

PART I

# The 7 Simple Secrets

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL



## INTRODUCTION

# Our Chief Want

**Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.**

**—Ralph Waldo Emerson**

You have the power to inspire anyone, anywhere, anytime. You may not have a leadership title, but you exert influence over someone every day. Whether you are a Fortune 500 chief executive or the head of a household, you are in the motivational business. Regardless of your role, you play the part of chief inspiration officer for someone at work, at home, or in your community. The 7 Simple Secrets revealed in this book hold the key to successfully selling yourself, your vision, and your values to everyone within your sphere of influence. As you develop the astonishing communications skills shared by the world's most inspiring men and women, you will enjoy far more successful and fulfilling relationships with your colleagues, clients, employees, and anyone in your personal or professional life.

In order for these strategies to work, you need to see yourself as the leader of your personal brand. How you talk, walk, and look reflect on

## Fire Them Up!

that brand, and you are in sole command of the impression you make. If you fail to connect, you will lose the admiration of the people you hope to influence. But once you master the 7 Simple Secrets, you will be known among your peers as an individual who speaks with confidence and charisma. A door will open to a new world of achievement because the stories you tell will have the power to inspire, motivate, and persuade. The verbal pictures you paint will be so vivid and bright that the rest of us will want to climb aboard for the ride. The language you use will be so positive and optimistic that your presence will energize us, making us feel better about ourselves and our roles in the world.

## Whose “Secrets” Are These?

When conference organizers invite me to speak on the topic of business communications, they often introduce me as a “motivational speaker.” While I am flattered and eager to share what I have learned, I quickly point out that if you have to hire a motivational speaker to fire up your people, you’ve already lost them. You are the one they turn to for motivation day after day, not me. I’m not the one who spends eight, nine, ten hours a day alongside them. You are the one who must develop your skills of persuasion to inspire those around you. In this book, you will learn from the best. The 7 Simple Secrets revealed belong to the men and women who, by the power of their words, deeds, and demeanor, inspire everyone around them. They include:

- Leaders who run companies such as The Ritz-Carlton, Google, Gymboree, Cold Stone Creamery, 24 Hour Fitness, Travelocity, Starbucks, and many other well-known brands.
- A company president who has built a culture so synonymous with extraordinary service that every year hundreds of business professionals pay thousands of dollars to learn his company’s techniques.

## Our Chief Want

5

- Managers who have transformed their companies from second-tier organizations into nationally ranked Best Places to Work.
- A Princeton graduate whose idealistic vision inspired thousands of college seniors to join her cause, landing her on the cover of *Fortune* magazine.
- An entrepreneur who created a worldwide brand sensation after sketching his idea on the back of a napkin and firing up the people around him to follow his vision.
- A teacher whose techniques are so effective that a television movie was based on his experiences.

These men and women come from different backgrounds, generations, and industries, but they share one quality in common: the ability to inspire others to higher levels of achievement and to win over others with the power of their words. Their insights will change the way you see yourself as a brand and how you communicate the vision behind your values. A world of potential exists in each and every one of us: a potential unleashed by those who speak the language of success. In the pages to follow, the language will be revealed.

The techniques are called “simple secrets” because they really are simple. All you have to do is adopt the model in your everyday communications: presentations, pitches, meetings, speeches, interviews, emails, Webcasts, blogs, or however you articulate your story to those you intend to influence. Most of the books, white papers, and research studies on the subject of business communications are long, confusing, and boring—the exact opposite of the skills you need to inspire. You will be pleased to know that I have studied the research to save you the hassle. I have also spent nearly twenty years as a communications professional: as a CNN business correspondent, television anchor, radio host, columnist, author, speaker, and communications coach who works with top executives at the world’s most admired brands. My clients’ brands touch your life each and every day. From your bank, to your computer, to the products you buy and the foods you eat, my

**Fire Them Up!**

clients make and sell the things that you can't live without. My job is to make sure that the leaders who run those companies craft and deliver messages that will electrify their audiences. Hundreds of business professionals, from CEOs to entrepreneurs, have gone from dull to dazzling using the model in this book. I get really pumped up about these principles because I see how they have changed the lives and careers of people who have mastered them.

The word “inspire” means to elicit fervent enthusiasm. In other words, to fire people up! Think about the roles you play in business and the opportunities you have to inspire, motivate, and persuade the people around you:

- *CEO*. Rallying your employees, customers, and investors to embrace your vision.
- *Salesperson*. Turning prospects into customers and customers into evangelists.
- *Manager*. Firing up employees about new products and the future of the company.
- *Merchant*. Encouraging your staff to exceed the expectations of your customers by offering mind-blowing service.
- *Entrepreneur*. Electrifying your investors, partners, employees, and customers about your new company and its potential to change the world.
- *Coach*. Motivating your team to play harder, learn from their mistakes, and celebrate their losses and victories with class.
- *Teacher*. Encouraging your students to learn discipline, study hard, and commit themselves to reaching their potential in school and in life.
- *Pastor*. Energizing your congregation to live their faith and values in the community after they leave their place of worship.
- *Parent*. Convincing your children to model your high ethical and moral standards.

## Our Chief Want

7

These desired actions begin and end with how effectively you communicate the story behind your vision. Some people have an appeal—a magnetism—that allows them to successfully influence everyone around them. You know who they are. They are individuals you see on television, read about in newspapers, or possibly run into at the office. It is time to join them.

### **Alicia Silverstone Isn't the Only One Who's Clueless**

If you work in sales, research shows your number-one pain point is making quota. It should be. Miss your numbers and you are out of a job. However, for many sales managers, a close second to making quota is motivating the people they supervise. Unfortunately, most people are clueless when it comes to inspiring others. I read an interview in the *New York Times* with an event planner, recounting some of the horror stories she experienced on the job. At one conference she coordinated, a company president organized a stunt as a “motivational” tool. The president, an expert archer, picked his top saleswoman from the audience and asked her to balance an apple on her head so he could shoot an arrow through it from fifty feet!<sup>1</sup> The arrow hit its target and the saleswoman survived, but the president was way off the mark. In this book, you will not learn corny gimmicks to fire up your sales team. You *will* learn how to speak with confidence, and by doing so, you will inspire everyone, including yourself.

## **Be Like Apple. Think Different**

In his book, *Hope: How Triumphant Leaders Create the Future*, Andrew Razeghi quotes a study that found “only 20 percent of all U.S. employees want to be with their current employer in two years.”<sup>2</sup> What's truly alarming is that most employees cite a lack of leadership as their reason for going elsewhere. Today's workers crave meaning in

## **Fire Them Up!**

their lives and a professional role that represents something larger than themselves. Unfortunately, few leaders communicate meaning, hope, and optimism. They fail to create an emotional connection with their employees, customers, and colleagues. But you have an opportunity to be different, to excel, and to inspire others in a way you have yet to imagine.

## **Bad, Boring, and Blah or Energizing, Engaging, and Electric!**

As a journalist and communications coach, I come across three types of communicators.

### **THE CHIEF OF BLAH**

This person does not consider the need to inspire his employees as part of his job description. A meeting is simply an opportunity to announce an order; a presentation is a way to score points, to show his superiors that he should keep his job. Nothing more. His primary goal is to keep bringing in his paycheck and to get a bigger bonus than his colleagues. He is not inspiring, nor does he want to be. Instead of energizing, he extinguishes, snuffing out all creativity, energy, and drive in the people around him.

### **THE CHIEF OF MEDIOCRITY**

This person is genuinely concerned about the need to rally her team, but she does not have the tools to match the power of her communications with her desire. She does an adequate job of communicating her mission, but she could be clearer, more convincing, and more compelling. This is the kind of person who can make enjoyable small

## Our Chief Want

9

talk at the company barbecue, but nobody is eager to join her at work on Monday morning.

### THE CHIEF INSPIRATION OFFICER

This person is an extraordinary communicator. He places a strong emphasis on the way he crafts and delivers his message, vision, and values. He is successful at getting listeners actually to change what they have come to believe. He successfully rallies people around the vivid future he sees and helps them find meaning in their roles. This leader is magnetic. He leaves everyone energized, enthusiastic, and electrified!

Your existing title is irrelevant. The only thing that matters is that you want to be more captivating and confident in the way you speak, because in this book, you'll learn from the best. In Chapter One, you will meet one entrepreneur whose title is "Grand Poo Bah." He has an untraditional title but a remarkable ability to electrify the people around him. Don't sweat the title. Achieve results. Your title will take care of itself.

#### Enchant the Soul

The standard definition of "rhetoric" is the art of persuasion through language. I prefer Plato's take on it: the art of enchanting the soul. Enchant the soul of your listeners, and you will enjoy influence, success, and joy beyond your wildest dreams.

### The Real Hell's Kitchen

Like most people, I have worked for some managers whose failure to communicate effectively left everyone in the division or company

uninspired, unmotivated, and demoralized. I spent a couple of years under one boss who made Chef Gordon Ramsey on the Fox show *Hell's Kitchen* look as friendly as a puppy in a pet store. This particular manager was a well-known television personality who tried on a boss's hat for a few years. Not a good idea. When he got mad, he would yell for his supervisors, bring them into his office—which was within earshot of my mine—slam the door shut, and scream obscenities for two hours. Grown men would walk out with tears in their eyes. Working for this monster—uh, “manager”—motivated me to leave that particular job and live my life on my own terms; I choose my own path, I'm my own boss, and I avoid working for people who fail to lift the spirits of those around them. This manager “motivated” out of fear but failed to inspire.

You do not need a book to teach you how to act like a jerk. Poor managers think that motivation means scaring the heck out of people. It doesn't. Other managers think we're all like Pavlov's dogs: Give us a treat and we'll perform. These managers believe that offering incentives, such as a 50-inch widescreen plasma TV for the person with the highest sales, is all the motivation his team needs. It's not. Financial or material incentives might work for a few hours or days, but they will fail to inspire people over the long run.

Many leaders have yet to discover this basic fact: Fewer than half of U.S. workers are happy with their jobs, and only 14 percent are “very satisfied,” according to a Conference Board survey.<sup>3</sup> This low level of engagement costs the American economy an estimated \$350 billion a year in lost productivity.<sup>4</sup> I could offer more statistics, but why bother? Clearly, people are desperate for inspiring leadership. We all know it. Just look at the frown on the face of the person next to you on the train Monday morning, the demeanor of the bank teller, the lack of enthusiasm and customer service skills from the sales clerk at the department store. People are uninspired, and it shows. Keep this in mind as you read the stories of the inspiring individuals in this book;

## Our Chief Want

11

although you may work for a demoralizing boss, you can choose to be different. You can choose to join the men and women who are among the most influential people on the planet, capturing the hearts and minds of everyone you meet. As an old saying goes, when you are ready, the teacher will appear. The teachers are in this book, so get ready!

I encourage you to be the type of person people want to stick with for the long term, the person whose vision people want to follow, and the person who brings out the best in others. Your customers, colleagues, clients, employees, staff, team, students, and children are searching for someone to satisfy their chief want. If you miss the opportunity to engage them, they will look elsewhere for inspiration: another company, a competitor, a boss, a congregation, or, saddest of all, questionable peers. We all want to be around someone who makes us feel good about ourselves and engages our hearts and minds with the vision of a brighter future. You have the ability and, I would argue, the obligation, to play this role for those in your life. All you need are the right tools, the proper insight, and a dose of motivation from others who have achieved this extraordinary level of influence.

## A Simple Formula for Career Success

If you truly want to make a mark in this world—to leave a “ding in the universe,” as Apple cofounder Steve Jobs once said—then you must elevate your personal brand and become a person of influence who communicates with confidence and charisma. Not only will you be rewarded on a personal level, but your career and company will reap the benefits. Engaged employees are passionate, innovative, and exceed their sales targets. They value their organization and, most important, their immediate supervisor or manager. According to a study by Watson Wyatt Worldwide, companies whose leaders communicate

### **Fire Them Up!**

successfully also outperform their competitors financially; companies with highly effective communications practices had a level of employee engagement that was nearly five times greater than that of the competition.<sup>5</sup> Those companies also posted a significantly higher return to shareholders over a five-year period.

According to leadership professor and author Jay Conger, “A more educated, more intrinsically motivated workplace demands that executives and managers recast their image more in the light of an effective political leader. They must learn to sell themselves and their missions—this depends on highly effective language skills.”<sup>6</sup> In the future, says Conger, “leaders will not only have to be effective strategists, but rhetoricians who can energize through the words they choose. The era of managing by dictate is ending and is being replaced by an era of managing by inspiration.” Think about it. Management by inspiration. What a glorious goal!

You might want listeners to enthusiastically embrace your vision for the company, buy your product, or choose your service. Reaching these goals requires that you build an emotional connection between your listeners and your vision, your brand, and yourself. When you succeed at creating that connection, the results are magical, leading to a transformation in your life as well as contributing to positive change in those around you. The people around you are looking for meaning, belonging, and a sense of fulfillment but are not getting it. You can change that, and you must, to enjoy a richer life. Adopt the 7 Simple Secrets and people will walk through walls for you.

### **Inspire!**

This book is based on observations and interviews with dozens of extraordinary men and women who communicate visions that are irrepressible, irresistible, and wildly contagious. If you are ready to take

your place among them, the 7 Simple Secrets will take you there. The next seven chapters in Part I will put you on the road to becoming a super motivator. Get ready to INSPIRE:

1. *Ignite Your Enthusiasm: Light a Fire in Your Heart before Sparking One in Theirs.*
2. *Navigate the Way: Deliver a Specific, Consistent, and Memorable Vision.*
3. *Sell the Benefit: Put Your Listeners First.*
4. *Paint a Picture: Tell Powerful, Memorable, and Actionable Stories.*
5. *Invite Participation: Solicit Input, Overcome Objections, and Develop a Winning Strategy.*
6. *Reinforce an Optimistic Outlook: Become a Beacon of Hope.*
7. *Encourage People to Reach Their Potential: Praise People, Invest in Them, and Unleash Their Potential.*

Part I explores each of the 7 Simple Secrets in detail. Part II includes conversations and observations of inspiring individuals in different fields. These chapters will help you to appreciate the wide range of situations in which you can apply the secrets.

Inspiring communicators have nailed the 7 Simple Secrets. By doing so, they leave people energized, enthusiastic, and motivated. When you are in the presence of these extraordinary individuals, you are left with the belief—the absolutely certain belief—that everything you have ever wanted to achieve is possible. They make you feel better about yourself and the world in which we all do business. They embrace change. They love challenge. They fill their days with positive energy and see a future that is bright and hopeful. This collective energy results in a motivated, positive, energized workplace, proven to increase the value of the organization. You have the potential to exert positive influence on the lives of those around you. These 7 Simple Secrets

## **Fire Them Up!**

will allow you to take your rightful place among the world's most inspiring leaders.

Inspiration comes in many forms. I am inspired by the radiant smile of my baby daughter when she sees her daddy in the morning, the par-3 seventeenth hole at Pebble Beach, and the emerald-blue water of Lake Tahoe. Accomplishments inspire us, too. We can be inspired by the deeds of extraordinary men and women, both historical and contemporary: Napoleon Bonaparte, Martin Luther King Jr., Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, and other innovative minds. Few of us will live at a confluence of history where we can unleash previously untapped powers to change the world, but we are all catalysts of change for the people around us. We all strive to improve our existence, to be our best selves, and to leave a legacy, but most of us need an extra push, someone to inspire us. It is our chief want, and this book will show you how to satisfy it. Now let's get started.

## CHAPTER 1

# Ignite Your Enthusiasm

## Light a Fire in Your Heart before Sparking One in Theirs

**This is the one true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.**

—George Bernard Shaw

In the 2006 season of *America's Next Top Model*, supermodel Tyra Banks and her zany cast of judges faced a decision: whether to advance one of two twin sisters competing for the ultimate prize of a cover shoot for *Seventeen* magazine and \$100,000 to jump-start her career. Michelle had poise, grace, and technical skills. Her sister, Amanda, lacked Michelle's natural talent but wanted it more. Amanda was enthusiastic about modeling and wanted nothing less than to make it her life's calling. Michelle, however, admitted that she did not have the same energy and passion as her sister or the other candidates. "In this competition, passion is way more important than beautiful pictures," said Tyra as she eliminated Michelle. Likewise, in the competition to inspire listeners, passion and excitement will separate you from the pack. Energize yourself before you attempt to engage the hearts and minds of your audience.

In my role as a communications coach, I meet astonishing business professionals in a cross section of industries and roles: in the executive ranks, sales, marketing, and throughout all levels of the organization. The most energizing among them have a personal quality that lifts everyone's spirit. They are a tiny but bright constellation, a group of star performers who are worlds away from the majority of leaders in business today. While they share 7 Simple Secrets that set them apart, it all starts with one common thread, Simple Secret #1: Successful leaders are fired up about what they do and have an extraordinary ability to generate excitement in others.

### **How One Google Executive Found Her Field of Dreams**

Inspiration begins internally. What is it about your service, product, company, or cause that pumps you up? Only after you identify what you are truly passionate about will you be in a position to motivate others. Marissa Mayer is the Vice President of Search Products for Google. She has her hands on pretty much every feature that appears on the search engine: colors, graphics, tools, and interfaces. Her role impacts the Internet searches that millions of people conduct daily. But it's her passion that got her there.

You might not expect a computer science major to have a warm, friendly, and outgoing personality, and I say that with only the greatest affection for technologists, but when I first met Mayer, she shattered my stereotype. She had recently been featured on the cover of several magazines, including *Newsweek* and *Fast Company*. She is articulate and has striking good looks (she captained the pom-pom squad for her high school in Wausau, Wisconsin, but I doubt her cheerleading experience makes it to the top of her resume). Mayer works an insane number of hours. Her weekdays begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 8:00 p.m. Those are only the hours she spends in the office. After hitting the

**Ignite Your Enthusiasm**

17

Google gym around 11:00 p.m., she typically answers email until 3:00 a.m.! And you thought you spent a lot of time at work.

Mayer has found a career that ignites her passion for how technology can improve our lives. “I’m amazed at the role Google plays in the world today,” she says. “Touching people’s lives and giving them information to choose better jobs, take better educational paths, find better medical treatment. Information is fundamentally critical.”<sup>1</sup>

In one respect, the information Mayer leaves out of the conversation is more important than what she includes. She never says a word about money, stock, the gym, or the famous Google cafeteria. (The company employs gourmet chefs to serve up fancy, delicious, and free meals to its employees. When was the last time you found Eggplant Ratatouille, Seared Day Boat Scallops in a Green Coconut Curry Sauce, or Tropical Shrimp Bisque Soup in your company kitchen?) There is no question that a good salary, health benefits, a club membership, a cafeteria, and free coffee are nice perks, but while perks keep us coming back to the office, they do not inspire. Big difference. Mayer’s teams of engineers and product managers enjoy working with her because her enthusiasm is infectious. She makes them feel good about the company, its products, and the role those products play in the world today. “In 1982, we had a lot of space where I grew up in Wisconsin,” Mayer recalls, “and I remember me and my group of friends had planned to build an actual baseball diamond. Was it 88 feet between bases or 90? we asked. We reached an impasse because we didn’t want to ask our parents to drive us to the library, pull out a reference book, and look it up. That was the only way to answer that question back then. Today you just type it into Google and have an answer immediately.”

According to Mayer, you would be hard-pressed to find a group of individuals who make a larger contribution to the world than her colleagues at Google. She communicates this enthusiasm in conversations, meetings, emails, and presentations. “People need to appreciate the impact they are having,” says Mayer. “When you produce a product that is installed on tens of millions of machines or viewed tens

## **Fire Them Up!**

of millions of times across the world, you have an impact on people's lives. You have a serious responsibility to users and the world."

Mayer creates a strong emotional connection to her listeners because she is deeply committed to the message. She exudes energy, enthusiasm, and excitement. You must do the same. Once you make a positive association between yourself and the message, you are more likely to reach the holy grail of influence: turning listeners into evangelists. Evangelists have such a deep passion for you, your brand, and your message that they will sing your praises to others. John Watson Sr., the founder of IBM, said, "The great accomplishments of man have resulted from the transmission of enthusiasm." Transmit enthusiasm. Do great things.

### **How a Pop Star Washed Out the Cobwebs**

People find inspiration in many ways. One of my clients, Latin pop star Obie Bermudez, found inspiration in a South Bronx laundry. His first album garnered very little attention, certainly not enough to let him live the life of a superstar. To make a living, he worked in a Laundromat for five years. Watching the daily interactions of the customers inspired him to write nearly all the songs for his second album, which reached number one on the Latin music charts. The spin cycle actually helped him find his voice!

### **How the Brain behind Cranium Connects with Your Heart**

When I stepped out of the elevator into Cranium's colorful office space near Seattle's famed Pike Place Market, I was hit with a wave of energy, enthusiasm, and excitement that I had rarely experienced in corporate



**Figure 1.1** Cranium’s infectious enthusiasm affects everyone; Cranium’s “Professor Profit,” Jack Lawrence, takes a lap around the office on his scooter to celebrate a “financial milestone.”

Photo by Ken Lambert, May 28, 2006. Photo courtesy of *The Seattle Times*.

America. These people really love their jobs, I thought. Everyone greets you like you are their best friend. They smile through the gloomiest Seattle day. (See Figure 1.1.) A sense of pride permeates their conversations. Cranium has successfully reinvented the board game category, creating the fastest-selling independent board game in history. It has become more than a game; it is a place that unleashes the limitless creativity and energy of its employees, who create award-winning games, toys, and books that are so infectious, buyers call themselves “Craniacs.” Where does this energy come from? I wondered. I did not have to look far. Sitting in a glass-walled office filled with toys and games was Cranium’s inventor Richard Tait, one of the most awe-inspiring entrepreneurs in America today.

I was about to get my first dose of the dynamic Scot whom Bill Gates had once selected as Microsoft's Employee of the Year. Richard Tait is now Cranium's cofounder, or "Grand Poo Bah." No kidding. That is his title. In fact, everyone at Cranium is encouraged to come up with a title that fits their job description. The "Head of the Hive" oversees publicity, or buzz. The "Chief Culture Keeper" heads HR, and the "Concierge" is the receptionist. You get the idea. Everything about Cranium is intended to reinvent the rules of how business is conducted. It is not often that I meet a charismatic pitchman like Tait. "Within five minutes of meeting Tait, you'll want to work for him," a colleague told me. She was right. Tait's energy and enthusiasm are wildly infectious. He is an entrepreneur, inventor, leader, and *Chief Inspiration Officer* for Cranium's employees, investors, and customers.

After ten years at Microsoft, where he specialized in starting new businesses, Tait left the company to create something of his own. He was determined to build a company that would delight customers around the world. However, he had yet to find a project that would ignite his enthusiasm. He certainly never thought that he would find success in a board game, especially one that requires players to answer trivia questions, whistle tunes, act out characters, or play with clay! But on a trip out East, this man from the West created a game that would unite friends and families around the world.

During a vacation with friends in the Hamptons, Tait and his wife, Karen, were playing their favorite board game, Pictionary. "Karen and I were unbeaten. We dusted them at Pictionary," Tait told me during our interview.<sup>2</sup> "Our friends wanted revenge, so they challenged us to a game of Scrabble. Scrabble is a word that can send shivers down my spine even to this day. Our friends are demons at Scrabble. Sure enough, they humbled us," said Tait, who blamed himself for the defeat. The loss did not lead to an aha moment as much as it left Tait with a feeling of looking like an idiot in front of his family and friends. The defining moment hit him on the plane ride home to Seattle. What

## Ignite Your Enthusiasm

21

if a game existed that had something for all players, where everyone had a chance to shine, to show off a special talent and be celebrated for that skill? “What would a game like that *feel* like? It would have to be a game that had performance challenges, data and trivia challenges, language and word puzzles, and creative activities. I sketched out the idea for the game on a napkin.”

On that flight, Cranium was born. I italicized “feel” in Tait’s quote because the word is a recurring theme in my interviews with inspiring business leaders. It tells me that these individuals are affected emotionally by the products and services they create, pitch, or sell. They generate excitement in others because they are deeply passionate themselves.

### The Napkin Test

Most venture capitalists would laugh you out of the room if you showed up with a business plan on a piece of paper you just used to wipe the blueberry pancake stain off your mouth. So why do so many companies seem to take shape on the back of a napkin? Simplicity. Cranium’s Richard Tait once gave a presentation after writing seven points on the back of a business card. Charismatic communicators make their message easy to grasp. The most exciting messages are memorable, repeatable, and strikingly simple.

## INFECTIOUS ENTHUSIASM

When Tait returned to Seattle from his trip to the Hamptons, he pitched the idea to a Microsoft friend, Whit Alexander, now Cranium’s “Chief Noodler.” At the time, Alexander was less than eager to tell his parents that he had left the world’s most important technology company to create a board game that encouraged players to whistle the tune to

*Star Wars* or sculpt Medusa out of clay. But Tait's enthusiasm was hard to ignore.

Although Tait and Alexander had an abundance of enthusiasm, they were not satisfied. Cranium would take off only if they managed to persuade retailers to carry it. The two were off to a bad start—or so they thought—when they missed launching the game at the Toy Fair, a major show where retailers decide what toys to stock for the coming year. Tait and Alexander decided to drink away their woes. But instead of heading to a bar, they settled on the fine Seattle tradition of meeting at Starbucks. The decision they made over lattes that day would change their lives forever. Looking around, the two men realized that they were surrounded by the type of customers who would enjoy Cranium. “Let’s take our game to where our customers are instead of where games are traditionally sold,” they decided. That’s the magic of passion—doors appear that would otherwise go unnoticed.

The Cranium guys had such an abundance of enthusiasm, they would soon win over a key player in their success, Starbucks founder Howard Schultz. He liked the game but also appreciated the power of enthusiasm to infect employees and customers. Schultz is all about infectious enthusiasm, which is why he thinks employees should be treated exceptionally well: Happy employees are enthusiastic, and that translates into superior customer service. It’s a simple formula. The brains behind Cranium had won over a key distributor and one that would jump-start its rocket ride to success. Cranium became the first board game carried at Starbucks.

Fueled by the passion of its two partners, Cranium took off. Celebrities jumped on board. The company did not need to advertise when Hollywood biggies like Julia Roberts were raving about it on *Oprah*. Cranium sold 10,000 copies in its first holiday season. Today Cranium has sold more than 16 million copies of its games. In February 2007, the Toy Industry Association awarded Cranium its coveted Toy of the Year in the games category; it was the fifth time Cranium had won the

award. Cranium has expanded into spin-off games, books, and award-winning toys. Cranium's journey to cult-like status began with a trip, an aha moment, and an abundance of enthusiasm.

### **LEAVING A FOOTPRINT IN THE SAND**

Military leaders know that motivation is contagious. If one person is fired up, it rubs off on the next person and the next. Once everyone on the team shares the excitement, they all perform better together. The same is true of teams on the corporate battlefield. Richard Tait saw the delight in the eyes of his customers the moment he sketched the concept for Cranium on the back of a napkin. That is where it would have remained had it not been for Tait's willingness to share that excitement with anyone who would listen—beginning with his cofounder and expanding to partners, employees, and customers.

“What inspires you?” I asked Tait.

First and foremost, it's the letters from customers I read every night before I go to bed. [Tait reads more than one hundred customer stories a day.] That gives me the strength and the belief that tomorrow we have to bring more of these moments into people's lives. The woman who wrote me at 11:30 one night—she has four kids of her own and three foster children. Instead of kicking her feet up at the end of a long day and enjoying a glass of wine, she's writing to tell me about the sense of togetherness our games bring to her family, a family previously fragmented and separated by age, ethnicities, and backgrounds. This woman is writing at 11:30 at night to thank me for creating these products. When is the last time you wrote to a company, thanking them for creating a product? I don't know about you, but I've never done it in my life. One of our core values as a company is to delight our customers at every turn. Those moments of delight inspire me everyday.

**Fire Them Up!**

“How do you share that enthusiasm with your colleagues? How do you get them pumped up around the same ideals?” I asked.

We share stories from our customers avidly within company. They are posted around the environment. [Stories, letters, and photographs are even placed under countertops throughout the office space.] When I read a story, I’ll send it in an email and talk about it in our company meetings. You need to show the difference everyone makes in people’s lives. Our employees have the opportunity to make history. In today’s world, those opportunities are few and far between. They have a real chance to be a part of something special. They’ll be able to look back with their kids or grandkids and say, I was a part of that. In today’s world, people are looking for a footprint in the sand. If there is an opportunity to leave it as part of a team and organization that is doing good work, then it’s a powerful promise to the folks who work here.

Our world needs fewer managers and more Grand Poo Bahs. We all want to leave a footprint in the sand. You can inspire others to take those first steps.

**Cranium’s Secret Sauce**

***By Richard Tait, Cranium “Grand Poo Bah”***

- *Have a clear sense of mission.* Make it relevant, easy to understand, and something that people are passionate about and that they rally around.
- *Create a culture and celebrate it every day.* Identify what makes your culture and organization special. What are the principles and values that you want people to embrace? Create methods of celebrating and reinforcing that culture. Make it your own, make it special, and make it an environment that people are proud to be a part of.

## Ignite Your Enthusiasm

25

- *Don't be afraid to change the rules; in fact, encourage it and celebrate it.* The best way to win the game is to change how it is being played in a way that works to your advantage. Provide a culture and work environment that supports and celebrates those well-calculated risks.
- *Your customers are your sales force.* Our company's success has been built on word-of-mouth as a marketing vehicle. We must never forget that Craniacs are fueling our growth, and every interaction that they have with our company must result in a sense of delight and enthusiasm, a pride of association that encourages them to introduce and include their friends and family in our brand.
- *Be a company with a heart.* From the very beginning we wanted to be a company with a heart, one that our employees and customers would be proud of and one that would extend our brand purpose to lighten and enlighten people's lives, beyond the purchase of our products.
- *Lead by example.* I try to lead with speed, passion, and a sense of discovery. My personal mantra is that Orville Wright did not have a pilot's license. I hope that each and every Cranium employee feels a sense of freedom and empowerment to embrace these qualities and apply them to their own individual contributions, to feel that their ideas are listened to and supported and that they should champion them with enthusiasm, and to feel supported when trying new ways to solve problems or create opportunities.

Are you beginning to see a trend here? Both Mayer and Tait succeed in energizing their colleagues by sharing their enthusiasm in all their professional communications. Employees who work for the companies featured in this book do not see themselves as dispensable cogs

## Fire Them Up!

in a soulless corporation. Instead they see themselves as playing key roles on a dream team of sorts, a team bringing hope, light, and promise to those they touch. They are leaving a “footprint in the sand,” as Tait said—stories they will proudly tell future generations. Mayer and Tait are leaders in every sense—in title, spirit, and attitude. But remember, you do not need a leadership title to influence those around you. Just as I sat down to begin writing this book, I ran into one of the most inspiring women I had ever met. She does not “lead” a company, but her enthusiasm wins over the hearts of hundreds of employees and customers every week.

## Driving Enthusiasm

Krista Hawkins fires up hundreds of potential customers every week. She is not an executive, a manager, or a saleswoman. Hawkins is a tour guide—one of the most passionate, excited, and enthusiastic guides you have ever seen. Where would you expect to find someone like this? SeaWorld? Nope. Disneyland? Not quite. She lives two thousand miles from the Magic Kingdom, but Hawkins works her personal magic on everyone she meets. Hawkins gives tours of a car plant in Montgomery, Alabama. Not just any car plant: Hyundai Motors Manufacturing, one of the most technically advanced facilities in the world. In the heart of the American South, Korean-owned Hyundai turns out eleven hundred cars a day for the North American market. The majority of cars manufactured at the plant are the Santa Fe (an SUV) and the midsize Sonata, both of which are among Hyundai’s best-selling models, winning rave reviews for safety, quality, and value. Meanwhile, Hawkins is winning over a legion of customers: some three hundred people per week who tour the plant. Her enthusiasm turns visitors into customers and customers into evangelists.

**Ignite Your Enthusiasm**

27

I met Hawkins at a conference, where I spoke to Hyundai marketing and advertising executives about the need for each and every one of them to be passionate spokespeople for their brand. During lunch on the hotel terrace, I overheard Hawkins talk about her job with such passion and enthusiasm that I could not help but strike up a conversation. Hawkins was riveting, and I asked her to stand and say a few words during my lecture. Her enthusiasm spread immediately. When she was finished, everyone in the audience cheered, clapped, and smiled. “My point exactly!” I exclaimed. Everyone who works for a brand represents it to the outside world. Every interaction is an opportunity to put a face to the brand—a face that must be wildly enthusiastic, energized, and engaged if you hope to win over your listeners. (See Figure 1.2.)

“I never dread going to work,” Hawkins told me.<sup>3</sup>

I have a smile on my face every day. I find something as simple as a smile to be infectious. I greet everyone with a smile. If I can read the name on their shirt, I will greet them by name. If you’ve come off the line after working four hours, it’s great to be met with a smile and enthusiasm. It lifts your spirits. I started in Human Resources and interviewed for production line positions. I saw how Hyundai changed the lives of our team members and their families. I also see what the plant has done for the community and the state of Alabama. How can you not be happy? I’ve never had a bad day here.

Imagine working side by side with an employee like Hawkins every day. Her greeting alone would help you shake off the early morning alarm, the long train ride to work, or missing your first cup of coffee. Every company needs a Hawkins. But listen closely to what excites her. Hawkins sees her role as an opportunity to leave visitors with a positive impression of the brand and the men and women behind it.



**Figure 1.2** Passion sells cars at Hyundai’s state of the art plant in Montgomery, Alabama; “Thumbs Up!”  
Author unknown, 2005, photo courtesy of Hyundai Motor Manufacturing, Alabama.

She never uses the term “employees.” To Hawkins, everyone is a “team member.” Although she appreciates the quality of the cars, Hawkins is not excited about the leather seats, wood trim, or aluminum-alloy wheels. It is not the product that inspires her, but what the product has done for the lives of employees and customers.

Hawkins is especially pumped up about the role Hyundai plays in the lives of the men and women who assemble the cars. According to Hawkins, “Our team is a family. Despite the fact that this plant is the most technologically advanced in the world, teamwork plays a big part in the quality of a car. Everyone has to perform their task perfectly, and that requires communication with your teammates down the line. Everyone’s mind has to be in it one hundred percent.”

## ROBOTS DON'T HIGH-FIVE

I know it might seem odd to say this about a manufacturing plant, but the Hyundai tour is cool. More than 250 robots begin the process of stamping (cutting steel), welding, and painting. Robot arms suspend and manipulate the car's shell as the steel is turned 360 degrees and dunked eleven times into special baths to apply coatings and paints. Robots are exciting to watch, but the real thrill happens during the general assembly when cheerful, smiling, high-fiving teams of one thousand human beings install the parts of each vehicle, including the wiring, brakes, engines, tires, doors, seats, and glass. Conveying enthusiasm is a quality robots have not quite mastered.

“The tours give me the opportunity to share the story behind our quality,” says Hawkins. “The quality of our vehicles is directly related to the energy of our people. There’s a lot of positive energy in our plant. That energy is going to translate into quality because everyone is passionate about the roles they play in building your car.” Hawkins is convinced that the enthusiasm that rubs off on each and every team member has helped the company build cars that have leapfrogged their rivals in terms of quality, safety, and customer satisfaction. Hawkins does not start a tour with the purpose of selling cars. Her goal is to entertain and inform visitors about how teamwork creates quality. But given the number of hugs she gets from visitors—yes, hugs—she might very well be Hyundai’s best salesperson!

The three Es must permeate every level of an organization: Energy, Enthusiasm and Excitement. Although you may not be the face of a company on CNBC, when you communicate with potential customers, you are the sole experience they have with the brand at that moment. Whether you answer phones, make sales pitches, or give tours, the way you communicate speaks volumes about two brands:

## Fire Them Up!

the company's brand and your own. What is the customer's experience like? When you talk to customers or colleagues, do they leave that conversation inspired, energized, and enthusiastic or uninspired, disillusioned, and bored? That is up to you.

### The View from the Top

In *What It Takes to Be #1*, Vince Lombardi Jr., writes that his father—the football legend who led the Green Bay Packers to five championships—delivered his pep talks with a missionary zeal, intended to grab hearts and minds. “Embrace your passion,” Lombardi would say. “Jump into your passion with both feet and bring others along with you.” According to Lombardi Jr., his dad taught him this important lesson: “Passion and enthusiasm are the seeds of achievement. Enthusiasm is like an ocean tide. There’s a certain inevitability about it. Passion sweeps away obstacles. To motivate people, there must be a spark, some juice, desire, inspiration. It’s tough to be a leader if you can’t energize your people and tap into their emotional energy.”<sup>4</sup>

## Pump ‘Em Up the Jack Welch Way

“Leaders have always had to energize their people,” says former General Electric CEO Jack Welch.<sup>5</sup> In today’s fiercely competitive global economy, Welch believes that it’s more important than ever for leaders to inspire everyone around them if they hope to compete. “[Leaders] have to pump up their people to tackle unscaleable heights and make them understand why change is constantly necessary, passionately explaining what’s in it for the company—and employees,” writes Welch in *BusinessWeek*. “No company, large or small, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission and understand how to achieve it.”

## Ignite Your Enthusiasm

31

Whether your role is that of a CEO, manager, sales leader, or receptionist, the enthusiasm behind what you do will make all the difference in the ultimate success of your company and your career. According to Welch, it is common to find smart, capable people whose careers are stalled because they fail to win over their employees, investors, customers, and colleagues. Do not let your career sputter, stall, and die. Infuse your conversations and presentations with energy, enthusiasm, and excitement. Doing so will help you win over the hearts and minds of your listeners.

### The Secret Behind Trump's Success

Millions of people want to be like Donald Trump. They buy his books, watch his television shows, pay hundreds of dollars for a ticket to watch him speak, and even drink his water (yes, there really is Trump bottled water). They hope Trump will offer a nugget of information that they can spin into gold. But when you strip away the buildings, the mansions, the jets, the helicopters, and listen to him—I mean really *listen* to his message—Trump's secret to success is simple: Do what you love. On CNN's *Larry King Live*, a caller once asked Trump what made him a great negotiator—again, someone looking for that special something that will turn his fortunes around. Trump responded, "You have to love what you do and you should never, ever give up. But, if you don't love it, then you will give up easier. Love what you do."<sup>6</sup>

## The Lovable Star

Donald Trump once said, "Without passion you don't have energy. Without energy, you have nothing." By feeling inspired yourself, you will have boundless energy, enthusiasm and excitement—all of those

qualities that you make likable; and if people like you, they are more likely to buy into your vision and your values.

When given a chance to work for someone, who would you prefer—a person who knows a lot but who acts like a jackass, or someone who is both smart and *likable*? If you are reading this book, it is not much of a stretch to guess that you prefer the latter. Most people do. According to a Harvard Business School study, researchers concluded that “if someone is strongly disliked, it’s almost irrelevant whether or not she is competent; people won’t want to work for her anyway. By contrast, if someone is liked, his colleagues will seek out every little bit of competence he has to offer. And this tendency didn’t exist only in extreme cases; it was true across the board. Generally speaking, a little extra likeability goes a longer way than a little extra competence in making someone desirable to work with.”<sup>7</sup> This research is highly relevant to the topic of inspiration because if your listeners do not like you, it becomes that much tougher to establish an emotional connection with them. When we are in the presence of people we like, we are more likely to follow the vision they articulate.

I recall having a conversation with a highly successful mutual fund manager in New York. When I asked what he looks for in a company, he replied, “I invest in people I trust.” Yes, the business model needs to show promise, but this fund manager said if he doesn’t like someone, he will not invest in the company. Savvy investors don’t put their money in buildings, but in the people *behind* the buildings.

A heavy dose of likability is a key ingredient in the motivation recipe. The men and women featured in this book are likable on a personal level before they win over their listeners in a professional setting. Think about it: Do you connect with your employees, investors, customers, or colleagues on a deep level? Do they like you? Do they trust you? How you communicate your values makes all the difference; the road to becoming a master communicator begins with the passion, energy, and enthusiasm you bring to your story.

**Embrace Your Passion and Enthusiasm  
Will Follow**

When testing your own personal vision, first ask yourself: Does the vision tap into my voice, my energy, my unique talent? Does it give me a sense of “calling,” a cause worthy of my commitment?

—Stephen R. Covey, Author, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*<sup>8</sup>

“If you love something, you’ll be great at it, the money will come, and everything else will fall into place.

—Donny Deutsch, advertising mogul and host of CNBC’s *The Big Idea with Donny Deutsch*<sup>9</sup>

## THE BEAUTY IN A HAMBURGER BUN

Legendary business titan Ray Kroc, who created the McDonald’s franchise system, once said, “It requires a certain kind of mind to see beauty in a hamburger bun.” What do you see in the product or service your company provides or makes? Do you see its beauty, its ability to improve the lives of its customers and employees? The McDonald’s franchise thrived under the Kroc’s leadership; his enthusiasm rubbed off on the franchise owners. Owners became evangelists and spread the company gospel, fueling the brand’s growth.

Enthusiasm separates average performers from extraordinary leaders. Leaders who wow their listeners are excited and energized about the role they play in the company and the industry and in the lives of their customers. They are advocates for the brand. If Kroc could find the beauty in a hamburger bun, you can certainly find something exciting about your brand.

We all want to be surrounded by people who have an unbridled enthusiasm for life. The death of Australia’s Crocodile Hunter, Steve Irwin, touched millions of people around the world because his passion

**Fire Them Up!**

for what he did—for wildlife and conservation—was obvious in every interview and television show. His energy jumped off the screen. We love to be around passionate people. Their energy is contagious, and there is something magical about being in their presence. Business professionals, entrepreneurs, coaches, parents, teachers, and leaders in every walk of life have to be fired up about what they do in order to inspire the people around them.

Inspiring individuals like Marissa Mayer, Richard Tait, and Krista Hawkins succeed in creating a culture of innovation by lighting a fire in the hearts of their colleagues and employees—a desire to change the world not by the products they create, but by what the products do for their customers. “Rarely in life are you given the chance to fly, to feel the passion and pursuit of something special, a dream,” says Tait. What dreams do you have? How do you communicate those dreams? You have no limitations except those of your own imagination. Dream big, get fired up about those dreams, and watch as others want to come along for the ride!