

# LEADING TRENDS

## Energy Transformation



**NOTE:** This January 2024 Leading Trends once again contains the annual New Year's missive from Jim Laing, a leadership consultant and colleague of ours in the United Kingdom. Jim's brief bio follows the text. We enjoy his message every year and think our readers will find this one especially helpful as we begin 2024. Included here with permission.

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We took the plunge a few months ago and had solar panels fitted on the roof of our house. Quite ambitious, as the sun isn't always

shining in East Yorkshire. Whilst there isn't much energy being produced at this time of year, we certainly benefitted from lovely green power during the summer months and are looking forward to the sun getting a bit higher in the sky soon!

As well as the roof panels, it is also necessary to have the box, seen above, fitted. It's called an inverter. If you know your technicals, you will appreciate that this is a

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nifty bit of kit that transforms the DC current generated by the solar panels to the AC current needed to power all the lights and electrical equipment in the house. Apparently, it does other things, too, but I haven't quite got my head around them yet so we will stick with the 'transforming' bit for now. If you look closely at the picture, you will notice that the manufacturer's name is GivEnergy (I know, the missing 'e' annoys me too).

When facing 2024, I'm sure leaders will have to give a huge amount of effort towards transforming any negative energy in the team into a positive force that can keep things running as smoothly as possible.

You may have heard of the sad death of Sir Tim Brighouse recently, especially if your leadership role is in the education sector. He was an amazing educationalist who once told the Guardian newspaper about the need for leaders to be "making a climate in which teachers and support staff feel honoured, valued and respected" as it did "wonders for morale."

I was once fortunate to meet Prof Brighouse at a conference where he spoke about his recent visits to educational establishments in Birmingham, UK. He told me he had identified two types of staff: 'Energy Creators' and 'Energy Sappers.' The two descriptions speak for themselves. Think, for a moment, about the people in the team that you lead. Who are the positive characters who seem to create energy and don't let difficulties get in the way of what needs to be done? Who are the people who are always finding fault? They sap\* the energy out of others and even themselves. I have often spoken about the disease of cynicism within an organisation, and Tim Brighouse was able to spot its negative influence much quicker than many other people.

This is why leadership in any organisation can be hard. You may not think of yourself as an 'inverter,' but that is what you need to be. One of your many roles is transforming any negative energy you identify into a more positive climate that will help everyone achieve beneficial outcomes.

How do you do this? How do you ensure positive energy runs through your team?

I've got just five simple suggestions, but you can probably come up with better ones.

1. Have a quiet think, and maybe a confidential chat with a trusted senior member of your team, and try to identify who the energy creators, energy sappers and neutrals are. Neutrals are those lovely folk who just get on with their job and keep their heads down when sparks are flying elsewhere!
2. Use the next few weeks to talk to the energy sappers about how they see things going for the team and the organisation in 2024. Discuss their fears and worries and re-assure them wherever you can. Talk to the neutrals and energy creators too, if you can find the time!
3. Consider introducing a 'buddy' or 'mentoring' system if you haven't already got one and your team is big enough. Try to ensure that any energy sappers you have identified are matched with an energy creator if you can or a neutral if you can't. It doesn't have to be a permanent fixture. You could introduce it for say, six months, perhaps 'just to find out more about each other's jobs'. It doesn't need to be hierarchical and certainly not formal. Perhaps just a one-hour meeting each month. It can also be seen as a way of supporting the wellbeing of staff. The Skills for Care organisation has a very straightforward two page guide to buddying and mentoring [here](#).
4. Remember also that it is ok for everyone to have doubts. Having doubts is not necessarily a source of negative energy. Healthy scepticism can be very powerful if channelled in the right direction. Adoni Iraola, the new young manager of Bournemouth F.C., was recently asked if he had any doubts about his team management. His reply is worth noting: "A lot of times. I always say that intelligent people have doubts, otherwise you don't make questions to yourself."
5. You could do worse than look back at my 2023 leadership message ([Bridges or Barriers](#)) and think again about your future communications with your team members. Before you write or speak, ask yourself, "Am I about to build a bridge or a barrier with this person / these people?" Choose your words carefully, as it will be the bridges that allow positive energy to flow around the team. Realistic optimism is the most positive energy you can provide.

Finally, you might have noticed that the picture of the inverter also has the word "Danger!" stuck on the front. Trying to give out positive energy all the time can be

very exhausting and possibly lead to burnout. Take care of yourself in 2024, and always be aware of your life/work balance (Yes, 'life' should come first!).

\* undermine, make insecure by removing foundations, destroy insidiously.

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Jim is a former headteacher and later the chief education adviser for a large local authority in the UK. He set up Ridgeway Associates more than twenty years ago and as a leadership coach, mentor, trainer and mediator he has supported the development of leadership and learning in schools all over the world. He has also worked with the leadership teams of several commercial organisations and national charities. Now retired, he spends time writing about leadership including an annual leadership message on every New Year.

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