

# Ripples of Energy

By Dawn Groves

**C**orporate leaders are guardians of company energy. They have the power to awaken creativity or suppress it, stimulate effort or dampen it, start production or stop it. Smart leaders understand this power and attempt to use it strategically.

Other employees also wield energy and influence. They may not have the same reach or authority as management, but everyone has an effect. In the same manner that a drop of water creates an expanding circle of waves in a pool, so does behaviour create expanding ripples of influence.

Energetic ripples and waves are initially generated by mind states. Thoughts and feelings translate into behaviour, behaviour conveys information and information produces waves of influence. Even simple activities such as walking to the coffee pot or catching the elevator can start the process. When the head is down, the brow is furrowed and steps are rushed, it conveys an entirely different message than when the eyes look forward and steps are relaxed or lively. People intuitively draw conclusions, reflecting the energy they see into new wave patterns of activity. "Wow, John seems tense. Oh no. I wonder if Sharon knows anything about it. I better call her right away."

## Good Advice

This doesn't mean that the act of walking through the office must be strategically analyzed. It does mean that we should be aware of the energetic affect our behaviour has, both on our personal productivity and on the people around us.

Awareness is a good adviser. It notices if the behaviour is positive, creative and respectful, or negative, wasteful and self centered. If Awareness recognizes that an unconstructive mind state (such as impatience) is habitual or dominant, it can help guide it into a more skillful, less damaging expression of behaviour.



Thoughts and feelings do more than create and affect behaviour. They also craft the lens through which we see and ultimately judge the world. If, for example, we're looking through a tinted lens of apathy, we'll most likely see and favor reasons to be apathetic.

Like the scientist who unconsciously skews research simply by what she believes to be true, so too do we filter an objective world through the subjective lens of our thoughts and feelings.

## Start at the Source

It's pretty simple when you get right down to it: a positive mind sees more possibilities and is more productive than a negative mind. But if mind states have such power, then why do we continue to indulge in crabby, unproductive dark moods and behaviour?

Because we're human. We have ups and downs. Bad things happen. Work gets overwhelming. There are plenty of good reasons to feel anxious. Biology sometimes exacerbates the problem.

Unfortunately, just because we have good reasons to be unhappy doesn't change the fact that our unhappiness has a ripple effect. Even worse, it



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often obscures solutions to very problems making us unhappy in the first place. So what can we do about it? The answer is that we must return to very heart of what makes us feel useful and happy: our core values.

## Core Values

Personal core values such as simplicity, excellence, or courage articulate what matters to us as individuals. In an ever-changing world, core values remain stable. They give our lives meaning, context, and direction. If we find ways to express them at work and in personal relationships, we're more secure and happy. Our energy is constructive and uplifting. If we live for someone else's core values or if we simply don't think about them at all, our energy can become harried, misdirected, or caustic.

The challenge is to identify our core values and then attempt to remember them. This way, we can enlist Awareness as a guide. We naturally gravitate toward productive actions that fuel valued behaviour and generate waves of positive energy. If we fall off the wagon, Awareness helps prevent us from overdoing judgment and self-hatred. We know we're pointed in the right direction most of the time. Steven Covey (*Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 2004) calls this direction *True North*.

## Dial It Up

If you already express core values at work, then it's time to dial it up a notch. Extend it further. Circles of energy are meant to be expand outward. Push yourself a little. Positive influence is worth the effort.

But there's a catch. Positive influence is only effective when it's natural. You don't want to smack of "do-gooder-ness." Nothing turns people off more quickly than overblown cheer. If you can't be positive then try hanging out in the Switzerland of mental states: neutrality. A quote running around the internet sums it up: "If you

can't be nice, be vague." Translation — be pleasantly neutral.

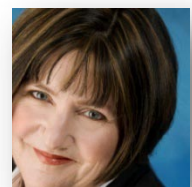
There are a variety of creative ways to shift energy. Consider one of the most transparent sources of energy, facial expression. Facial feedback studies tell us that facial expressions are more than a consequence of our feelings, they also generate them. A graduate of ME+GO (an energy management course I teach) took this to heart by employing the chopstick technique. She gripped a chopstick lengthwise between her teeth while driving to work. Studies show that the happy grimace accompanying this gesture helps restore or extend good humour (1988, Strack). At the very least, she generated positive ripples in neighbouring vehicles on the road.



Energetic waves can be big and showy such as offering congratulations or standing up for someone. They can also be quiet and simple such as a hand on the shoulder, a genuine smile, or holding the elevator door. No matter how they find expression in your world, they generate energy in a thousand wholesome ways that can't help but result in inspiration, imagination, and the holy grail of the working world, production. \*

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