



8 October 2010

How to identify anchoring and unleash inspiration by using it

1. People who exercise the anchoring influencing behaviour show total commitment to team goals, the team, and team members. Start your search for anchors by looking to those whose behaviour is considered exemplary. They characteristically don't say anything negative about others and they never take the credit for themselves either, even when it's warranted.
2. Anchors are tremendous assets in tough times, injecting a vital sense of dependability into the team. They are variously described as the bond, rock and glue of teams. We also found that anchors are resilient, enduring, perseverant.
3. Take the time to look for and reward those dependable 'workhorses' that you may be taking for granted. In busy workplaces their vital contribution often goes unrecognised, usually until they are no longer there. It's likely, for example, that countless teams axed their anchors during the GFC, only to realise their true value through absence.
4. If you wish to exercise anchoring, be prepared to put yourself on the line for your team, team goals and individual members. Although you'll use a lot of communicating and listening, most of the time will be putting in a 110% effort, particularly when the going gets tough. Ultimately, your rewards will be deep trust from the team, some of whom might even find your behaviour inspirational.

IS INSPIRING GREAT THINGS IN OTHERS A SKILL YOU'VE MASTERED?

Do you have to be heroic to be inspiring?

Although there's growing recognition that there are more inclusive ways to lead, ideas of hero leadership are still pervasive. It's been around for centuries, usefully deployed in societies wracked by upheaval and crises. The knight in shining armour saves the day for the victors and ends it for the vanquished!

Many of the stories of the past recount heroic deeds. A large proportion of the popular novels, TV stories and movies also showcase heroes and their actions. Heroes and heroism, some research suggests, are embedded deeply in the collective psyche of most cultures. Charismatic leadership (hero leaders), according to a large cross-cultural study, is a 'universal leadership positive'.

The reasons above provide a powerful, evidence-based explanation about why heroic leadership dominates leadership thinking. But, so many of the conditions that precipitated and sustained hero leadership have become democratised. Many more people now have the wherewithal to step up and lead. It's also possible for leadership to be highly influential without being heroic. The truth is, 'ordinary people' (non-heroes) all around us are exercising leadership all the time!

We might be drawn to think that 'ordinary' is a synonym for mundane, but we'd be wrong. In the next section we'll look at how it's possible for everyday, non-heroic behaviour to evoke a powerful sense of inspiration in others.

We expect our heroes to act in a certain way

Developing and sustaining a heroic mantle usually requires the hero to be at least a little 'lite' on humility, without being arrogant or boastful. We expect heroes to exude strength and, sometimes, even just a little arrogance.

Commentary on the newly-installed UK Labour Leader, Ed Miliband, shows how his body language transformed from complete openness to being more guarded, even slightly aloof, during his acceptance speech. He intended to appear the victor, not only to the Labour faithful, but also to the undecided TV audience, wondering if he could be their new political hero. After their election flogging, the British Labour Party needs a heroic effort to begin the rebuilding, and a hero to lead it.

Is it possible to be inspiring without being a hero?

UGM research into distributing team leadership shows how it's possible to be both humble and inspiring. One of eight influencing behaviours, *anchoring*, is exercised through 100% commitment to team goals, the team and members within the team - a huge ask of anyone. Anchoring involves selfless (servant leadership style) execution.

Our study found that one person in a team may fit this bill, rarely more. It isn't uncommon for teams not to have anyone anchoring at all - and those teams are definitely poorer for that deficit.

How anchoring leads to inspiration

We found that anchoring behaviour is a major trigger for inspiring others. We often read about 'inspiring' as a leadership behaviour, but there seems to be a lack of discussion on antecedents of inspiration, other than 'this is what heroes (or charismatic leaders) do!' If it's a leadership behaviour, how do leaders actually 'do' inspiration?

Informants in our research helped us reach the conclusion that leaders can't actually 'do' inspiration in the same way as one *does* listening or *does* coordinating etc. For example, leaders 'do' motivating (another of the 8 influencing behaviours) to others by exercising the motivating behaviour. On the other hand, a leader exercises anchoring which may then evoke a sense of feeling inspired in others. Inspiration is a by-product of anchoring, not its primary purpose. The type of humility, service, connection etc. that people who are exercising anchoring show leads others to want to emulate at least some of the commitment and thus contribute more to the team.

Humility is a key attribute of people exercising the anchoring behaviour. Anchoring is a humble expression of commitment, not an act aimed at inspiring others. In a way, though, when inspiration follows, it's a just reward for a selfless act of leadership.

Interestingly, even the rewards of evoked inspiration are shared by many more than just the leader who was anchoring. Inspiration directly benefits the individual who's inspired and also the team which enjoys contributions from the inspired member. The person doing the anchoring is often further humbled when they discover the impact their selfless behaviour has on others. Consequently, they're motivated to increase their efforts because of their greater sense of making a valued contribution to the team (see UGM briefing on the powerful contributing-belonging cycle).

Anchoring and your teams

Although anchoring isn't vital for team effectiveness, teams with at least one person seen as the 'rock', 'mainstay' or 'anchor' are likely to outperform teams that don't have one. A key reason is the enduring loyalty and commitment these humble people show to team goals, the team, and individual members. This raises both the sense of belonging and the level of contribution. Another is that often their exemplary behaviours are inspirational.