Don’t you just love being around magnetic people? The kind who make you feel as if you could conquer the world? Ralph Weickel is one of those energizers. “I see the good in every person I meet,” he said. As the owner of Performance Management, he’s an executive and personal coach whose job is “to make my customers successful and not fix them.” For Weickel, it’s all about affirming people’s natural strengths, which works as a corollary too: When confronted with a problem, the first question to ask is, “Which one of my strengths am I not using?”

In addition to leading workshops on financial management, team performance, conflict resolution, and “Managing People, Not Tasks,” a typical project for Weickel is conducting a strategy planning session with a CEO and/or managers. They talk about what is working, and what the company’s strengths are. “When you get to a certain level,” he said, “your job is to make sure your employees have everything they need to be successful.” All businesses talk about customer service, “but it starts in your own backyard,” he said. “Treat your employees like your best customers.” People work for people, after all, and it’s important for senior management to be in touch with employees on a regular basis. “Consistency means you do it in a manner comfortable for you,” he said. It could be a weekly breakfast or lunch, or an afternoon chat. “I don’t care if it’s uncomfortable,” he added. “If this stuff was easy, there’d be tons of General Electrics or Ritz-Carltons out there. They didn’t get there by doing this once or twice.”

With a background in the financial service industry, Weickel started his own business in late 1998. A couple of years beforehand, he prepared with a daily prayer: “Let me learn something today I can use for my own business in the future.” The good times have been good, and even the financially lean times were good. “It’s all learning experiences,” he said. He gives a lot of credit to his wife, Judy, and their three children for the support to get him started and keep him going. Weickel keeps a list of positive affirmations by his computer, including the Third Step Prayer from AA and a set of spiritual, personal and professional goals. “If I do the next right thing, things are going to work out.”

Weickel contracts support work for his own company, such as bookkeeping and research. “I find people who have those strengths,” he said. “I have to trust and let go that they will do their best work.” This type of trust can be a big problem for most managers, and typifies fear-based management. “Fear-based is when you’re afraid to lose,” he explained. Or a tacit philosophy of “If I succeed, you
need to fail.” Love-based management, on the other hand, is knowing that when your employees are the best they can be, they’re a good reflection on the company and its leadership. Enlightened managers who practice this concept are the ones who trumpet their employees’ successes.

If the terms love-based and fear-based management don’t work for you, try personal power versus position power. “Personal power is affirming,” said Weickel. The theory works for any size company or department. “Small companies can cascade it quicker,” he said. “Large companies have more people to get on board and take longer.” An example of shifting from position power to personal power can be found in performance reviews. “In most performance evaluations, you’re told what you do well, but ‘fix these two things,’” said Weickel. “All the employee hears is ‘You’ve said I’m broken.’ A better evaluation process would be to ask, ‘What are you proud of? What are the areas you’ve excelled at? Anything you would have done differently? Are there skills you have that are not being utilized?’ And then affirm those things,” he said. “It’s not a ‘singing Kumbaya’ love-fest. It’s about making money.”

Whether we work for a huge corporation or me-myself-and-I, Weickel said keeping the honeymoon going is a process. “Constantly look ahead and challenge yourself,” he said. “Don’t rest on your laurels or stay in a comfort zone.” Keep the edge, lose the stress, and put work in perspective. “Except for brain surgeons, we’re not saving lives here,” he said. “We need to worry less about looking good and more about being good.”

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