



Be a Positive Influence at Work

Positive attitudes are contagious at work, but so are negative ones. Moods, feelings of engagement or disengagement, and even health-related habits like healthy eating and exercise, can spread within a network of work colleagues in ways you're often not aware of. Be a person who lifts the moods of the people around you, encourages good work and effective collaboration, and inspires by example. By being a positive influence at work, you can make your work environment healthier, more productive, and more enjoyable while improving your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people around you.

THE SPECIAL ROLE OF MANAGERS

Recognize your outsized influence. One recent survey showed that managers have more impact on people's mental health than their therapist or doctor—an impact equal to that of a spouse.¹ Recognize the power of your influence to inspire or demoralize, to energize people or drain them of energy. Understand what an important model you are for demonstrating healthy stress management and work-life balance. Managers need to manage themselves—their moods, their behavior, and their words—to build high-performing teams in a work environment that enhances physical and mental health.

Deal promptly with negativity. One negative influence can pull a team down, in both its mood and its performance. Pay attention to people who complain, engage in destructive gossip, or undermine colleagues to make themselves look better. These are performance issues, as important as—and perhaps more important than—an individual's own output. Include positive or negative influence on others as a key measure when setting goals and evaluating performance.

How to Be a Positive Influencer at Work

Manage your emotions. Emotions are particularly contagious at work. If a colleague is anxious or unhappy, it's easy to be pulled into that anxiety or sadness. If a colleague is smiling and laughing, it's hard not to smile and laugh, too. You can't always control your emotions, but you can learn to manage them so they don't erupt in uncomfortable and unproductive ways. If you feel yourself growing upset or angry, step back from a situation and go for a walk or take some deep breaths.

Help others feel heard and understood. Getting your way in the face of opposition isn't influence. It can be perceived as overbearing and make others feel ignored and unappreciated. Build a reputation as someone who listens and works to understand different viewpoints.

Draw positive attention to colleagues. Get behind other people's ideas, and be sure they get credit for them. Be generous with compliments. Publicly recognize colleagues' good work and progress.

Set a high standard with your work. Be the best that you can be in your work. Show that you can be depended on to do your share and more, deliver quality work, and meet your commitments.

Be clear and honest in your communication. Explain your ideas and suggestions in ways that people will understand, even when the issues are complex or technical. Don't overstate or exaggerate the points you're making. Be honest when things go wrong or you need more time to complete a task.

Build your expertise. Expertise in a valued skill or area of knowledge will lead others to look to you for guidance and include you in planning discussions. You'll be able to contribute to your organization's work in more significant ways.

Be a problem-solver. Identify obstacles that are getting in the way of efficient, high-quality work, and suggest solutions for getting past them. When problems occur, don't just complain; look for ways to solve them, and participate in those efforts. Pay attention to changes outside your organization, and suggest ways the organization might adapt to or take advantage of them.

Be inclusive and welcoming. Show that you recognize and value differences among your colleagues—differences in backgrounds and life experiences, training, expertise, and communication or work style. Seek out different viewpoints to help make better decisions. Accept and value people for who they are, so they feel welcome when working with you.

Help build connections. Make an effort to meet people from other parts of the organization. Look for opportunities to work on projects that involve people from different locations or departments. Use those connections to link people in solving problems and coming up with innovations.

Be a positive voice. While it's important to be realistic, to be aware of challenges your team and the organization may be facing, be the person who is looking for positive solutions and opportunities, not the one who complains and makes others scared and unhappy. Keep yourself above gossip and negative talk, especially negative talk about particular people behind their backs. When you hear this kind of talk or see these kinds of messages, ignore them. Don't contribute to their spread. If the negativity advances to the point of harassment or bullying, don't be a passive bystander. Stand up to it or report it in safe and appropriate ways.