

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

FIVE MINUTES TO GREAT MEETINGS: START WITH THE 'POWER LEAD'

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

Contributors: Michelle Gielan, Founder of the Institute for Applied Positive Research and bestselling author of *Broadcasting Happiness*.

THE GOAL:

Create and support a positive mindset that leads to greater productivity, performance, and satisfaction for your team by starting your meetings with a Power Lead.

NANO TOOL:

New research from the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience shows that small shifts in the way we communicate can create big ripple effects on business outcomes, including 31 percent higher productivity,¹ 25 percent greater performance ratings,² 37 percent higher sales,³ and 23 percent lower levels of stress.⁴ Using scientifically supported communication strategies to extend a positive mindset can increase happiness and success at work for others as well as for ourselves, instantly making us more effective leaders.

One of those strategies is the Power Lead, a positive, optimistic, inspiring beginning to a meeting, a conversation, or even an email. The Power Lead takes advantage of the documented effect of positive priming,⁵ which means if the first thing we're exposed to in a situation (in this case a meeting) is positive, it has a beneficial effect on our mindset and behavior. Focusing on something good at the beginning of a meeting sets the tone for the ensuing conversation, and research shows that how we begin a conversation is predictive of how well it turns out. Because the Power Lead also focuses the brain on growth-producing areas and encourages positivity in others, it helps teams and individuals accomplish tasks more quickly, find more creative solutions to problems, and recover from setbacks more quickly. Conversely, negative priming at the start of a meeting shuts people down and leads to poor performance.

Because the Power Lead is simple and can come from any person regardless of rank, everyone has power to positively impact the success of a meeting. The five action steps provide concrete suggestions for incorporating the Power Lead in your organization.



ACTION STEPS:

Experiment with the Power Lead for a week or two with your team. Even if the topics on the agenda are serious or challenging, start your meetings with any of the following five leads, and take note of their effect:

- 1. List Accomplishments.** Highlight one or two recent team or organizational accomplishments, no matter how small, and remind everyone that their achievements will fuel the goals they are about to turn their attention toward. Leading with accomplishments inspires people to do their best and to achieve even more.
- 2. Be Positive.** Choose a positive topic and spend the first five minutes discussing it. Topics could include sharing one thing a coworker did to help them or a small success that hasn't gotten the attention of the larger group — or even a recent win by the company softball team. The Air Force Research Laboratory⁶ found that people do better at their jobs when they have strong, positive leaders at the helm when challenges strike.
- 3. Highlight Resources.** Draw attention to available resources, which could include new hires or partnerships, existing strategic relationships, or even a new printer in the office — anything that helps make success more attainable.
- 4. Inspire Hope.** Anything that helps generate hope in a brighter future can serve as a Power Lead. Is the team close to hitting their sales target? Is there a possibility of a year-end bonus? Is the team on track to earn the free pizza on Friday? Big or small, hope generates energy and engagement and can set the tone for a productive meeting.
- 5. Be Thankful.** Mention something that you're grateful for and how it impacted you. Gratitude and the positive emotions it generates prime our brains for positivity and resilience.

HOW ORGANIZATIONS USE IT:

After company-wide positive psychology training (which resulted in revenue tripling),⁷ Nationwide Insurance COO Mark Pizzi began publicly sharing morning gratuities through the company's internal social media. He hopes his practice will inspire others to adopt a similar positive habit. "I have to work at it; I am no different than anyone else," Pizzi explains. "The boldness with which we act to rebuild people's lives, and our business results, ties in to how we think. We want to embed positivity into Nationwide's DNA."

A quality control leader at a large technology company used to start his morning meetings by focusing on the number and severity of "fires they needed to put out," often in an anxious and frustrated tone. After learning about Power Leads, he shifted his approach. He started each meeting by mentioning three things he was grateful for: one in general, one about the team, and one about someone on the team. Despite the extra time this took, he found that he could still cover all the issues that needed to be addressed, and surprisingly, his spark of positivity changed the spirit of the team. The average time it took to resolve open items dropped substantially — resulting in a large jump in productivity. Power Leads are now a regular practice in all his meetings.

The executive team at Hugo Boss starts each morning meeting with five minutes of positivity. Managers choose the topic, and everyone is encouraged to review his or her workday and come up with something positive to share. As one manager said, "It's something that takes no more than five minutes but can make an eight-hour difference."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Broadcasting Happiness: The Science of Igniting and Sustaining Positive Change*, Michelle Gielan (BenBella Books, 2015). Offers specific communication techniques based on new research from positive psychology and neuroscience that can improve business, educational, and personal outcomes.
- “Shawn Achor: What You Need To Do Before Experiencing Happiness,” Dan Schawbel, Forbes Entrepreneurs Blog, September 10, 2013. Describes the effects of too much and/or negative internal and external communication, or “noise.” Research and findings included in a [Nano Tool](#).
- [“Meetings: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.”](#) *Knowledge@Wharton*, Sept. 16, 2015. Includes research and insights by Wharton on the benefits of meetings, and how leaders can insure that they are productive and well-attended.

CITED IN THIS NANO TOOL:

1. “Increase Your Team’s Productivity — It’s FRE(E),” Margaret Greenberg and Senia Maymin, *Positive Psychology News Daily*, October 4, 2008.
2. “Happy Employees Are Critical for an Organization’s Success, Study Shows,” Kansas State University, *ScienceDaily*, February 4, 2009.
3. *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. M. E. Seligman. New York: Vintage, 2011.
4. “Rethinking Stress: The Role of Mindsets in Determining the Stress Response,” A. J. Crum, P. Salovey, and S Achor, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 104, No. 4 (2013): 716.
5. “The Interpersonal Communication Motives Model,” E. E. Graham, C. A. Barbato, and E. M. Perse, *Communication Quarterly* 41, No. 2 (1993): 172–86.
6. “The Effects of Leadership Style on Stress Outcomes” J. B. Lyons and T. R. Schneider, *Leadership Quarterly* 20, No. 5 (2009): 737–48.
7. See *Broadcasting Happiness*, page 26.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton’s Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.