

## Want to Get People to be Their Best? Here's How

At one time or another, most of us have been motivated to do our best by a special person who pointed the way. It could have been a teacher or a boss, maybe even a parent or friend.

We all have the ability to motivate others to be their best. It is just a matter of following several key principles:

- **Expect the best.** If you believe the people you lead are capable of great things, their performance will generally follow suit. That is because they apply your expectations to what they do.

- **Study other people's needs.**

### Don't Dream About It—Do It

At some point in our lives, nearly all of us yearn for a second chance to do that one thing we always dreamed about but never got around to trying. While most of us hold back from taking the plunge—usually fearing failure—plenty of others have shown it is worth the risk.

So, if you are harboring a secret desire to start a business, race cars, become a doctor or lawyer, maybe these six pointers can help.

1. **Take your dreams seriously.** As a child Charlie Barsotti always wanted to be a cartoonist. Instead he joined the staff at a school for disturbed children and made cartooning a hobby. The school president took Charlie's drawings more seriously and loaned him plane fare so he could travel to New York to show his cartoons to magazine editors. That trip changed Charlie's life. Today, his cartoons appear in such publications as USA Today and The New Yorker.

2. **Never say it's too late.** It is easy to pass on your dreams, believing you are too old. Not Al Comley. He waited 30 years to pursue his dream of becoming a salesman. At age 53, he retired early from his job to become an insurance agent. Now 70, he works for Fuller Brush and has a territory of 300 customers.

"Stereotypes are breaking down," says Bernice Neugarten, professor of education and sociology at Northwestern University and a noted expert on aging. "Thirty years ago people were expected to do certain things at certain times. Today, life cycles are much more fluid and we're more open to change at any age."

3. **Conquer your mountain in stages.** John Naber dreamed about competing in the 1976 Olympics—but in 1972 he recognized that he would have to lower his swimming time by four seconds in four years to make the team. At first the task seemed impossible, but then he figured that if he trained 10 months out of every year, he would need to trim only a tenth of a second per month to shave off those four seconds. That is just what he did.

Steven Danish, chairman of the psychology department of Virginia Commonwealth University, says, "By breaking a goal into achievable parts you enhance your immediate benefits in terms of short-term gains, and you reduce the price you pay in effort."

4. **Recognize the trade-offs.** In opting for that second chance, there are trade-offs that must be faced—like earning less money but being happier at what you do. If you prepare for both the short- and long-term consequences of any decision, you can help avoid failure.

5. **Be willing to change.** Lots of people complain about their jobs, their marriages, sometimes life in general. But unless they do something constructive to change their lives, they will remain unhappy. That is what getting a second chance is all about—believing that change is within your grasp, making the change and benefiting from it.

6. **Don't take no for an answer—even from yourself.** There are plenty of naysayers who love to warn people of the risks of making changes. Do not do that to yourself. Recognize that at some point you have to jump.

It takes more than a slap on the back or an encouraging word to turn someone into a peak performer. Listen to what people say about themselves to learn what will motivate them. For some, the challenges they face in their jobs are more important than salaries. In those cases, a manager who emphasizes a subordinate's chance to earn money rather than trying to make a job interesting could be making a serious mistake.

- **Set high standards.** If people are not regularly challenged to reach for the stars, they will set their sights much lower, and their performance likely will reflect it.

- **Create an environment where failure is not fatal.** The

best managers expect their people to make mistakes and, instead of replacing staff constantly, recognize that it is more efficient to teach people how to learn from their mistakes. Fear of failure can destroy creativity and initiative.

- **Use role models to encourage success.** Effective teachers impart values by holding up real people who embody those values. People are more easily influenced by individualized experiences—stories about a businessman going to law school at night or a young farmer taking correspondence classes—than by general principles.

- **Recognize and applaud achievement.** Rather than saving feedback for when people do things

wrong, look for opportunities to praise them when they do things correctly. "The applause of a single human being," said the English critic Samuel Johnson, "is the great consequence."

- **Place a premium on collaboration.** Good leaders do more than build allegiance to themselves—they also build allegiance to one another into an organization. This gets everyone working together to achieve the same level of quality in all that they do.

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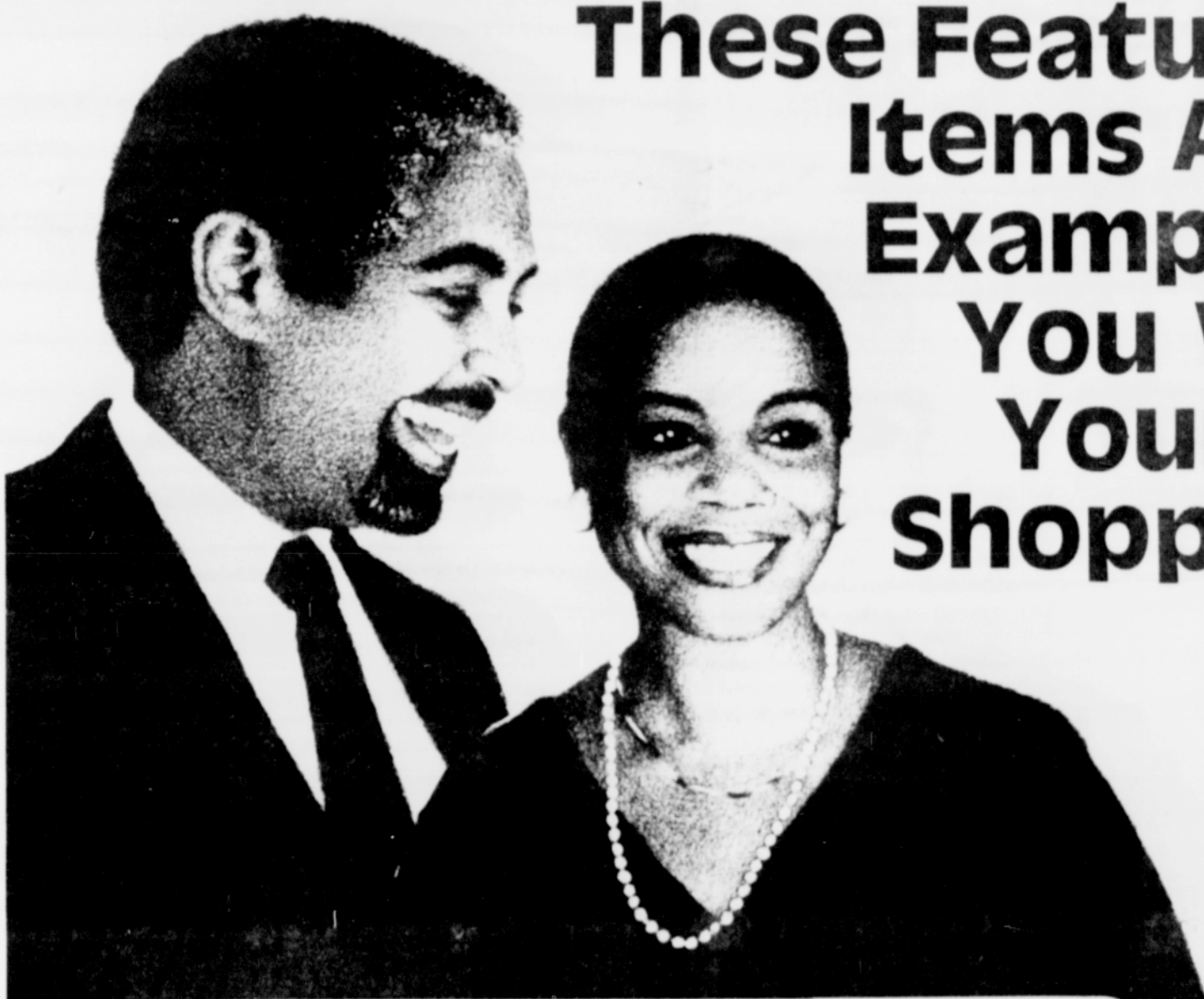


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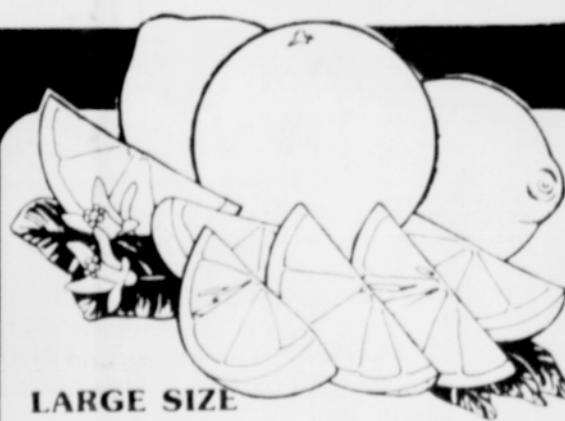


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