



POSITIVE ENERGIZERS

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CHANG**E**

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Text: Marcella Bremer

Design & Lay-out:
Remina Syra Zerrudo
Marcel Lamers

OCAI online

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Everyone knows them from personal experience: coworkers who wear you out. The people you tend to avoid because they are always complaining, criticizing every new idea with negative arguments, and simply not getting involved in anything. But we also know people who radiate enthusiasm, who make you feel great and make you believe that anything is possible (yes, we can!), who make you want to go to work. It is this group of people we want to work with in organizational change.

Research performed by Baker, Cross, and Wooten* (2003) shows that people can be classified as energizers or energy drains, and this makes a lot of difference. Energizers stimulate vitality in others; by interacting with energizers, others feel motivated and inspired. Energy givers are optimistic, attentive, reliable, and unselfish. They attract others.

Energy drains on the other hand reduce good feelings and enthusiasm in others. They absorb energy and weaken or tire others, reducing motivation. Studies show that energy drains are critical, inflexible, selfish, and unreliable.

Additionally, Baker, Cross, and Parker** (2003) discovered that energizing is an acquired talent, not a character trait. For example, there is no correlation between giving energy and being an introvert or an extrovert. In other words, it is possible to learn how to become an energizer, and this has nothing to do with how spontaneous or extroverted you are by nature.

Energizers help organizations because they enable others to function more effectively. Research by Baker*** (2004) shows that employee success can be predicted more reliably by their belonging to a “positive energy network” than by their position in the information network (who is receiving information from whom) and the network of influence (who influences whom).

In the capacity of an energy giver, people prove to be four times more successful than if they are the primary figure in the information or influence network. This success is also “contagious” for people who are in contact with these energizers. By interacting with them, these people start to become energizers as well and achieve better results. Baker discovered that organizations that excel in their endeavors have three times the number of energizers than organizations performing at an average level.

This is understandable because energizers will have a positive influence on the strength of the interpersonal relationships in an organization, as well as affecting cooperation, coordination, and working efficiency. Executives can be important in this process by behaving as positive energizers and by consciously stimulating “positive energy networks.” Identify the energizers within the organization, and acknowledge, reward, and support these people. Because energizers have a positive effect on others, they should be positioned in places where a lot of interaction is required. This allows many others to come into contact with the energizers’ “vitality.” Energizers can also be used to coach their colleagues.

In most organizations, energy drains are known as well. For example—the senior specialist who knows everything there is to know about his area of expertise but who is considered a “black hole” by others. These people can be approached by using a four-step plan. The first step is a personal conversation, providing them with feedback about their behavior. If that is not enough, the second step is to offer them coaching or training in order to teach them alternative ways of behavior. Their negative attitude or endless criticism may sometimes be the only kind of behavior these energy drains have picked up, and a good coach can work miracles.

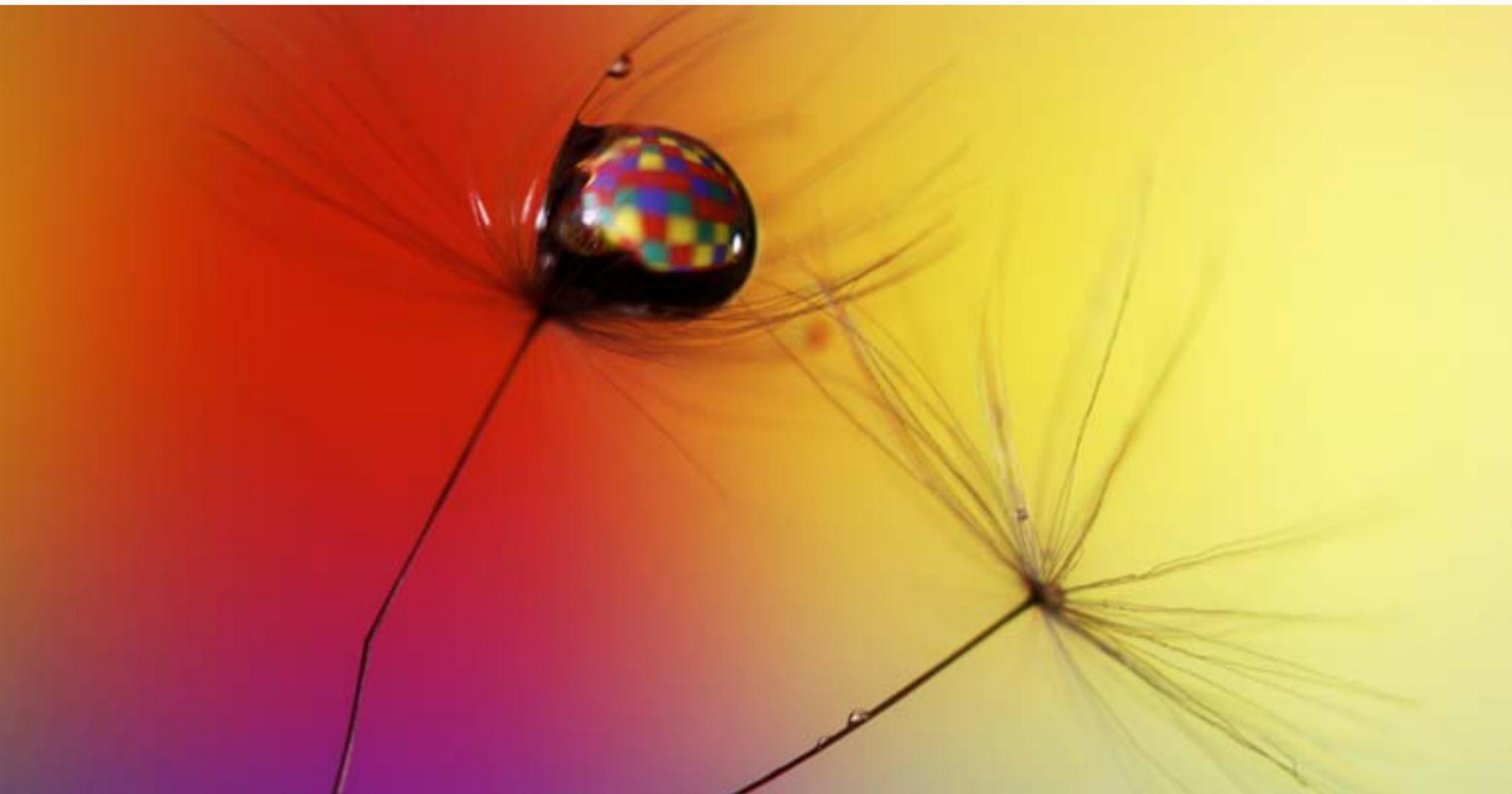
If that still has no effect, the third step is giving the energy drain a position in which he or she can work alone (e.g., a technical position) and has as little interaction with others as possible. If none of these measures has any effect (which is very rare), you may want to consider the fourth step, which is asking this person to leave the organization.



In order to instill change and improve results, these energy networks can be put to good use. To be successful, you will first need to identify where they are and what people are involved.

You can do this by performing a formal analysis, where all employees have to rate each other using the 1-to-5 Likert scale, ranging from “very de-energizing” (1) to “very energizing” (5). Once you have made a statistical analysis of the data, it is possible to draw an energy network.

A simpler but quick method is to ask all your employees to write down or mail the names of the two or three most energizing people in the organization. The names that appear most often will allow you to track down the energizers and their network, while those people who do not appear may be eligible for further consideration and maybe even a course of coaching or mentoring.



For change to occur, it is essential to have as many “relay stations” as possible on all levels of the organization. Just having top management get on the soapbox will not do much good. All executives will have to collectively communicate the same message and stimulate the preferred behavior in true “people manager” form. You will also need enthusiastic colleagues: positive energizers or propagandists, change agents, early adopters or sponsors, any of the names professional literature calls them. These are the people who embrace change and sell it to others, who lead by example for as long as it takes to reach a critical mass and get most people to behave according to the new culture and work methods.

Every organization needs these people to get moving and to keep moving until the desired change has been achieved. Revolution by evolution—one step at a time, repeating what it is that we want to achieve, presented and stimulated in a 1,001 different ways. These are the people we are looking for to take part in the change groups, project groups, and committees that will be formed to guide and pioneer the change. Ask a number of people (or as many as possible) to provide you with the names of three energizers. Think of people who demonstrate the following characteristics:

- * Are open to change
- * Are enthusiastic
- * Tend to look for possibilities (rather than limitations)
- * Find ways to solve problems (rather than look for objections)
- * Think of solutions (rather than problems)
- * Are focused on what you can achieve (rather than what you can avoid)
- * Are active and work hard (rather than think about things endlessly)
- * Are energetic

- * Have a lot of ideas
- * Do what they say (or promise) and say what they do
- * Attract others, people who will motivate you

Ask those people whose names are mentioned most to take part in the change group. They will think along with you, look for possibilities, and set others going. Preferably, these people should come from all parts of the organization. You should strive for representation of all departments and levels but pay particular attention to the criteria mentioned above.





Marcella Bremer is a change guide, author and energizer who helps leaders, consultants and professionals make a difference at work by positive leadership, inclusive change and cultures of kindness.

She co-founded Kikker Groep consultancy for organization development (in the Netherlands), OCAI online (online organizational culture survey) and Leadership & Change Magazine and Blog. She published two books, her latest is "Organizational Culture Change: Unleash your Organization's Potential in Circles of 10".

Follow Marcella Bremer on Twitter: @MarcellaBremer

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Notes And Literature:

* Baker, Cross and Wooten. ***Positive Organizational Network Analysis and Energizing Relationships*** (2003) in Positive organizational scholarship, by Cameron, Dutton & Quinn.

** Baker, Cross and Parker. ***What Creates Energy in Organizations?*** in Sloan Management Review (2003)

*** Baker. ***Presentation on Positive Energy Networks*** (2004, unpublished manuscript University of Michigan Business School) in Positive Leadership, strategy for extraordinary performance, by Professor Kim Cameron, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008

Recommended reading:

Positive Leadership—Strategies for Extraordinary Performance, Kim Cameron, 2008, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc, ISBN 978-1-57675-602-7

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