Book Hundred Percenters

Challenge Your Employees to Give It Their All, and They'll Give You Even More

Mark Murphy
McGraw-Hill, 2009

Recommendation

Some business books are obvious, trite and unexceptional. You can learn more reading a soup can label. On first blush, Mark Murphy's book might seem just that ordinary, with its cover's exhortations to "challenge your employees to give it their all, and they'll give you even more." Warning: Do not roll your eyes. Murphy is a leadership expert and his thoroughly researched book is actually brimming with discernment and acute analysis. Using imaginative language that will hold your attention, he presents a multistep program for turning average achievers into exceptional performers, or, in his words, "Hundred Percenters." *BooksInShort* recommends Murphy's solid counsel. Read his book if you supervise people and want to motivate their best performance every day.

Take-Aways

- Most employees do not give 100% at work. To improve, they need leaders who both challenge them and connect with them: "100% Leaders."
- These leaders are more effective than the usual "avoiders, intimidators and appeasers."
- Most people fear challenges and prefer the status quo. This stasis is bad for business.
- Set "HARD" – "heartfelt, animated, required, difficult" – goals that push your people.
- When employees make mistakes, "invite them to partner, disarm yourself, eliminate blame, affirm their control, list correct feedback [and] synchronize your understanding."
- Never place blame. Don't use "weapons of communication," like anger and shouting.
- Identify people's "tugs," or motivators, and their "shoves," the demotivators that might shove them "out the door."
- Tell talented staffers with bad attitudes to fix their frame of mind or leave, even if they're great in every other way.
- To foster a culture of "Hundred Percenters," promote, praise and reward excellence.
- Don't wait until the situation is perfect for change. Choose a meaningful step – surveying employees, training leaders, setting new goals – and start now.

Summary

Should Leaders Inspire Fear or Love?

According to surveys of more than a half million working people and their leaders, 72% of employees acknowledge that they do not give 100% to their jobs. Day after day, they just get by. And 77% of the leaders surveyed know their employees aren't making a real effort. Clearly, "Hundred Percenters," that is, dedicated, diligent workers, are hard to find and nurture. To reach their potential, they need "100% Leaders" who connect with them and challenge them to be great.

> "If there's one hallmark of 100% Leaders, it's pragmatism...They find out exactly what their best people want, and if it's practical and possible, they make it happen."

Based on 360-degree assessments of approximately 17,000 managers and executives, ineffective leaders tend to be "avoiders," "intimidators" or "appeasers." Avoiders never connect with employees or challenge them to beat their limits. Intimidators challenge their employees but don't connect with them personally. Appeasers have no trouble connecting with employees, but they seldom challenge them. Hundred-percent leaders both challenge their employees and connect with them. Thus, the old question about whether good leaders are the ones their employees love or the ones employees fear is off the mark. Real leadership does not come from coddling

employees or relentlessly browbeating them. Instead, 100% leaders ask people they obviously care about to push beyond their limits. These leaders succeed in financial management, staff retention and "innovativeness."

Setting "HARD" Goals

Most employees are afraid to challenge themselves, and their leaders are just as scared to challenge them. Such fearfulness can undo companies. Wal-Mart breezed past Sears, which was stuck in the past. Kodak could not keep up with competitive challenges. The "Big Three" U.S. carmakers have embraced the status quo. Many employees are gripped by inertia. Doing something new is difficult, because it requires companies to leave their comfort zones. Few employees will make such changes by themselves. To be a 100% leader, you must challenge your people with ambitious goals that force them to stretch.

> "Disappointingly small minorities [of employees] are coming in every day saying, "Let's push the envelope, let's be great, let's do what nobody thought could be done."

Set HARD goals that are:

- **"Heartfelt"** – Money is a good motivator, but achieving something you believe in, something transcendent, is even better. Set goals that fit the "NOBLE" formula: "Name a party Other than ourselves who will Benefit from this goal Like customers or End users."
- **"Animated"** – Most corporate goals are dull. Make your goals inspiring by graphically, vividly describing the results. Avoid percentages, which don't excite anyone. Use absolute numbers. Dieters don't set out to drop 5% of their weight, but to lose 10 or 15 pounds. Numbers count; percentages do not.
- **"Required"** – Explain why attaining your challenging goals is necessary. Survey your employees to confirm that they agree that the goal you've set is crucial. If 70% say yes, you are in good shape; if fewer people concur, keep explaining and convincing.
- **"Difficult"** – As goals become tougher, performance goes up. When supervisors assign jobs that require staffers to stretch to their limits, the employees will eventually like their supervisors and their companies even more than they previously did. They'll feel more fulfilled and satisfied about who they are and what they do. Set goals that are challenging, but not absurd. Be specific and concrete. A goal is difficult if it makes people learn new skills and if it seems "scary." Believe it or not, slightly constraining resources can generate better results. People become too comfortable when they have everything they need to accomplish a job, and comfortable people don't push themselves.

The "IDEALS Script"

Your employees are not perfect. When they push themselves to reach tough goals, they'll make mistakes. As their leader, you must use "constructive feedback" to discuss their errors in a direct way, so they don't repeat the same mistakes. The IDEALS script enables you to explain how to avoid future mistakes while having a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental conversation. This helps employees take responsibility and hold themselves accountable, without provoking "denial, blame, excuses and anxiety."

> "The harder the goals you set, the better your employees will perform."

The acronym "IDEALS" stands for this statement about working with employees to address errors:

- **"Invite them to partner"** – Bring the problem up gracefully by asking the person involved, "Would you be willing to have a conversation with me about [whatever went wrong]?" Opening a dialogue demonstrates your willingness to listen, so the person also will listen to you.
- **"Disarm yourself"** – From the beginning of the conversation, convey the message that you will not use any "weapons of communication," such as anger, shouting, tantrums, and so on. Signal that your conversation will be reciprocal, not one-way.
- **"Eliminate blame"** – The employee probably already feels terrible about his or her mistake. Placing blame isn't helpful.
- **"Affirm their control"** – People become defensive if they feel they have no control over their situation. During your meeting, periodically ask, "Does that sound OK?" to show that you value the employee's thoughts and feelings. This also lets you check that you're getting through to the person in the way that you hope you are. If someone says, "No, that doesn't sound OK to me," you know you have to keep explaining.
- **"List correct feedback"** – Make sure that your constructive feedback is logical, sensible and understandable. Provide sufficient information to educate the employee about how to avoid the mistake in the future. To avoid micromanaging, follow this rule to identify constructive content: "If something is not optional and if you will hold the employees accountable if they don't do it, you must give clear and logical feedback."
- **"Synchronize your understanding"** – End the conversation by making this open-ended statement: "Tell me how you think we can work together to build on this and make things even more effective next time." This approach is much better than asking, "Do you understand my feedback?" This is not the time for a close-ended question that requires only a yes-or-no response. Such questions constitute a poor litmus test for ensuring that the employee fully understands what you have tried to communicate.

The Momentum of Motivation

Survey research indicates that employees learn more about their jobs, and about how their companies handle things, from their fellow workers than from their supervisors. This does not support your effort to convert "Fifty Percenters" to hundred percenters. Fifty percenters might not want to work as hard as they see hundred percenters working. Since 100% employees always give their full effort, everyone turns to them when extra work looms, like weekend and late-night projects. Fifty percenters see that the 100% people receive lots of extra work, so why would anyone want to become a 100% staffer who isn't already one?

> "Push employees to their full potential with 'tough love' leadership."

Change this perception by proving that being a 100% employee is worthwhile. Showcase your hundred percenters at every turn and spotlight them as company heroes. Provide positive and very public reinforcement when they do something productive and praiseworthy. Convey this message in all their performance appraisals. Signal that the 100% staffers will receive ample rewards.

The Downer of Demotivation

All employees require motivation, either external or internal, to work at the 100% level. Unfortunately, many leaders and organizations sometimes inadvertently demotivate employees, who then work at a level below what they are capable of achieving. Common wisdom to the contrary, money is not always the primary demotivating factor for employees. Any number of negative factors can discourage an employee: lack of opportunity for career advancement, inflexible hours, dull work projects, and the like.

> "Demanding more of ourselves and one another is scary in an era where 'happiology' is our planetary religion."

To find out what motivates and demotivates your employees, engage in a "shoves and tugs" conversation with them. Find out what their individual "shoves" are, that is, what elements of their work distress them and could tend over time to shove them "out the door." Then identify their "tugs," the characteristics of their work environment that tug at them to keep striving.

> "The iPod, the X-Box, the Amazon Kindle, Google, the Human Genome Project...were created by Hundred Percenters."

Hold informal, individual shove-and-tug conversations with your employees at least once a quarter. Ask specifically when they felt demotivated at work during the past "month or two," and why. Also ask about what motivated them. Once you have each person's input, do everything you can to get rid of the shoves and increase the tugs. This won't always be easy, but moving in this direction will help keep your hundred percenters working at their peak and will encourage your fifty percenters to climb to a higher level of performance.

The Attitude Adjustment

Some people are bright, imaginative, knowledgeable and resourceful, yet they will never be 100% employees because they have terrible attitudes. Despite their exceptional capabilities, these "Talented Terrors" bring down other team members. They make it tough for leaders to be effective; in fact, they can cost leaders their jobs.

> "Hundred Percenters get better results, feel more deeply fulfilled and are the key to every great corporate and cultural achievement."

Don't even try to adopt a therapeutic approach to mitigate talented terrors' bad attitudes. Even psychologists are reluctant to attempt restructuring people's personalities, so don't think that you're equipped to do that. Instead, speak to a talented terror about his or her bad attitude. Be calm, candid and specific. Explain that a change in attitude is necessary and that the result of not changing may be termination.

10 Lessons for Creating a 100% Culture

To spur all employees to become hundred percenters, follow these 10 steps:

1. **"Make every goal HARD"** – Nothing you can do to develop a 100% corporate culture is more important than giving everyone challenging goals.
2. **"Integrate HARD goals into performance management"** – If you don't, employees will not take their objectives seriously.
3. **"Measure whether you have a Hundred-Percenter culture"** – Use well-designed employee surveys to assess your culture. Bad surveys can have a destructive effect on morale. Do not use "five-point scales" that grade responses from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Within organizations, they provide skewed results. Instead, use "seven-point scale" surveys with response terms ranging from "never" to "always." This scale's broader parameters will record your employees' thoughts and feelings more accurately. Ask your people if they believe they are giving 100% daily, and if their supervisors are pushing them to achieve top performance.
4. **"Measure whether you have 100% Leaders"** – Are your executives 100% leaders or appeasers, intimidators and avoiders? Find out by conducting 360-degree leadership assessments. Share your findings with your leaders to give them the self-knowledge to improve if necessary.
5. **"Train your leaders to be 100% Leaders"** – Doctors, lawyers and engineers do not develop knowledge and skills intuitively. They undergo years of challenging education, followed by extensive systematic training. Why should your leaders be any different? Provide comprehensive training, continuing education and routine professional development.
6. **"Learn everyone's shoves and tugs"** – Get rid of the shoves. Track and record the tugs that work best. They are your greatest motivators for building a 100% culture.
7. **"Reach for higher states of accountability"** – Give all employees regular feedback. Most staffers receive feedback on their work only twice weekly, and some only twice monthly. Like professional athletes, who constantly hear from their coaches, employees need routine feedback so they can improve and grow.
8. **"Turn your Hundred Percenters into heroes"** – Showcase them at every turn, including at board meetings and executive team meetings (let them sit in). Display hundred percenters throughout your organization. Talk about them. Make them role models.
9. **"Improve or remove your Talented Terrors"** – They are a weight around your neck and everyone else's, including your hundred percenters'. If they can't change, fire them.
10. **"Start wherever you can"** – Don't wait until the situation is perfect for change. Become active right away. Choose an important activity – surveying employees, providing leadership training, setting new goals – and get right to work.

About the Author

Mark Murphy is founder and CEO of Leadership IQ, a consulting and training firm in Atlanta, Georgia. *Fortune*, *BusinessWeek*, *Forbes* and the *Washington Post* have written about his work.