

GET MOTIVATED: MOVE YOUR BODY, MOVE YOUR ATTITUDE



TELE-WORKSHOP SPOTLIGHT SPEAKER

Dennis Mertzig

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Speaker Profile:

With more than 30 years of experience in the education field, primarily as a school principal, and extensive life coach training, Dennis has gained a reputation for motivating staff, parents, and students to achieve their goals with a smile on their faces. In addition, Dennis has volunteered for many years as a fitness instructor at a 5:50 a.m. "boot camp" workout filled with push-ups, sit-ups, running, and more push-ups. His fitness recruits attribute their goal-driven, positive attitudes (plus finishing several marathons and triathlons) to his motivational style, too.

Dennis Mertzig brought his straight-shooting and highly energetic approach to the September Tele-Workshop as he spoke in front of the team assembled at the America's Byways Resource Center conference room in Duluth, Minnesota. From the start, Dennis challenged the audience to commit to better fitness and better attitudes for personal and professional growth.

"Stand up!" he said. "Too many people sit at a desk more than 50% of the time. You need to move. Move your arms. O.K. No push-ups right now. No sit-ups today. Or elbows (a plank position from Pilates). But move!"

After the live audience and phone audience obliged, Dennis commented, "Everyone should do at least 30 minutes of activity every day."

According to Dennis, research shows there is a direct connection between physical activity and mental well being.

"You're all leaders. And leaders motivate others," Dennis told the group. "The quality of leadership depends on focusing on the positive."

Physical fitness helps feed positive attitudes.

"What have you done today to take care of yourself?" he asked.

Listeners offered varied responses that ranged from "Drank more water" and "Took vitamins" to "Biked a six-mile commute" and "Ran five miles."

"I would refer to the rest of you who didn't do anything for yourself this morning as slugs," commented Dennis. "Harsh? Yes. I'm teasing a little, but you need to de-slug yourself because you can't take care of your family and your job if you don't take care of yourself first."

Try This!



Write your fitness goals for the next 90 days on a piece of paper. Also write your personal goals and your professional goals. Seal this paper inside an envelope addressed to you. Keep it in a safe place. Put a reminder note on the calendar 90 days from now to mail the envelope to yourself (or ask a trusted friend to mail it to you then). See how well you do!

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

Dennis explained that leaders stay motivated by switching to positive attitudes and building positive characteristics.

"Think about characteristics that you admire and those you don't," he said. "Picture in your mind the worst boss you've ever had. Describe that person in phrases."

Some of the responses included:

"Didn't delegate"
"Gunslinger"
"Impatient"
"Arrogant"
"Non-caring"

Then Dennis asked the audience to flip those phrases to positives:

“Thoughtful”

“Decisive”

“Has a vision”

“Caring”

“Listens”

He explained that when you identify positive characteristics and experiences, research shows that it's easier for you to avoid being negative as well.

“Don't be a con—be a pro,” he said. “Avoid the negative—that includes negative people. Help them, as their leader, to see the positive sides of things.”

He suggested finding inspiring quotations from inspired people, and keeping the quotes where you can read them often. Some of his favorites:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead

“Let us put our minds together to see what we can build for our children.”—Hunkpapa Teton (Sitting Bull)

“Weeeeeeee-doggies!”—Jed Clampett

“How can you look and not see?”—Frank Puig (a logging supervisor during the 1930s from Brule, Wisconsin)

POSITIVELY PROFESSIONAL GOALS

Dennis again stopped the discussion for some physical movement. When everyone was settled again, he said, “Part of achieving your professional goals as a leader is to understand the culture and climate where you work.”

He used an iceberg analogy to explain climate and culture. “Climate is the part seen above the water. Culture is what's below,” he said.

“A positive climate, such as one with openness, trust and collaboration, needs to be supported by a culture of caring and receptiveness.”

The variables of climate and culture are related, according to Dennis. “Are they positive in your organization? Then stay motivated to keep them energized. Are they toxic? Then you need to take them to the positive side.”

Dennis said changing a group culture toward the positive takes dedication and an outside guide. He relayed a story on culture and

climate from his experience as a principal:

“A few years ago, I had a great opportunity as a leader to really focus on culture. We had a new elementary school building—a new place for learning. We knew that the positive environment we envisioned wasn't about the curriculum or how you teach math. We realized it was about building a positive culture. I'm here to tell you that there are very few systems that can see their strengths and weaknesses without help from an outside source. You see, precedent keeps us stupid. Without someone objectively looking at you from outside the organization, you fall back into the old patterns. Repeating patterns: that's the easiest thing to do. Changing is not easy to do.”

Dennis noted that Stephen R. Covey's book, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness* (a sequel to *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*), has been a helpful resource.

“What Covey did in his book is to turn a Harris poll on working environments into an analogy that anybody can understand,” explained Dennis. “Covey figured if those workers were represented on a soccer team, then 4 in 11 would know where the goal was; 2 of 11 would care where the goal was; 2 of 11 would know what positions they were playing, and all but 2 would be competing against their team members.”

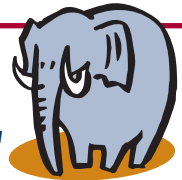
He referred the audience to Daniel Goleman's book, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, for excellent descriptions of several personality types that can disrupt positive change.

“What can you do?” asked Dennis. “Stand up! Move! And if you have cookies or a bag of chips—dump them! You have to be motivated yourself.”

TACKLE THE TOUGH STUFF

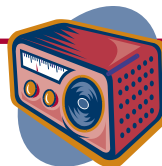
Dennis referred to a book by Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't*, that looked at what characteristics defined the very few Fortune 500 Companies who have sustained profitability and growth over 15 years.

Try This!



Whatever project you tackle next or, better yet, in the next 48 hours, have that difficult conversation. Whether it's with a group or an individual, do an autopsy without blame. Sit around the table and be totally honest. You can't get the elephant out of the living room until everyone can talk about the fact that it's there.

Try This!



Think of a song that describes who you are or the positive person you want to be. Record it and listen to it to at least once a week to motivate you as you work on staying positive.

Dennis noted that leaders need to address the negative factors that mess up teamwork.

“My experience with school changes has taught me that there can be roadblocks, but you can get over them,” said Dennis.

“People are in work situations or family situations that need changes. We can all change for the better. So to cure that emotional virus that can infect your group, you have to identify what type of negative person you're working with.”

“He discovered that those great companies get at the tough stuff,” said Dennis. “They identify what needs to be fixed and how to fix it. All groups can do these things, including your family. Get to the brutal facts—you know, that elephant standing in the living room. Brutal facts need to be addressed.”

Dennis explained that the military uses terminology that separates “ground truth” versus “political truth.”

“For the ground truth, talk to the people who actually know what's really going on. Leave out the political truth. That's how you get to the brutal facts,” he said. “I suggest keeping to the positive side. Take care of yourself. That's a positive. Then have that difficult conversation—tackle the brutal facts. Respectfully disagree. Use your listening skills. And stand up and move!”★

Q&A

Q. You mentioned roadblocks. How have you dealt with them?

A. My responsibility as a principal is to support everyone, keep the vision and define expectations, and help some 60 staff, 400 students and 700 to 800 parents meet those expectations. I try to keep every meeting or event fully positive, to the point and motivational. It's okay and important when people question plans or ideas. When it slips into the negaholic or other negative personality, the group's motivation stops working. I try to spin the cynicism into a positive early on. Most people delay dealing with it—you think that negative people will figure it out on their own. They don't.

Q. So what do you say to a negative person?

A. Here's what I learned: you have to develop a positive relationship with that negative person and work with him or her in a non-critical way to shift the attitude. You have to be that "critical friend." It takes some guts, some fortitude. I might say to that person, "This is how I observe what your impact is on the group." I take ownership of the observation and suggest a positive alternative.

Q. You said that you're thinking about writing a book.

How is it coming along?

A. Well, I have the first three chapters.
Chapter One: Why Get Off Your Dead A___.
Chapter Two: You Can't Lose Weight If You Eat Like A Pig.
Chapter Three: Do You Associate With Slugs?
We'll see how far it goes.

Q. How many push-ups should a person do?

A. You can never do enough push-ups.

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And leaders
motivate others.
The quality of
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on focusing on
the positive."*

RESOURCES

The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness

Stephen R. Covey

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Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't

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Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence

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