

Who Needs Encouragement?

The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. houses the personal belongings Abraham Lincoln was carrying the night he was assassinated. Among them is a well-worn newspaper clipping lauding Lincoln's achievements as president and describing him as, "One of the greatest statesmen of all time." Now, President Lincoln was by no means an egomaniac. In fact, he battled self-doubt throughout his presidency, especially during the Civil War when friend and foe alike heaped criticism upon him. That a national hero like President Lincoln would carry around words of encouragement in his pocket speaks volumes about the human need for affirmation.

As a leader, the first person you must encourage is yourself. If you're discouraged and feel like quitting, then you won't be able to spur on the people looking to you for support. Here are four simple strategies to keep you in high spirits.

1) Create Mementos

Hebrew shepherds carved a record of their significant life achievements into the wood of their staffs. Each day, as they carried the staff, they felt its contours on their skin. The stories etched in the wood served as encouraging reminders of obstacles they had overcome or victories they had won.

We can draw encouragement from past triumphs, but only if we perpetuate our memories of them. Do so by finding a tangible memento to represent the accomplishments that make you the proudest. Abraham Lincoln chose to carry around a news article. For you, maybe it's framing written words of praise from your manager. Or perhaps it's displaying artwork you've created, a medal you've won, or a plaque you've received in honor of your contribution to the organization. Whatever the case, give yourself visual cues that will trigger recollections of success.

2) Build a Support Team

Mark Twain understood the importance of being surrounded by encouragers: "Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great." Every relationship in our lives either uplifts us or drags us down. We have to choose carefully whom we allow into our inner circle because their attitudes toward us affect our success.

We draw encouragement from the people who believe the best about us. When we have a cheering section in life, we're a lot more likely to overcome the difficulties we encounter. The higher you go in leadership, the greater the pressures will be. Being able to lean on the support of loved ones serves as a valve to release the pressure. When we're buoyed by

encouragement the burdens of leadership feel light, and we are able to experience the joys of being entrusted with influence.

3) Envision Future Rewards

We draw encouragement by keeping future rewards at the forefront of our minds. If you've ever run a long-distance race, then you know the rush of energy that comes from seeing the finish line. Having the goal in sight gives you encouragement to finish the race.

As a leader, passion for attaining your vision should carry you. If you can't get excited about the destination you're headed toward, no one else will either. Spend time visualizing your arrival at the finish line. What will it feel like to reach your goals? How will life be better when your vision comes to fruition? Let the anticipation of achieving your dreams supply you with strength for the journey.

4) Sow Encouragement into the Lives around You

As a leader, who you are is who you attract. If you want encouragement from others, then be generous with it yourself. People are looking to your leadership for cues on how to conduct themselves. When they see you giving out courage and hope, they aspire to do the same.

Encouragement is reciprocal. What goes around comes around. I'm amazed at how eager people are to return the favor after I've provided them with inspiration. They line up to express their gratitude, and their kind words give me the strength to keep going.

