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CONFESIONS

of a Cheerleader

**Author and learning expert Julie Winkle
Giulioni says corporate cheerleaders help to
keep a team moving in the right direction**

How many leadership books and articles are built around the metaphor of the team and its coach? You know the story. The coach encourages and makes things happen from the sidelines. The team, having practiced its drills, is prepared to collaborate seamlessly, under pressure, overcoming all odds to win the game.

It's impressive; but let's take a step back and look at the game from a different vantage point. The players are on the field, advancing the game through their personal actions. So of course they're enthusiastic and passionately engaged. But, what about the hundreds or thousands of spectators who aren't making the plays directly but are supporting the effort from the stands, as excited and committed to the outcome as anyone

on the field? Who's responsible for that phenomenon?

It's the cheerleaders. They contribute to the game from the sidelines, working consciously to:

- Expand the game to include those not on the field
- Keep everyone engaged
- Encourage broad participation
- Get people on their feet
- Amplify successes
- Bond the group together to generate support when the team is behind
- Create one loud, unified, harmonious voice

What about "cheer" leadership as a new and maybe more powerful leadership metaphor for business?

So much of a manager's focus is on the 'harder' side of the business

game: sales, profits, margins, market share. This blocking and tackling work can't be overlooked. But that's only part of what's required for success today.

Cheerleaders in the workplace can deliver bottom-line results by building positive emotions and inspiring enthusiasm among their team members. These emotions are powerful fuel for the discretionary effort that helps teams and organisations distinguish themselves in the marketplace. When employees are energised and enthusiastic, they volunteer more: more brainpower; more time; more creativity; more effort. And all of this contributes to the bottom-line through productivity, efficiency, innovation, greater customer service, and more.

Meet Nancy, a self-described

corporate cheerleader who has made a career of leading individuals, groups, and organisations to success. She's a sought-after mentor because of her ability to help others tap into the best they have to offer. Others clamour to collaborate with her on projects because she has a way of helping individuals and groups coalesce around a vision.

But Nancy takes it all for granted. "It's just how I'm wired. I've always been positive... could see the silver lining in any cloud. That kind of energy and outlook just creates possibilities and progress."

What exactly does Nancy do to create an effective cheer-leadership style? No pom-poms or gymnastic feats are required. Just three practices.

Talent management



Play to the strengths

Nancy has an eye for talent; but more importantly, she quickly recognises and discovers the unique strengths of anyone with whom she works. She uses this understanding to ensure that each individual is positioned to tap into the best he or she has to offer. People gravitate toward Nancy because when they work with her they feel capable and skillful.

According to Nancy, "It doesn't take any longer to give people an assignment or role that will really make the most of their talents and let them shine. And, it's good business. We get better results this way."

It pays to figure out who's good at what and deploy people accordingly. Using one's strengths is energising. And like muscles, the more you use them, the stronger they become. Leveraging strengths promotes an upward spiral of positive emotions that drive learning, development, performance, and results.

Spotlight successes

Nancy's positive point of view keeps her always looking toward what's working, who's succeeding, and how her

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Julie Winkle Giulioni is a learning and training consultant with DesignArounds and author of the Amazon bestseller, *Help Them Go or Watch Them Go: Career Conversations Employees Want*



projects and teams are moving forward. This doesn't mean that she ignores problems. But when she addresses them, it's always in a constructive context.

Nancy is known for saying, "Capable, successful people can overcome any challenge... especially when they remember how capable and successful they are."

Cheerleaders address but don't dwell on losses and setbacks. With their people, they keep their focus squarely on what's going well. There's as much to be learned from positive outcomes as from failures; and mining successes is more energising for employees. Keeping accomplishments and successes front and centre reminds everyone that they're on a winning team... and builds the resilience required to deal productively with reversals or challenges.

Appreciate others

Appreciation and recognition are a foundation of Nancy's effectiveness as a leader. Yet, sometimes this can create a short-term challenge. Nancy recounts:

"Saying 'thank you' is like breathing to me. It just happens... and a lot. Years ago, I was working on a project and had an IT professional added to the team after we'd launched. Two emails into an exchange with him, he let me know that I could drop all of the 'nice-nice' stuff at the beginning and ending of the email and just cut to the chase. He 'got' that I was thankful...now let's move on. Apparently he thought it was some sort of management ploy. So, the next time I corresponded with him, I tried. But after struggling for 30 minutes with a two paragraph email, I picked up the phone and explained that the appreciation was sincere and I wasn't willing to edit it... but that he could just delete those parts if he preferred. Months later when we were shutting down our work together, he admitted that he'd saved the emails and that the sense of being appreciated was the best part of the project for him."

Authentic appreciation is a powerful - and underappreciated - force. We crave being recognised for who we are and what we do. Appreciation honours the individual, builds strong connections, boosts confidence, and fuels higher levels of contribution and performance.

Genuine and effective appreciation takes many forms beyond giving compliments and saying 'thank you'. It plays out quietly through listening and other demonstrations of respect. It can also take more overt forms like formal recognition and celebration.

Nancy's example and these three practices inspire a sense of enthusiasm and positivity that's infectious. Enthusiasm seems to generate more of itself. Before long, the leader's modeling can change the culture as employees begin to play to their strengths, spotlight team successes, and appreciate each other.

Given the challenges facing business today, having the right team and the right coach may not be enough. If you're looking for big and long-term wins maybe it's time for some cheer-leadership. [hrm](#)

The Markets open at 6am. Could Sarah be in the wrong one?

Sarah had always wanted to work in the stock market. Little did she know that she would end up working in the wrong market. What happened?



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