Toolkit:

Engaging Others

practical

development

success

Strengthening public sector leadership for New Zealand

The concept of the 'hero leader' is losing its relevance in today's work environment. It is no longer feasible that one person alone can solve problems or overcome challenges in a world of ambiguity and constant change.

The public service requires a different type of leadership – one that focuses on supporting others to work together effectively to make a difference. As a New Zealand public sector leader, you need to create the environment where your staff can be their best, collaborate and find innovative solutions. You need to know your purpose, communicate with consistency and enthusiasm, regularly connect with staff and stakeholders, and ignite passion in others.

If you are a leader looking to engage effectively with others, you need to learn about them, understand their different motivations, and be able to harness and bring together diverse groups and inspire them to achieve together.

Theories and frameworks

Engagement and motivation

Daniel Pink proposes that "if we start treating people like people, and not horses – get past the carrot and stick ideology – we can make the world a little better". Pink's book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* (2009), summarises personal engagement and motivation into a simple model.

Pink claims there are three key motivators that lead to better performance and personal satisfaction when completing complicated tasks that require conceptual and creative thinking:

1. Autonomy – the desire to be self-directed
2. Mastery – the urge to get better at something, for example, practising a musical instrument or a language
3. Purpose – making a contribution.

The engaging leader

Aon Hewitt, a human capital and management consulting services headquartered in Lincolnshire, USA, published the Global Employee Research Database (2014) of seven million respondents, which contains a large source of information about what makes an engaging leader.

The analysis reveals some findings that emphasise how an individual and their relationships can impact on those around them. Aon Hewitt claim that as a prerequisite, engaging leaders must be engaged themselves. These leaders stay connected to their people by being 'nearby leaders' – they are accessible, enable their people and show genuine concern for their people.

The research showed that engaging leaders have three fundamental similarities:

1. **Early experiences shaped them** – These early-leader experiences commonly entail deep learning from taking on tough assignments that required navigating through ambiguity or difficult transformations.
2. **Unique belief systems, personality traits and core beliefs** – These include ideas of servant leadership − that leadership is a responsibility and not about status or rewards. Relationships, emotions and trust matter.
3. **Behave in unique ways that positively and exponentially impact on the engagement of those around them** – They act in a way that shares their own engagement and purpose, they strive to stabilise and energise their people, they act in service of their people – taking time to connect with and grow their followers – and they conduct themselves with authenticity because their behaviours are aligned with their beliefs.
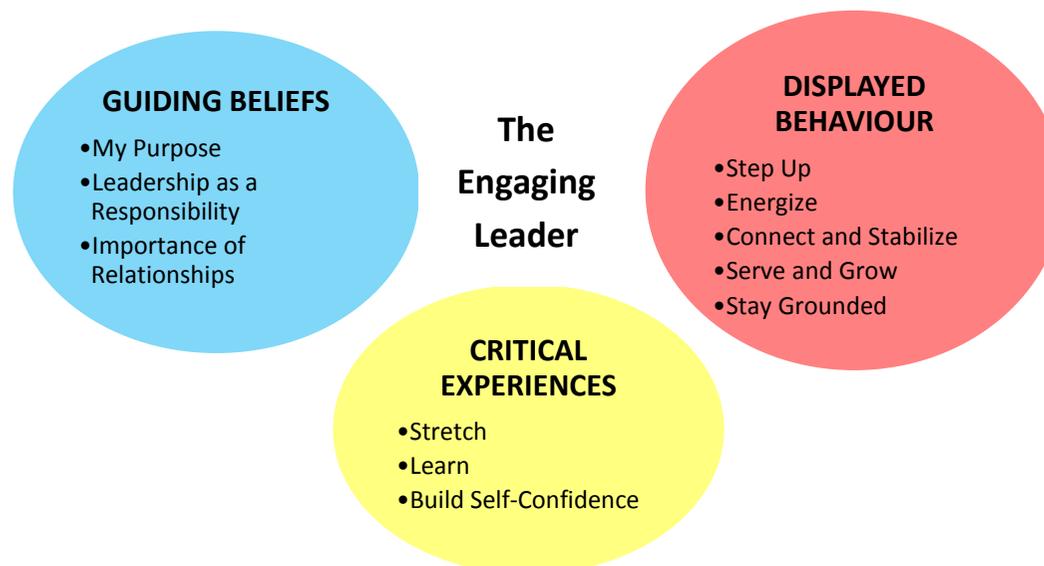
Personal connections and relationships

Leaders need to inspire others to work towards achieving team, agency and sector objectives. Wilson (2008) defines engagement as "a willingness to give your best efforts to benefit yourself and your organisation". He says that much of the workforce lacks engagement, and leaders are fundamental to shifting engagement levels. You can use Wilson's four cornerstone model to assess your leadership engagement abilities, then target your efforts towards developing in the areas you need to.

The cornerstones of engaging leadership

The four cornerstones:

1. **People-centric approach**

2. **Engage emotions**

3. **Build trust**

4. **Leverage unique motivations**

One of the two supporting factors in this model is the need for leaders to establish and maintain personal connections. Leaders need to view staff as human beings who have personal goals, desires and needs, rather than 'knowledge workers that are a vehicle towards productivity'. Staff and stakeholders will reciprocate effort when they are acknowledged and treated in this manner.

Effectively conveying your message

To engage others effectively, you also need to deliver compelling messages to an audience. This is especially important when leading across large teams, where it can be difficult to know all of the individuals involved well.

To help build your ability and influence in this area, use the *Corporate Leadership Council's Roadmap for Delivering Effective Presentations* (2008).

Preparing content	Rehearsing	Facilitating discussion
Introduction Body Conclusion Materials	Do not memorise word-for-word Embrace anxiety Rehearse often	Pose discussion topics Maintain a positive environment Address objections

**Preparing content** – aim to create 'actionable interest'.

- Include calls- to-action.
- Open with an interesting story or fact.
- Place yourself and the team within the action.
- Provide the audience with a roadmap and take them on a clear step-by-step journey.
- Listen to objections and address them appropriately.
- Create a compelling conclusion and repeat calls-to-action.

Rehearsing

- Regularly rehearse your message.
- Rehearse in front of others and ask for feedback.
- Understand that anxiety is natural and will help your presentations.
- Practise ways to remain composed and focused.

Facilitating discussion

- Summarise key points.
- Repeat calls-to-action.
- Invite and acknowledge objections − think about your response and be succinct.
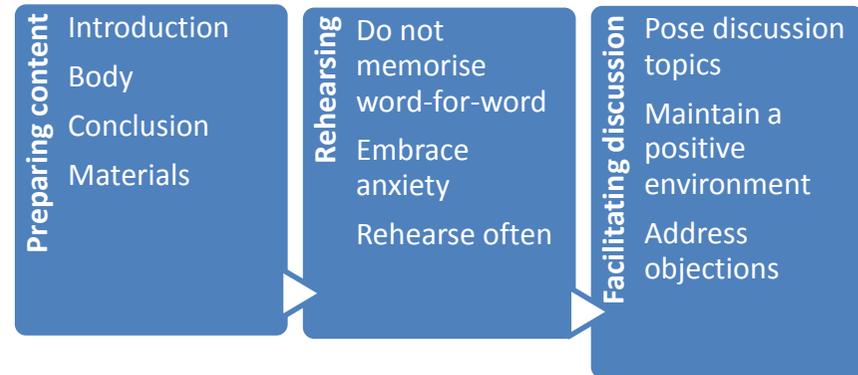
The 'trust equation'

In *The Trusted Adviser,* the authors Maister, Galford and Green (2002) say that people take advice from those they trust. In the leadership context, the book states that people will follow leaders they trust. To build cohesive and high-performing teams, leaders need to understand how they are perceived so that they are able to work to gain the implicit trust of their team. Without trust in their leader, teams can come unstuck and channel their energies into non-productive areas. The authors developed the trust equation, which you can use to help consider your level of perceived trustworthiness as a leader and where you may need to place more effort.

$$\text{Trust} = \frac{\text{Credibility} + \text{Reliability} + \text{Intimacy}}{\text{Self-Orientation}}$$

Credibility – This is about knowing to what extent your team believes your words and actions, and whether others feel you have the experience, know-how or background to know what you are talking about. Credibility is a mixture of objective and emotional measures – do you have the qualifications and experience? Do your actions seem believable? Are you truthful to your team?

Reliability – You need to follow up on what you say and promise. Your team needs to be able to depend on you to provide them with clear expectations and consistency. Leaders who fail to demonstrate reliability quickly erode their levels of trustworthiness with staff and other stakeholders.

Intimacy – You need to build personal connections with team members. This is not about sharing information about your private affairs but more about understanding that work is personal, and challenges and achievements create emotional responses. Show your staff that you are emotionally honest, and be willing to talk and care about issues experienced at work.

Self-orientation: This refers to the degree to which staff feel you might be acting in your own self-interest. The combined impact of a person's credibility, reliability and intimacy diminishes rapidly if staff see that a leader is acting in their own self-interest. Trust will be destroyed, and engagement and commitment depleted if others feel a leader is trying to advance their career or manipulate a situation without consideration for team goals or the welfare of team members.

Improve your ability to engage with others

What you can do

- **Foster trust and openness** – Share information and your feelings about projects and objectives. Provide the full picture so staff and stakeholders can make the decision to be part of the solution.
- **Listen and learn** – Acknowledge that you don't have all of the answers or knowledge. Listen to others and foster an environment of collaborative learning.
- **Focus on relationships and connections** – Look out for the desires, needs and interests of individuals as opposed to viewing staff as vehicles for achieving long-term goals. Make genuine efforts to get to know others and they will reciprocate with the same effort and respect.
- **Seek to understand what motivates others** – Learn what makes people tick. Tailor your messages and approach to suit the different people you interact with.
- **Know your brand and provide consistent messages** – Maintain self-awareness and provide timely messages to staff and stakeholders to help them maintain focus and enthusiasm towards collective goals.
- **Build true teamwork** – Encourage team accountability for performance. Foster an environment where members collectively pursue challenging team goals.
- **Deliver high-impact presentations** – Prepare content, and rehearse and facilitate discussion to deliver highly effective presentations.
- **Reward success** – Acknowledge and recognise the efforts of the team and individuals. You are asking people to get behind a purpose and to expend considerable effort in doing this. Make sure rewards or acknowledgements are provided in order to foster repeated efforts.

Self-reflective questions

- What made me grow and become engaged as a leader? How can I support others in being exposed to similar experiences?
- Who inspires and engages incredibly well with others? Can I learn from this person − by shadowing them or asking them for advice?
- When have I been successful in engaging others? What did I do to succeed on this occasion?
- What activities or development could I undertake to become more effective at engaging others?
- Am I modelling the right behaviour? Am I engaged? Do I appear motivated and passionate?
- Which of your insights from reading this toolkit will you turn into actions, and how?

Sources

Corporate Leadership Council (2008). *Tips for Effective Presentations.* Power Point Presentation − Research Report: CEB Membership resource.

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