

The High Performance Team and the Life Affirming Leader

Adapted from Practices of Life-Affirming Leaders

(by Margaret Wheatley and Berkana Institute for Leadership)

Life-affirming leaders are able to nurture and evoke the best qualities in people;

- Creativity
- Commitment
- Caring

To evoke these qualities, leaders use many different processes, but all of these approaches rely on a team's innate capacity to self-organize in creative, sustainable, and generous ways.

These are characteristics of life affirming leaders:

They know they cannot lead alone. In these complex times, no one person is smart enough to know what to do all the time. Many different perspectives are necessary in order to gain a fuller understanding of what is happening.

They have more faith in the collective than they do in themselves alone. Leaders patiently and courageously insist on peoples' participation as the means to discover their potential and contribute to the organization.

They recognize human diversity as a gift, and the human spirit as a blessing. These leaders recognize that each person sees the world differently. When these unique perceptions are shared, the team gains a larger perspective of what's going on. And it is only the human spirit that can bring hope and possibility even in the most challenging and tough circumstances.

They act on the fact that people only support what they create. These leaders engage people in anything that affects them. Decision-making processes expand to include more and more voices.

They solve unsolvable problems by bringing new voices into the room. Team systems grow healthier as they connect with those formerly excluded. New and different information changes how they define the problem, and make new solutions available.

They encourage learning as the fundamental process for resiliency, change and growth. When reflection and learning are built in to all activities and projects, people become intelligent. Teams quickly find workable and innovative solutions. Without reflection, they keep repeating their mistakes.

They offer purposeful work as the necessary condition for people to engage fully. When people know why they're doing their work and connect with the purpose of it, they assume responsibility for that work. They become creative and work hard to find the most effective solutions and make their greatest contribution.