



THE
Positive Business
MANIFESTO

JON GORDON

Youwould have to live on another planet not to notice the plethora of business books and articles discussing the importance of developing a positive organizational culture at work. The research is clear. Positive leaders, positive work environments, and positive engaged employees produce positive results.

However, if building a positive business is so important and beneficial, then we are left to wonder, “Why aren’t more companies, more positive?” Why are there not more people skipping through the halls, smiling at their co-workers and loving their job? Why do more people die Monday morning at 9am than any other time? Why does negativity cost companies 300 billion dollars and sabotage teamwork, careers, morale and performance?

The answer is simple; you don’t build a positive business by osmosis and it clearly doesn’t happen by sitting around, holding hands and singing Kumbaya. Successful, positive companies with positive employees and positive cultures are created like anything else—through a set of principles, processes, systems and habits that are ingrained in the corporate culture and each individual employee. Positive companies aren’t born. They are developed by positive leaders. And when you build a positive business, **culture drives behavior and behavior drives habits.**

POSITIVE LEADERS ARE REQUIRED

In my work with businesses, schools, churches and professional sports teams I have found that in order to build a positive culture the leader must drive the bus. They must make their organizational culture a priority, lead the initiative and be engaged in the process. If the leader is not driving the bus, positive change won't happen. But when the CEO, school principal, head football coach, or team leader decides it's necessary to build a positive culture and they commit to the process, *then* amazing things result. An example of this is Coach Mike Smith, the head football coach of the Atlanta Falcons. Last season before Coach Smith's arrival the Falcons team culture was in shambles and the organization was filled with negativity. Mike was hired to turn things around, and to do this, he knew he needed to change the culture. As part of this process, Coach Smith gave a copy of *The Energy Bus* to every player and coach and he also brought me in to speak to the team to reinforce the positive message found in the book. Coach Smith also engaged in a number of initiatives to build trust, improve communication, weed out negativity and build a winning team. He was and is actively involved in every aspect of the process, and if you asked him he would tell you it's his #1 priority. Within 6 months, Coach Smith has completely changed the culture, mindset and actions of his team. He drove the bus and led the way.

BUILD A POSITIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Once the leader is committed to the process of building a positive business, it is essential to then build a positive leadership team that shares this commitment, focus and purpose. I have met too many leaders who have tried to create a positive organizational culture by themselves. I've also worked with too many organizations where I have been brought to speak and, 2 minutes after my talk, employees will come up to me and say, "this all makes so much sense, but the leaders who need to hear this are not here and they are part of the problem." The employees are right. To build a positive organization fueled by positive energy, the leader must invite his/her leadership team on the bus and develop a shared vision, focus, purpose and direction for the business. The leadership team must join the leader in making their organizational culture a top priority and be engaged and committed to the process. After all, positive energy trickles up and sideways through an organization but it flows powerfully from the top down: from leaders, to managers, to employees to customers. To get the leadership team on the bus I often recommend a two day offsite where the team is taken through a process that generates a powerful vision, road map, action plan and set of initiatives to move the organization in the right direction.

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DEVELOP A FLEET OF BUS DRIVERS

Leadership is not just about what you do, but also what you can inspire, encourage and empower others to do. To build a positive business, it's not enough to just be a bus driver yourself. You must also develop a fleet of bus drivers in your organization. This involves a process where a united leadership team shares the company's vision with their managers and employees, invites them on the bus and then encourages and empowers them to drive their own bus. The leadership team explains that it's their job to create a positive environment where managers and employees can perform at their highest level and it's each employee's job to stay positive and utilize their gifts and strengths to contribute to the goals and vision of the organization. Individual conversations should also take place between leaders and managers, and managers and their employees. Each person needs to understand the organization's vision and identify how their personal vision, job and effort contribute to the overall vision. When this happens, instead of one bus with one driver, you now have a fleet of bus drivers all moving in the same direction. This generates a tremendous amount of power and momentum in the organization.

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PRACTICE THE SECRET TO WINNING

In a world driven by stock price and short term results, building a positive, successful company requires leaders to have a long term vision and an understanding that too many of their counterparts focus on the outcome rather than the process. They focus on what is urgent rather than what matters. They focus on the fruit of the tree—stock price, profits, costs, etc. and ignore the root—the culture, trust, people and positive energy of the company. Leaders who run successful, positive companies over a long period of time know that when you take care of the root of the tree you will always be pleased with the fruit it supplies. However, if you ignore the root, eventually the tree will dry up and so will the fruit. Of course you have to measure outcomes. You have to measure results. But you do so with the knowledge that the outcome is simply a by-product of your culture, teamwork, vision, talent, innovation, execution and commitment to your people and process. You know that it's not the numbers that drive the people but the people that drive the numbers. A great example of this is John Wooden, the legendary UCLA basketball coach. He never focused on winning. He focused on the culture of his team, the character of his players, winning teamwork, fundamentals and daily improvement. As a result he won a lot.

WEED OUT NEGATIVITY

It's the biggest problem in business today and the biggest obstacle to creating a positive business. Yet, it's like the elephant in the room. Everyone sees it but they ignore it—allowing negativity to ruin far too many careers, teams and organizations. Not anymore. To build a positive winning culture, you must deal with the cost of negativity head on. At work you'll likely face organizational and individual negativity. You'll have to deal with processes and systems that create poor communication and negative interactions. In other cases negativity will arise from negative co-workers and customers, a group of office complainers and/or a boss who is a jerk. That's why I encourage every individual and organization to *ask* and *answer* the following question:

How are we going to deal with negativity, challenges and energy vampires (negative people)?

Dwight Cooper, the CEO of PPR, a nurse staffing company that was voted one of the best places to work by SHRM, asked himself this question about negativity and his answer was a company policy he called *The No Complaining Rule*. Cooper decided to deal with the subtle negativity that acts like a cancer in an organization. The rule states that “Employees are not allowed to mindlessly complain to their co-workers. If they have a complaint they can take it to a manager or someone who can do something about the problem, BUT they must also offer one or two possible solutions.” The intention is to eliminate mindless complaining which leads to a toxic work environment and encourage justified complaints that lead to new ideas, innovation and success.

Cooper is not alone in the fight to cultivate a positive culture and weed out negativity. Colorado Permanente Medical Group chose to deal with negativity by letting go of 10-20 negative doctors each year, increasing morale and profits in the process. Turns out the negative doctors were creating a poor work environment and scaring away patients.² First Transit dealt with the low morale and

negativity of its bus drivers by initiating a positive reinforcement process that required managers to praise drivers for their positive behaviors and positive actions. The result was less absenteeism, enhanced morale and profits.

To build a positive winning culture, you must deal with the cost of negativity head on.

Regardless of your situation or the source of negativity, it is critical that you take action to cultivate the positive and weed out the negative. Like a garden, you'll have to get rid of weeds from time to time and let go of your negative people, but the best way to deal with the weeds is to create a positive environment where the good grass grows healthy and strong eventually to the point where the weeds have no where to grow. In this spirit you'll want to ingrain positive energy into your systems, process and culture and eliminate negative energy wherever you find it. From hiring practices to recognition programs to communication processes, you'll want to identify the people and the gaps in your processes that are contributing to negativity. You will want to address these gaps and incorporate positive strategies and best practices that are proven to hire, develop and fuel positive, engaged people and teams.

GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON THE BUS AND THE WRONG PEOPLE OFF THE BUS

Building a positive business always begins with selecting the right people. In the classic book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says to build a successful organization and team, you must get the right people on the bus. His research shows that great companies and organizations do this. They get the right people and put them in the right seats. However, a bigger question that is not in his book is “Who are the right people?” After all, in order to get the right people on the bus you must identify who the right people are, right? The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company asked this very question and have saved millions of dollars and become a leader in their industry by identifying the key characteristics, strengths and traits of each job/position at the hotel, and then creating a benchmark that every potential employee is measured against. Utilizing a company called *Talent Plus*, they interview each potential employee and identify how they measure up to the benchmark of the position they are applying for. As a result, they are better able to identify who the right people are for each job at the hotel. It’s not enough to say that we need to get the right people on the bus. We must identify who the right people are, make sure they are positive, and create a process that gets them on the bus.

We must also make sure we let the wrong people off the bus. Too many leaders know who their negative employees are but they don’t know what to do with them, and so they do nothing, which leads to dangerous consequences. Like a cancer, one energy vampire can spread negativity throughout a team and organization. While you should give them every chance to get on the energy bus and contribute to your positive culture, if they don’t make the necessary changes, then at some point you’ll have to let them off the bus. Post a sign that says “No energy vampires allowed” and eliminate anyone that sucks the energy and life out of your organization. It may not sound positive, but it’s essential to create a positive culture.

FILL THE VOID

With the right people on your bus, you want to make sure you communicate consistently and effectively with them so they always know where the bus is going. Peter Drucker says that 60% of management problems are the result of faulty communication. This is because where there is a void or gap in communication, negative energy will always fill it. When people feel fearful or uncertain or unheard they start thinking the worse and act accordingly. And as negative energy fills more voids and grows in these gaps, the positive energy can't flow through the organization. By designing systems that enhance communication, you eliminate the gaps and allow positive energy to flow through the business. Companies such as PPR address these gaps by hosting company wide, Monday morning 8:31 meetings. The meeting lasts 10 minutes and everyone in the company is briefed on everything each department will be working on that week. Consider it a company's version of the football huddle. Google creates wide open work spaces and meeting rooms that foster better communication and idea collaboration. Southwest airlines communicates in many ways to their employees via daily intranet updates, newsletter, conference calls, and town hall meetings. And think of Ken Blanchard, who is not only a leadership guru for many other companies, but his own as well. Ken's title is Chief Spiritual Officer and each day he holds an all employee call where he shares an inspirational message. Employees not only want to be seen and heard but also desire to hear, see and be part of the team. Daily and weekly meetings allow businesses to communicate with their employees, share their vision and values, celebrate successes, recognize individuals for their accomplishments and infuse their associates with team spirit—and this makes all the difference.

LOVE YOUR PASSENGERS

It's a simple fact. When you care about your employees and the people you work with, they are more likely to stay on the bus and work harder, with more loyalty and greater positive energy. In turn, they are more likely to share their positive energy with your customers, enhancing service and the bottom line. That's why I say the greatest customer service strategy has nothing to do with customer service, but rather it has everything to do with how you treat your employees. If you treat them well, they will treat the customer well.

Just the other day I was speaking at a hospital and was told that they were doing patient satisfaction surveys as a way to improve nurse performance. "What about nurse satisfaction surveys," I asked. "No we're not doing that," they said. The problem was clear. Measuring patient satisfaction will not make nurses more energized, positive and attentive. Patient satisfaction will go up when nurse satisfaction goes up. I have found that that organizations who deliver the best service also have the best culture where employees are valued, listened to and cared for and, in turn, these employees value, care for and serve their customers. Great service begins with a positive culture where employees are engaged and energized at work and enjoy sharing positive, contagious energy with their customers.

Best Buy, for example, utilizing a twelve question survey from the Gallup organization started to measure the engagement of their employees and in the process saw service and profits improve. T-Mobile dramatically improved and transformed their customer service when they improved the culture in their call centers by listening to their employees. And Woodloch Pines, a family owned resort in Pennsylvania, wins awards every year because they treat their employees like family who then treat their guests like family.

So how do we love our employees when hugs are not an acceptable business practice?
The ways are endless and practical, and here are a few to get started.

✦ **Treat them like a person, not a number.**

The number one question every employee in every organization is asking is “Do you care about me and can I trust you”. Employees want to know if you care about them. If you do, they will be more likely to stay on the bus and work with you. If you think talking about love and business in the same sentence is corny, consider that one of the questions in Gallup’s engagement survey is “Does your manager care about you.” Employees are more engaged at work when their manager cares about them.

✦ **Develop a relationship with them.**

Andy Stanley said “Rules without relationship lead to rebellion.” Far too many managers and leaders share rules with their people but they don’t have a relationship with them. So what happens? The people rebel and disengage from their jobs and the mission of the team. I have had many managers approach me and tell me that I helped them realize they needed to focus less on rules and invest more in their relationships at work. The result was a dramatic increase in team performance and productivity. To develop a relationship with your employees, you need to listen to them, make time for them, recognize them, invest in them and mentor them. And, when relationships are created, they stay—because they have invested in others and others have invested in them.

✦ **Appreciate them.**

The main reason why people leave their jobs is because they don’t feel appreciated. When you love your passengers, you thank them and appreciate them for the work they do. For example, Doug Conant, the CEO of Campbell Soup, has written over 16,000 thank you notes to employees over the last 7 years and created a very positive business in the process.

DRIVE WITH A BIGGER PURPOSE

Loving your passengers keeps your people on the bus, but when you drive with purpose they will help you push it when the bus breaks down. The fact is every organization will face adversity and challenges and be tested on their journey. And the answer to these tests is a positive culture filled with purpose driven people.

The research shows that people and organizations are most energized when they are focused on a bigger purpose beyond themselves. Howard Shultz, founder of Starbucks, for instance, told his people from the beginning that we are not in the coffee business serving people, but in the people business serving coffee. He inspired his employees with a sense of purpose to make a difference.

Unfortunately, there are far too many people in the business world who are hopeless and purposeless. This is fueled by the glaring misconception that, in order to live a life of purpose, we have to leave our jobs and go solve world hunger, or feed the homeless or move to Africa or start a charity. While these are all noble causes and there are people called to do this, for many of us our bigger purpose can be found in the here and now, in the jobs we have, right under our noses. And when we find and live this purpose at work, it will provide the ultimate fuel for a meaningful and successful life and career.

I recently spoke at a conference to a large number of bus drivers. Ironically, when the conference organizers booked me to speak they didn't even know I had written a new book, *The Energy Bus*, a story about a bus driver named Joy who changes the life of a marketing manager who rides on her bus. After my talk I met a gentleman who told me that he was a pastor of a small local church. He said he originally started driving a school bus for the insurance benefits. But after a few years of driving a bus, it occurred to him that he was having a bigger impact on people as a bus driver than as a pastor at his church. Wow.

The truth is we don't have to go on a mission trip to be on a mission. Every day we can live our mission at work. I heard of a janitor who worked at NASA and felt his bigger purpose was to put a man on the moon. I met a hairstylist who saves lives. I met an administrative assistant who has become the Chief Energy Officer of her company. I heard of a grocery store bagger who inspires his customers with positive notes in their bags. I know a Popeye's Chicken employee named Edith in the Atlanta Airport who makes millions of air travelers smile.

Ordinary people, doing ordinary jobs with an extra-ordinary purpose.

In any job, our purpose waits for us to find it and live. It's not the job we have but the energy and purpose we bring to it that matters.

I can't tell you what your bigger purpose should be for your organization or your career. But I can tell you that every leader needs to identify a bigger purpose for their organization, and every employee must tap into this purpose. I can tell you that we can find the excitement in the mundane and the extraordinary in the ordinary. I can tell you that every business and every job matters, regardless of how glorious or boring it may seem. Purpose is the ultimate fuel that energizes your culture, keeps your people focused and perpetually moves your bus towards a destination called success.

To identify your organization's purpose and to fuel your organization and people with it, I suggest a two day offsite where your leadership team can roll up their sleeves and clarify the vision and purpose for the organization.

ZOOM FOCUS

I've shared a number of principles, strategies and suggestions to develop a positive business. However, I am realistically aware that none of this will do any good unless you and your organization have the ability to take action and execute. As Einstein said, "Vision without execution is hallucination." The difference between a successful positive business and unsuccessful business is one word: "Execution."

You must engage in a process I call Zoom Focus, where you focus on what truly matters and tune out all the distractions that drain organization and individual energy. I have studied a lot of leaders and companies, and what I have found is that there really aren't any secrets out there. There is no magic pill or genie that makes one company better than another. Rather, the most successful businesses do ordinary things better than everyone else. They do ordinary things with extraordinary consistency, comment, focus and positive energy.

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To build a positive business, you must be able to not only identify your vision and purpose for your organization, but make it so it is ingrained in the culture, mindset and actions of your people. Encouraging your employees and team to read positive books and attend workshops is one thing, but translating knowledge into action and habits is another. Having the desire to be a positive

business is wonderful, but it won't happen unless you relentlessly focus on your culture, people, processes and systems.

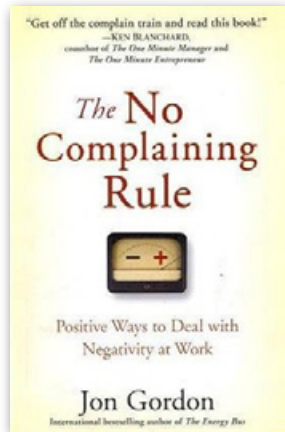
As part of this process, I encourage you to utilize my books *The Energy Bus* and *The No Complaining Rule* as a roadmap to build your positive culture and as a tool to empower your managers and employees to take positive action. In addition to books, we provide consulting, executive workshops and employee programs that help you build a positive business, develop a fleet of bus drivers and transform vision and purpose into action and results.

I wish you all green lights on your journey. Stay Positive,

Jon Gordon

Notes

1. Gallup Organization
2. Business 2.0, May, 2007, article by Jeffery Pfeffer



BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Jon Gordon's [*The No Complaining Rule*](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jon Gordon is a speaker, consultant and author of the international best seller [The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel your Life, Work and Team with Positive Energy](#) and [The No Complaining Rule: Positive Ways to deal with Negativity at Work](#). Jon and his books have been featured on CNN, NBC's *Today Show*, and in *Forbes*, *Fast Company*, *O Magazine*, the *US News & World Report*, *Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. Clients such as The Jacksonville Jaguars, PGA Tour, Northwestern Mutual, Publix Super Markets, Denver Public Schools, and Campbell Soup also call on Jon to get their team "on the bus" and moving in the right direction. Sign up for Jon's free weekly positive tip newsletter at www.JonGordon.com

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