

Positive Psychology: How to 'Be Like Mike' in the Workplace

“I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. 26 times I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” – Michael Jordan

“Every strike brings me closer to the next home run.” – Babe Ruth

“Inside of a ring or out, ain’t nothing wrong with going down. It’s staying down that’s wrong.” – Muhammad Ali

These quotes from great athletes perfectly portray positive psychology characteristics that help generate the motivational propensity to achieve goals and succeed. For example, these quotes demonstrate: *self-efficacy* or the confidence these athletes had in themselves and their capabilities when others doubted their abilities; they portray *optimism* when it would have been just as easy to respond negatively and give up; they express personal *hope* that is contagious to those surrounding the athletes; and lastly, they exhibit how *resilience* can help overcome defeat to succeed.

You may be asking yourself, what do I have in common with elite athletes and what connection does this even have with the workplace? The answer: The positive psychology characteristics visibly demonstrated by elite athletes are not unique to athletes, rather they can be developed by the “average Joe or Jane” and employed to meet the ever-increasing demands of today’s workplace. The workplace today is (a) highly competitive due to globalization; (b) complicated, with four generations working side-by-side; and, (c) constantly “on” thanks to technology creating a 24/7 working environment. As such, it is not surprising that job stress is a major source of stress reported by adults. Moreover, 80% of workers experience stress on the job, and nearly half say they need help in learning how to manage stress (American Institute of Stress). Research has shown that positive characteristics such as self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience can serve as a personal resource that individuals can use to combat stress and improve daily functioning (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007).

In order to develop employee positive psychology characteristics, managers may consider offering a series of trainings. Such trainings should target individual characteristics (e.g., resilience), providing practical tips to individuals and incorporating a plan for continued personal development past the conclusion of the training (i.e., an action plan). If the

implementation of positive psychology training(s) is not feasible, managers can incorporate positive psychology into their regular employee feedback meetings. For example, a manager within a sales department may suggest to an employee that he/she target their self-efficacy and positive optimism through the practice of practicing visualization techniques to ultimately increase their sales percentage.

In conclusion, whether it be a company-wide culture shift to incorporate positive psychology or it be a lone manager guiding his/her direct report, the opportunities for applying positive psychology to the workplace are limitless. And luckily, the great athletes of today and yesterday provide tangible examples and serve as a constant reminder of how such characteristics are the key to success.

References & Suggestions for Further Reading

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