by an “incandescent eyeball” level of motivation and you’re likely to see some movin’ and shakin’.

What has this got to do with buckets?

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“Each of us has an invisible bucket. It is constantly emptied or filled, depending on what others say or do to us. When our bucket is full, we feel great. When it’s empty, we feel awful.”

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Well, in their national bestseller, *How Full is Your Bucket?*, Tom Rath and Dr. Don Clifton (the father of strengths psychology) note,

“Each of us has an invisible bucket. It is constantly emptied or filled, depending on what others say or do to us. When our bucket is full, we feel great. When it’s empty, we feel awful.”

Based on research, the authors note that 99 out of 100 people report they want to be around more positive people, and 9 out of 10 report being more productive when they’re around positive people.

Don’t let that connection escape detection: **Greater POSITIVITY translates to greater PRODUCTIVITY.**

The book goes on to explain what we've all experienced, and may in fact even experience on a daily basis. That in addition to our individual buckets, each of us has an invisible dipper, and we can use that dipper in our daily interactions to either fill people's buckets or to empty them.

That said, being mindful of all of our daily interactions and the energy exchanges they represent, positively or negatively, is no small matter.

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Organizational climate -- how we feel about our work environment -- can account for 30% of performance.

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For example, how many of us realize that organizational climate – how we feel about our working environment – can account for as much as 30% of organizational performance? More to the point, how many of us genuinely appreciate and appropriately leverage the power we have in our daily interactions to help fill (or empty) the buckets of others in our families, our organizational teams, or other personal interactions?

Don't misunderstand. My personal bent is too sober and pragmatic to simply advocate some happy-face, saccharin approach to making people feel good. That's a lame idea, and people see through cheesiness and insincerity in a heartbeat. But I'm also just observant enough to know that a kind word and a simple but heartfelt recognition of people's value and their work can work small wonders.

The really good news is that as more and more people mindfully attend to these daily "dipper" transactions, the effect is cumulative.

Bit by bit, day by day, these small but powerful exchanges can incrementally, positively, and profoundly transform an environment, charging organizational batteries rather than draining them.

If you're interested in improving organizational climate and performance (and who among the awake and alert isn't?), you have a good number of options. But one that doesn't cost you a dime is just to "mind your dipper."

More practically, as a daily discipline and experiment, let me encourage you put three matches in your left pocket each morning. Then, each time throughout the day that

you genuinely share a word of appreciation or affirmation with someone, transfer one of those matches to your right pocket.

At the end of each day, if you've got three matches in your right pocket, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you're slowly lighting fires that will help your organization to burn brighter – with lots of positive payoffs.

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**“Set yourself on fire and people will come
from miles around just to watch you burn.”**

-- John Wesley

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If your organization has energy leaks, you're not alone. Feel free to contact me at drlarryjohnston@aol.com or call me at 303.638.1827 for a complimentary consultation. We've been helping Christian organizations of all sizes for 40+ years to grow and excel and would welcome the opportunity to explore how we might help you and your organization.

Larry Johnston is president of McConkey • Johnston International, a firm twice awarded “Best General Fundraising Counsel in the Christian Sector” in independent national surveys of development consulting firms. www.mcconkey-johnston.com

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