



Lead Positive: How to Be a Highly Effective Leader

KATHRYN D. CRAMER

People Follow People—Not Just Good Ideas

I am holding the space for a new conversation about leadership. Instead of strategy, market share, alignment, and execution, I want to shine the spotlight on what goes on in the minds and hearts of leaders that makes people want to follow them. My passion is finding out how leaders use themselves as instruments to drive positive change. To that end, I ask you to think about the following three questions.

What if the leaders in our midst learned to:

- See more possibilities than problems?
- Say more about “why” and less about “what” and “how”?
- Do the courageous thing instead of operating out of the comfort zone?

How much more effective would they be? How many more would they inspire? How much better off would our institutions and businesses and schools and communities be today and in the long run?

Turning those “what-ifs” into leadership realities is what Lead Positive is all about. My promise to you and all leaders is that when you shift what you see, say and do toward what is possible and positive, you will get farther, faster. This will hold true in any situation—even the thorny, difficult ones.

When you “lead positive,” you offer a compelling vision of the future by reframing problems into possibilities and appealing to a higher sense of purpose, a noble and mighty cause. When you think, speak, and act out of the positive side of the ledger, people feel more hopeful and confident about the future. And if you are able to articulate why your vision is so important to those you serve, people trust and respect who you are, not just your ideas. Then, when you take a stand that requires courage and sacrifice, you can rely on their support and determination as you walk together toward a new positive direction.

“When you “lead positive,” you offer a compelling vision of the future by reframing problems into possibilities and appealing to a higher sense of purpose, a noble and mighty cause.

Learning to Soar

Imagine having unshakeable self-confidence, unwavering optimism, and exceptional personal magnetism. Imagine being in the Leadership Olympics, operating at the upper limit of your potential, proving yourself strong and courageous.

That is what happens when you become an Asset-Based Thinker. With Asset-Based Thinking (ABT), you learn to grab the spotlight of your attention and focus it on what is positive and strong in yourself, others, and in every situation. ABT is a game changer. People know intuitively when a leader is self-confident and optimistic about getting positive results. Confidence and optimism are both necessary and contagious.

It can be pretty difficult to lead with a positive view of the future and one's own skills and capabilities. For one, our high-stress, uncertain environment works against us. How can a leader—or anyone else for that matter—learn to see the positive upsides when facing adversity and volatility?

Now, more than ever before, Asset-Based Thinking is a leadership imperative. It is precisely because you face stressful, unpredictable conditions, that you need to master the skills of Asset-Based Thinking. With ABT, leaders learn to search for the gold hidden inside of the complexity and unprecedented rates of change. With ABT, leaders build momentum and

keep making progress. And momentum and progress are what triggers enhanced confidence and optimism to face the next unexpected challenge.

Without Asset-Based Thinking, our brains' built-in "negativity bias" completely takes over. The very human tendency to become consumed with problems (and their corresponding fixes) is exacerbated by the countless twists and turns, fits and starts, that shake us up on a daily basis. The constant barrage of negative pressure can easily send us into a downward spiral of anxiety, frustration, and even anger... but only if we let it.

Deficit-Based Thinking is my term for being preoccupied by the seeming endless flood of problems, setbacks, mistakes, shortcomings, and weaknesses that our myriad stressful circumstances bring out. It is all too easy to spot what's "not working" thanks to our brain's alarm system designed to protect us from harm. Fight, flight, and freeze constitute our automatic, defensive reactions when something goes wrong. Defensive reactions were necessary for survival in ages long ago. But defensive reactions in this new age do nothing but create more havoc.

So what can a leader do to override the brain's "negativity bias," to start becoming an Asset-Based Thinker and Leader? It is simple, but not easy. Leaders must shift the majority of their attention away from problems and barriers, and instead zero in on the progress being made and the possibilities that exist in the here and now.

Recent studies in brain science confirm that with practice we can shape new neural networks that make it increasingly easier to be more alert and responsive to the positive facts of a situation. If we see the positive facts, we can draw others' attention to them, and then take action to leverage them. If, on the other hand, we have "asset blindness" due to our preoccupation with the negative forces and facts, we are doomed to operate in a constant deficit-based "fix-it" mindset. Without the ability to see and seize assets (i.e., the positive forces and facts about you, others, and the situation at hand), you forego the opportunity to be courageous and proactive in achieving the results you seek, to lead effectively, to inspire.

“ Leaders must shift the majority of their attention away from problems and barriers, and instead zero in on the progress being made and the possibilities that exist in the here and now.

Four Steps toward Lead Positive Mastery

What if you were able to motivate others to embrace and even drive change? What if you could create a highly engaged culture? Imagine making inspiring presentations—the kind people keep talking about. Imagine having the skills to teach others to be more resilient and confident. What if you could be better than you already are at fostering top-performing teams? Mastering the Lead Positive See-Say-Do framework will give you these skills and more.

Below I detail four Lead Positive steps and the proven tools that will start you on your way.

Step 1: Shift Internally So You Can Excel Externally

The fundamental Asset-Based Thinking practice is shifting out of a negative perspective into a positive one. With ABT you find the opportunities and strengths hidden within the trials and tribulations of a stress-prone environment. You silence the demons of anxiety and frustration born out of the natural “negativity bias” we have all inherited as an outdated way of protecting us from harm.

The ASA Shift | Your perceptual set is your mental predisposition to perceive one thing over another. Shifting from a negatively biased (i.e. deficit-based) to a positively biased (i.e. asset-based) perceptual set can be daunting. If you are seeing the downsides of a situation, then you

might think “problem” and you might feel “overwhelmed.” On the other hand, if you see the upsides in that same situation, then you will think “possibility” and you will feel “exhilarated.” Think of it as a self-reinforcing process, a virtuous cycle that spawns solutions, or a downward spiral that only makes matters worse. This exercise helps you to shift your perspective just enough to begin triggering the positive feelings that set a virtuous cycle in motion.

Think of a challenging or stressful situation you are facing right now. Maybe an employee is failing, you are way behind schedule on an important project, or the regulators are putting up barriers. Make it a situation you know you could be handling better. Next, follow the ASA steps.

- **Acknowledge:** Identify your negative emotions and trace them back to the negative aspects of the situation that you are focused on. Acknowledge that the negative aspects of what you see, think, and feel are probably true, but not helpful. At the moment, you have a temporary case of opportunity blindness. If you look more closely you will be able to glimpse some beneficial aspects of the current situation that are also true.
- **Scan:** Look for the positive side of the ledger. Ask yourself: How can my team or I benefit from tackling this situation head on? Scan for one potential gain or upside. Think about the reward that comes with dealing effectively with the challenge.

- **Act:** Take one step toward realizing the benefit you now see is possible. Act on that potential gain and feel how it makes the negative thoughts and feelings recede.

Step 2: Say It With Soul

Saying it with soul is about meaning what you say—and saying something meaningful.

Make the “why” of what you want to achieve more important than the “how.” When others understand the “why,” you can figure out the “how” together. Creating the “how” roadmap becomes an exciting collaborative effort, a shared goal for everyone.

What is Your Mighty Cause? | To infuse your message with soul, you must be able to answer these questions and communicate their answers authentically—soulfully—to your listeners.

What is your mighty cause? When you are able to link your vision and goals to a greater purpose, a mighty cause, people are inspired. You help them grasp the true meaning of what you are trying to accomplish. When a leader is genuinely committed to and can effectively communicate a mighty cause, it is truly inspiring. Don't fret if your mighty cause isn't world peace or eliminating global poverty. Soulful leadership happens on many levels.

Why is this so important to me personally? Get personal. Show your skin in the game. Often leaders think their teams are not concerned with what the leaders think is important; people only care about why something is important to their own well-being. That statement is true.

People do care most about their own wellbeing, but that is why they need to know that the leaders they are about to follow have personal skin in the game. If a trusted leader is genuinely committed and personally invested in a cause, then it lowers the bar for his or her followers to get on board.

Why is it important for them (your audience) to get involved? What's in it for them? Which of their values and beliefs does this mighty cause serve? If the people you lead trust that you are looking out for them, their loyalty to you and their commitment to the cause, their sense of meaning and purpose is strengthened.

“Imagine having the skills to teach others to be more resilient and confident. What if you could be better than you already are at fostering top-performing teams?”

Step 3: Say It With Sizzle

A story well told, a story with sizzle, transports the listener to a different time, place and plane. It captivates emotions and provides an exciting trajectory of experiences full of hope, struggle, uncertainty and surprise. Stories show us how to live life.

Tell the story of what it will take to “go to the moon,” complete with the sensory details to stimulate the imaginations of your listeners. Help them to live the milestones and turning points along the way to victory in their hearts and minds.

Tell the truth: The journey will not be easy, it is not for the faint of heart, and it will not happen overnight. But achieving the vision will indeed happen. Make heroes out of your listeners.

A rich experience of the vision, a story that sizzles in the hearts and minds of your team, is the first phase of making it happen.

Your Hero's Journey | Leadership stories have been told for centuries in the form of heroic myths and legends. When well-known mythology professor Joseph Campbell conducted comparative research on those timeless stories, he found similar themes and patterns that he characterized as the Hero's Journey. I have taken these themes and turned them into a crafting tool to help you create your own Hero's Journey, the powerful leadership story of what lies ahead for you and your team in the pursuit of your mighty cause.

Use these touchstones to tell the detailed story of the future you seek—tell it as if it has already come true. Through telling your Hero’s Journey, you address your own experience as a leader. You articulate the path forward complete with plausible windfalls and challenges encountered along the way to victory. You detail the experiences of others—your allies, enemies, mentors, and detractors. Your listeners will feel what you feel. And when your team and other stakeholders are emotionally drawn to you and your cause, they will get on board and be happy they did.

1. **The Call:** The Hero (i.e. the leader) is presented with a challenge or opportunity that opens up a whole new world. The “call” is so named because this step is about pursuing a vocation—something the leader is born to do, his or her mighty cause.
2. **The Resistance:** The leader faces fear and hesitation about pursuing the journey. The obstacles to be overcome seem insurmountable.
3. **The Threshold Crossing:** The leader makes the decision to move forward, away from the way things are and toward the way things can be. The new reality is palpable and there is no turning back.
4. **The Journey:** The leader faces windfalls and blessing, tests and challenges, allies and enemies. Some are predictable; most are not. The only constant is the resolve to keep on going.

5. **The Supreme Ordeal:** The leader encounters a profoundly dark moment, a time when he or she is at risk of losing everything. This is the lowest point, the time when the leader really needs to prove his or her worth, to be the Hero.
6. **The Return Home:** Having survived the darkest hour, the leader takes possession of the treasure and returns home with boons and elixirs from the adventure. They return to the ordinary world with unexpected and timeless lessons that transform the human experience.

Step 4: Start a Positive Ripple Effect

Momentum comes from taking action—well-conceived, well-performed, and well-understood action. The key to Lead Positive mastery is to keep on creating outcomes that inspire people to achieve more, to take on the next milestone.

Act, Observe, Reflect | The extent to which you learn from your past leadership experiences is key to increasing your effectiveness. This point was driven home to me shortly after graduate school when an executive I was working with gave me a copy of *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience* by Richard Hughes, Robert Ginnet, and Gordon Curphy. In Chapter Three of this classic leadership text, I learned about the Action-Observation-Reflection model. It resonated so strongly with me that I have used it in my work ever since.

The premise of the model is that once leaders commit an act, they must stop to observe what happened and then reflect on what was done well (or poorly) and what lessons can be carried forward. The model calls for leaders to learn from what they do. Taking the time to observe, and reflect on your actions automatically puts you in the ABT responsive mode. The benefits are also a well-earned timeout from doing and the cultivation of rich lessons for what to do better next time.

Act, Observe, Reflect is what I want you to do more intentionally. Assess what you are learning as a function of what you are doing. You can accomplish this in the privacy of your own thoughts, or you can process what you are learning out loud in conversation with someone else. Both methods work to help you milk your leadership experiences for all they are worth.

“Momentum comes from taking action—well-conceived, well-performed, and well-understood action. The key to Lead Positive mastery is to keep on creating outcomes that inspire people to achieve more, to take on the next milestone.

7 Good Reasons to Gain Lead Positive Mastery

Think of the four ABT Mastery Tools you have just learned about as the starter yeast for your Lead Positive adventure. When you gain mastery in the Lead Positive See-Say-Do framework, you will become a leader who can:

Live your strengths. Know what makes you effective so you can tap into those skills at any time.

Sizzle. Become a more magnetic and memorable communicator.

Inspire change. Motivate others to embrace and even drive change.

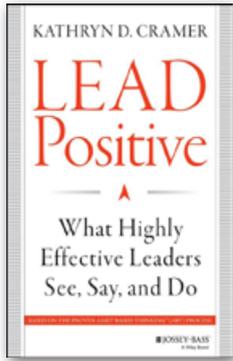
Guide talent. Coach your teams and develop their future paths.

Involve. Create high-engagement cultures tailored to your organization.

Remove barriers. Resolve polarizing conflicts and difficult issues.

Open the future. Push the boundaries of what's next for you and your organization.

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [Lead Positive](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Dr. Cramer, a psychologist and business consultant, believes in big thinking, the power of presence, concocting new ideas, and never cooking the same meal twice. She created and has dedicated her life to Asset-Based Thinking™ (ABT)—a way of looking at the world that helps leaders, influencers, and their teams refocus and make small shifts in thinking that produce extraordinary impact. Dr. Cramer has written seven bestselling books including *Change the Way You See Everything*, which started the ABT Global Movement. Her latest book, *Lead Positive: What Highly Effective Leaders See, Say & Do*, shows leaders how to increase their effectiveness through her revolutionary yet refreshing simple mindset management process, Asset-Based Thinking.

→ **SEND THIS** | [Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

→ **SUBSCRIBE** | [Sign up for e-news](#) to learn when our latest manifestos are available.

This document was created on March 12, 2014 and is based on the best information available at that time. The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](#) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. Cover image from [Veer](#). You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

About ChangeThis

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

800ceoread

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at [800-CEO-READ](#) or at our daily [blog](#).



Explore your knowledge further with [KnowledgeBlocks](#), a new project from 800-CEO-READ that lets you turn what you know into knowledge you can use.