



The Inspiration Code

How the Best Leaders Energize People Every Day

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

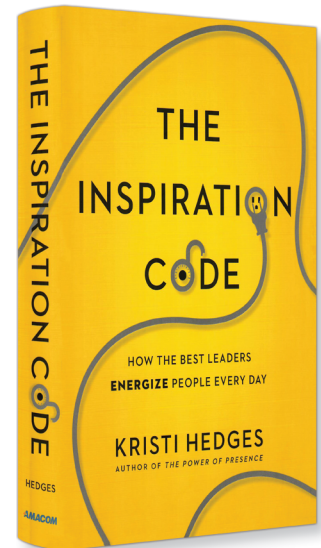
A spark is all it takes to inspire: the boss who tells you that he recognizes your potential, the colleague who truly listens to your ideas and concerns, the manager who communicates with a mixture of authenticity and vulnerability. These conversations and genuine connections galvanize people to achieve more than they thought possible and drive organizations to new heights. More than any other trait, the ability to communicate in a way that inspires lies at the heart of great leadership.

Based on findings from a commissioned survey on who and what inspires people, an analysis of published research and her own extensive work as a communications expert and executive coach, author Kristi Hedges uncovers a set of consistent, learnable behaviors that dramatically enhance leadership success.

Intimate and psychologically astute yet geared to workplace situations and goals, *The Inspiration Code* awakens you to the power of speaking and listening, challenges you to rethink assumptions and coaches you in the art of intentional, connected conversations that lift everyone higher.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What it takes to stay focused despite pressure and distractions.
- How to project authenticity even to large groups.
- How listening intently will increase your investment in others.
- How to energize people with the right amount of passion and show conviction using both verbal and nonverbal cues.
- Why you should be courageous in your words and choices.



by Kristi Hedges

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE INSPIRATION CODE

by Kristi Hedges

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Introduction

The Conversations that Count

Every once in a while, we have a conversation that changes our lives. A conversation that changes how we think about ourselves opens our minds to what we're capable of doing and shows us what's possible.

When people describe who inspires them, they talk about these conversations that count. They're the right words by the right person at the right time.

We can't will ourselves to be inspired. Rather, there's a trigger. This may be a person, an idea or both. Furthermore, inspiration involves two separate component processes: We are inspired *by* something as well as *to* an action.

Inspiration can't be forced. It can't feel like manipulation or even influence. Inspiration is an invitation, and since it fosters a personal insight, it can't be heavy handed.

If we want to have inspired companies, then we need inspirational leaders. And that involves being the kind of leader who communicates in a way that creates the conditions for inspiration in others.

A Journey Along the Inspire Path

There are certain definitive communication behaviors that make a conversation an elicitor of inspiration. These elements are brought together in the Inspire Path model.

Inspire Path conversations happen when we communicate in a way that is *present*, *personal*, *passionate* and *purposeful*. These four factors greatly enhance our inspirational effect. All four need not occur simultaneously, though many inspirational conversations do involve most elements in one form or another. ●

PART I: PRESENT — THE GIFT OF ATTENTION

Are You Talking to Me?

People who inspire us are both physically and mentally available to us. They give us the gift of their time and, just as important, the gift of their attention.

On a basic human level, we crave positive attention from those who matter to us. Leaders should keep in mind that their attention casts a large shadow and has an inflated impact. When you're a leader, people are watching you more closely, and you're more prone to overlook them.

Being fully present at key times has a motivational impact. When a leader actually pays real attention to us, the capacity to inspire is heightened.

Being Present: A Pretty Amazing Present

For most people, it's unrealistic to resolve to be present for every interaction. However, there are certain conversations in which we do want to connect and inspire another person to expand perspective or take action. There are a number of ways to show how important these conversations are to you:

Create a distraction-free zone. It's easier to put ourselves in a place where we can't be distracted than to resist distractions by our computers, our phones or office interruptions. When you show how seriously you're taking a conversation, it raises the importance for everyone.

Use the power of pause. Take a few moments before the conversation and sit quietly. By using this pause to consider what feeling you want to create, you reorient your brain away from external noise or internal concerns and toward the moment in front of you.



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Hold the space. When we hold the space for other people, free of distraction and with full attention, then we provide the opportunity for them to process their own thoughts through dialogue. By holding the space, you don't rush the conversation either explicitly or implicitly. You designate a time for it, and you honor it.

Say that it's important. We all fall prey to the *transparency illusion*, which is a psychological phenomenon in which we overestimate how well others can guess what we're thinking. It can benefit the conversation to state our motivations at the outset, so there's no guessing required. ●

The Stories We Tell Ourselves While We're Falling Apart

When we are around people who seem overwhelmed, our primary instinct is to distance ourselves from them.

If we're the ones who are overwhelmed, we can't have an Inspire Path conversation when our audience would prefer to get away from us. Like a narrowing lens, overwhelm takes away our ability to see the full extent of what's in front of us. It limits creativity, agility and ideation and overrides empathy.

There are actually two motivating forces behind our behavior: love and fear. Any other emotions we have are subcategories of these two. In the workplace, love can mean passion for our work, care for our teams or enjoyment for making a difference. Fear may mean worry about being successful, insecurity about not measuring up or engaging in undermining behavior to secure our status.

We operate from a place of fear more often than we realize. When we do, we aren't inspiring or connecting. We're pushing people away. And most of the time, we don't even realize it because we're merely surviving in overwhelm mode. Fear-based behavior is reactive and sometimes even irrational. Stress and overload absolutely change the way others feel about being around us. Even when we think we're good at hiding it, it leaks out.

Yes, I'm Overwhelmed. Where's My Lifeline?

Once we begin to notice that we've gone into overdrive, we can begin to develop strategies for how to get ourselves back to a place where we can be present. Your schedule, your workload or your office demands are what they are. They are a neutral variable with no emotional charge. It's your reaction to them that causes you stress.

This means that you have the ultimate control and choice in the matter. People get themselves out of the hole of overwhelm all the time. It may not be easy, but it's possible.

Challenge Your Assumptions

When people want to change the results that they're getting, they typically try different actions. However, for significant change to take place, people need to question their underlying assumptions, thoughts and values.

Say you want to be promoted (the result), which requires you to raise your visibility (your assumption). So, you go about taking action to do that. At the end of the period, many more people will know your name. Yet, you're no closer to getting that promotion.

Now, let's look at what possibilities would open up if you challenged your assumption that raising your visibility would lead to a promotion. Suppose you learn that a handful of influencers were vocal advocates for every person who'd been promoted. The actions you might choose to take would look quite different — and include ones you couldn't even see before questioning your assumption.

Pause and Hit Reset

When we're trying to get out of a stress event or a chronic state of overwhelm, mindfulness can have a major impact in a short amount of time.

It's to your advantage to clear out the stressful energy and refocus yourself. This stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system — “rest and digest” — and turns off your sympathetic nervous system of “flight or flight.”

Use Situational Intentions

Situational intentions are in-the-moment calibrations to get your head around your real purpose in communicating.

Before important interpersonal exchanges, pause to consider the following:

- How do I want my audience to feel?
- How do I need to show up and put that feeling in the room?

The operative word is “feel.” We process people emotionally first, then fill in the blanks with logic.

When we take this moment to reorient our thinking, center our energy and focus on an intention, we make ourselves far more present to the person in front of us. ●

Tricking Your Brain to Open Your Mind

We'd like to believe that our thinking expands with experience and age. In fact, our thinking calcifies with success and experience. The more we think we know, the less we listen and consider alternative viewpoints.

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Open-Mindedness and Being Present

We're more present if we're more open-minded. Those who inspire us are right there with us, not judging, not pushing, but trying to understand where we're coming from.

Unfortunately, our brains are rigged against us. It's not just success that gets in the way of an open mind but our basic brain functioning. Because the brain's primary goal is efficiency, it creates a myriad of shortcuts for us to simplify our thinking so we can reduce our energy burn.

This is terrific news when we're driving to work, as we barely have to think about how to get there. But it's not so good when we make knee-jerk assumptions at work.

Princeton University professor Daniel Kahneman breaks down our thinking into the following two functions:

- System 1 thinking is automatic and quick, requiring little to no effort. We don't even realize we're thinking.
- System 2 thinking takes effort. It's associated with concentration, decision-making and analysis. It requires attention, and when that's taken away, System 2 is interrupted. In general, System 2 takes the suggestions of System 1 without challenge. It's only when System 1 has a problem that System 2 jumps in.

System 1 is fast but far from accurate. It's filled with biases: cultural, personal and learned. It also can't be turned off. The only thing we can do is understand what's happening in our thinking and prompt System 2 to boot up when we need it. If we want to grow in this area, we have to make an effort to understand our thinking and then challenge it.

Use a "Pre-Mortem." Know yourself well enough to understand what biases will kick in, what triggers could flare, what influences you're susceptible to and what you'll do ahead of time to remain present, focused and open minded.

Ask Open Questions. Most questions that we ask are close-ended fact finders that start with "why" or "did." Primarily, they elicit right-or-wrong answers, and they come across as judgmental. On the other hand, open-ended questions encourage minds to wander. Coming from a place of curiosity about the other person, they can be illuminating for both sides of the conversation.

Embrace "I Don't Know." People are most resilient and successful when they develop what Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck calls a *growth mindset* — the belief that basic abilities can be developed through effort and hard work. Those with a growth mindset expect to work hard for mastery and don't take it personally when challenges arise. Embracing "I don't know" encourages a growth mindset. The follow up to it is, "Let's find out." When leaders are also learners, their teams and organizations benefit because the behavior models a collective growth mindset that says, "Never stop improving." ●

PART II: PERSONAL — PUTTING YOURSELF INTO IT

First, Keep It Real

Authenticity is the epitome of being personal because we're being our true selves. When we're having Inspire Path conversations, authenticity plays a critical role in connection. Your listener looks to you first to see how much you care, and this is what shapes how much he will care.

The Magic Balancing Act

People are drawn to those who blend competency with vulnerability. The most compelling leaders blend strength with struggle, power with vulnerability and steely resolve with a learning approach.

So, there's a balancing act to have the right amount of authenticity, which can seem like the opposite of being authentic. It's a tension that's in the background and can cause us to feel that we never get it right.

Communicating authentically can be tricky. It's not simply flipping on a switch but engaging in a continuum of behaviors. It's helpful to approach this as a two-step process: Start with the internal piece and then move into how to translate that to the external.

Authenticity Internalized

When we aren't clear about what we stand for and where we're coming from, we open up the conversation to miscommunication and misinterpretation. By getting our values clear, embracing our story and owning our message, we can come across with heightened clarity.

Know your values and determine your brand. List your most cherished values that are critical to your self-image. Narrow those values down to a brand. Your personal presence brand is your anchor. It's a reminder in times of stress, distraction, tedium or frustration of what you want to show up to be and stand for.

Embrace your leadership story. There can be a downside when we buy into our own stories. But there is also a time when embracing our stories does help us connect with others. Think of this as your leadership story. Your leadership story reveals enough of yourself so that others can get to know you and see what your values are.

Own the message. Leadership maturity is the idea that when you take the job, you assume ownership over the messages and make them your own. It's not parroting talking points but revealing your values through them.

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Authenticity Externalized

While you can never please everyone, and shouldn't expect to, it's to your advantage in Inspire Path conversations to present yourself honestly and authentically. When we do that, others reply in kind.

Explicit transparency. Most people think they are transparent, but in fact, we're all very difficult to read. To overcome this, we need to be explicitly transparent. A simple, "Here's my intention for this conversation," can change the direction entirely.

Genuine language. When we want to externalize our authenticity, we should sound like we do in any other part of our lives. While it's good to be thoughtful and consider how we'll communicate, it's less about the exact wording than it is about the sentiment behind those words.

Vulnerability expressed. Share your leadership story so the other party can better get you on a basic human level. Connection doesn't really start until we know we're dealing with the real person across the table. ●

Lifting Sights Toward Potential

Recognizing another's potential — sincerely, specifically and altruistically — is one of the most powerful and inspiring conversations we can have. Conveying potential is not about manipulating or pandering. Conversations about potential have the impact they do because we offer them with no attachment to the outcome for us.

Conversations about potential aren't the same as positive feedback, though there can be overlap. Positive feedback is given around a particular work area or function. Conversations about potential are primarily about the person, not the job, and they aren't directive.

At their core, potential conversations are about what's possible. They lift people's heads out of their day-to-day routine to see something larger in themselves.

So, What's so Powerful About Seeing Potential?

How people in authority view us becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: We rise or fall to their expectations.

All leaders, whether in the classroom or the boardroom, have tremendous power simply by being in positions of authority. They possess the ability to influence how others view themselves. When you call out people's greatness, the recipients see the greatness, too.

When someone we respect — and who may even be in a position of authority — tells us what she believes we can do, we will borrow that person's confidence in us. ●

The Quiet Influence of Listening

Listening signals respect. It shows that we value the speaker. In Inspire Path conversations, attentive listening plays an important role. When people describe inspirational figures in their lives, they say the person made them feel truly listened to. Listening at that level says, "Your opinion is so valuable that I'm going to devote myself not just to hearing you but to fully understanding you as well."

Talk Is Cheap, Listening Is Expensive

Miscommunications abound because in any single conversation, there are actually multiple conversations. Every time you open your mouth, there's a running narrative also going in your head. If we don't actively manage it, we pay more attention to our internal conversation than to the one we're having externally.

The Subtext Is Screaming if You Listen for It

Just as in any conversation there's an external and an internal dialogue, there's also a text and a subtext. The text is the words that we're speaking. The subtext is the underlying meaning. It's the context of the conversation — our thoughts, history, past interactions, emotions, larger culture and expectations. When we ignore the subtext, it is all too common for two people to walk away from a conversation with dramatically different ideas of what just happened.

Shift Your Listening to Open Your Understanding

There are four key shifts you can make when you're trying to listen intently. They all require you to move from *how* you listen to *what* you're listening for.

Listening Shift 1: Listening for facts › Listening for the whole person. Often when we listen, we're trying to determine the facts. We're better listeners if instead of zeroing in on the facts, we widen our focus to take in the whole person in front of us. We discuss the facts, but we also listen for how that person explains the situation, what his body language is telling us about his emotional state.

Listening Shift 2: Listening for text › Listening for text and subtext. Sometimes, we have an idea of what the subtext might be, but we're not sure, so we don't mention it. Other times, it goes right by us. Conversations in which we aren't brave enough to be real and say what needs to be said are never inspirational.

Learning to listen for subtext in addition to text requires a commitment to being in the moment and noticing both the said and the unsaid.

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Listening Shift 3: Listening for what you need › Listening for what the other person needs to say.

Similar to listening for facts, we can default to listening for what we need from a conversation and miss what the other person needs to say. When we listen in this way, our agenda is the only one that matters. Depending on the conversation, this can negate the whole reason we're communicating with this person in the first place.

By shifting our listening to what the other person needs to say, we're opening our own minds to the meaning of the conversation. We're sharing the agenda; we're taking in the details we deem worthy, and we're also noticing the value another places on those details.

Listening Shift 4: Listening to judge › Listening out of curiosity. Being able to draw swift conclusions aids our functioning in a busy work environment and may even be why we're good at what we do. When it comes to listening, however, that same capacity to make snap judgments can hinder our ability to understand — and show understanding of — another person.

This shift requires us to tamp down the analytical, critical part of ourselves in order to stay with the conversation and show empathy to the other person. We need to shift to curiosity when we want to learn rather than just confirm what we already think. ●

PART III: PASSIONATE — BRINGING HEART AND ENERGY

Your Energy Is Contagious

People who are passionate enthusiasts for what they do create passion in others. People desperately want to find and maintain passion in their work and in their lives. Just as important, we want to work for passionate leaders. Passion is the precursor to personal investment.

Inspire Path conversations can't happen without the right level of passion. It infuses energy into them, creating that lift we feel after an inspiring exchange.

Energy is the most visible form of passion and arguably the one that we react to the most viscerally. Energy is contagious, be it positive or negative. And when the person with the strongest mood is in a position of power, the contagion is flat-out viral.

The amount of energy we convey sets the benchmark for what other people will be able to feel. We are leading the way in showing how meaningful and important what we're communicating should be to the other person.

We've all seen what happens when someone else's energy, even when it is intentional and well meant, is not well received. There's an out-of-sync feeling between the energy someone's putting out and those on the receiving end. It can be off-putting and have a strong countereffect.

Showing the right amount of energy or passion can be harder than it appears. We want to be inspirational but not over the top. We need to light a fire but not burn people out. We have to instill a sense of seriousness but not be scary. And we mess up these energy differentials all the time.

Once you know where your authentic passion lies, you'll need to calibrate it against the situation before you. You don't want to be so far away from your audience that they reject your message. Inspiring conversations create energy but only if the other party lets them in. ●

Moving Hearts Before Minds

In the workplace — and to a larger extent, in life — we don't feel free to express ourselves emotionally. And yet, as we consider passion, it is inherently emotional. Enthusiasm without emotion comes across as flat or disingenuous.

When we share our emotions, we allow others to share theirs. It's the observing of emotions in someone else that brings them to the surface. It makes sense that revealing our emotions is part of how we show others who we are. When we can reveal an emotional side of ourselves and our message, we bring head and heart into it. It resonates in a more meaningful and personal way.

Emotion is a key part of how we process information, and while it can get in the way of logic, it also makes us care. Without emotion, there is no empathy. Our emotional responses call upon the deepest parts of our humanity.

We've already discussed how stories convey authenticity. Part of the reason is that a good story evokes emotion. Stories change how we listen and how well we listen.

It's worth noting that some may feel ambivalent or disdainful about purposefully tapping into their own and other people's emotions. It's understandable. After all, we've made considerable efforts to show up as unflappable and logical. Culturally, making an emotional case can feel sleazy and wrong, as if we're trying to trick someone.

So, let's frame the situation up front: When we bring emotion into our Inspire Path conversations, we're not faking or manipulating. We're authentically communicating the emotions that we already possess. We're bringing to the surface the emotions of others, which are guiding their decisions and thoughts already. In short, we're communicating in a wholehearted way. ●

Say It Like You Mean It

Conviction is the last component of passion. We engage through our energy, we deepen the connection with emotion and we show our mettle through conviction. When we seek to inspire others, we are encouraging them to believe. When we demonstrate conviction, we show that we already believe wholeheartedly, making it safer for others to take that leap.

One of the primary places that we look for this quality is in nonverbal communication. It's not enough to speak with conviction; we must also want to see it reflected.

So, how do you say it like you mean it? It comes down to alignment. You need your nonverbals to match your words and both to match your intent.

Start by Realizing What You Think You Know Is Probably Wrong

David DeSteno is a psychology professor at Northeastern University who studies physical signs of trustworthiness. According to DeSteno and other researchers, when it comes to reading another's body language, we look at clusters of behaviors, not isolated traits. Context also plays a role. And even when we read body language correctly, we often rationalize ourselves out of those impressions.

If you want to show conviction, instead of picking your nonverbal communication behaviors apart with a scalpel, a better approach is to get your head in the game and let your body follow the lead.

When Your Mind Speaks, Your Body Listens

The link between our bodies and how we think and feel plays directly into displaying conviction and managing nonverbal behavior. If we know the emotion we want to convey, that's more likely to show up in our body language.

Smiling can show openness and invite another into the conversation. Though not all Inspire Path conversations are ones to smile about, when they are about positivity, optimism, joy or excitement, smiling works in more ways than one.

All this can be summed up in three ways. First, people desire to know the right way to show up verbally and nonverbally to be most effective. Second, there is no right way: We don't respond to someone's communication style trait by isolated trait. We take them in through a series of aspects that we can't always logically explain. Third, instead of trying to get a checklist of communication attributes to put on like a suit, we're more effective when we consider the nuanced ways that we can put our thoughts in our bodies and let our bodies confirm our thoughts. Rather than perfection, we should strive for alignment. ●

PART IV: PURPOSEFUL — SPOTLIGHTING MEANING

Purposeful Conversations

If passion is the accelerator, it's purpose that steers the car. It's what creates meaning from our labor. Finding an inspired purpose is an equal-opportunity desire in every type of job at every point in our careers.

We hear a lot about purpose-driven organizations. And yes, it can be inspiring to work for an organization with a clear sense of purpose — especially when that purpose aligns with your own. On the other hand, if there's an explicit or implied corporate purpose that conflicts with your values, it can make you miserable.

But for most people, the process of finding purpose exists on a more nuanced, personal scale. It's less about a grand vision outside of ourselves and more about the vision we possess internally. That's why those who inspire us are willing to have conversations about purpose, even pointing to it when we're not looking for it. Helping someone find that internal spark of purpose, or reignite it, is a transformational act.

If we don't know why we're doing what we're doing, we won't know how to accomplish our goals. But if we can determine the why, our perspectives on the how expand dramatically. We find purpose not by starting with the goal and working backward ("I want to get promoted because I like a challenge.") but by starting with you and letting that lead to a new goal ("I like challenges, so how can that manifest?"). All too often, we talk ourselves into a goal without ever having thought through why we want it.

The Purpose of Purpose

Purpose and inspiration are closely related in the research and causally related in our own lives. Having a purpose is inspiring to us, as are those who help us find it.

Being an inspirational force for another may be enough of a reward. We get a big psychic boost from being helpful. However, there are ample business reasons to support the development of purpose in others. Purpose and inspiration have been shown to increase well-being and goal progression as well as vitality, positivity and life satisfaction.

We know from decades of research that people find internal motivation, inspiration and purpose through consistent means — by doing what they're good at and enjoy, feeling useful, being in relationship to others and having a sense of agency that carries them forward. ●

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If You're Not Wearing It, You're Not Sharing It

When we share and show a purpose, we inspire others to do the same. Role models are a powerful force in motivation. As a behavioral model, role models embody the goals of aspirants, allowing them to learn vicariously and increase their confidence. By representing what's possible, role models show how an aspirant can be like them, not just today but in a future state. And in terms of being inspirational, role models stimulate ideas for new goals and make them desirable.

The same questions that work on others, work on us. Find the time to consider the questions for yourself. Put the threads together to understand what you're good at doing and enjoy doing, what feels useful, what creates forward momentum and what puts you in relationship to others in a way that you desire. ●

The Call for Courage

Many behaviors found in inspiring leadership require courage. Inspiring leaders have to go off the worn path, which takes courage. Inspiring conversations require much more of us intellectually and emotionally. They, too, take courage. We admire courage in others. We know it's the harder path.

Being willing to be in conversations about purpose, both with others and within ourselves, requires us to make courageous choices. Leading a purpose-driven life doesn't happen by accident. We have to make decisions and act in ways that support our purpose.

Courage in All Its Forms

Courage can seem like a lofty concept or even a platitude. But it's conveyed by small, everyday choices. Even large, courageous moves typically begin as discrete, defined decisions. Courage isn't an abstraction. It's a series of decisions that we believe are right even if they're tough.

Bill Treasurer, author of *Courage Goes to Work*, outlines three different types of courage.

- Try courage: the courage to take the initiative, attempt new things and take risks.
- Trust courage: the courage to have faith in others, let go of the need to overly control situations and be open to change.
- Tell courage: the courage to voice concerns, provide tough feedback, assert an unpopular viewpoint and speak truth to power.

Your Leadership Shadow Is Showing

In leadership circles, there's a concept called a leadership shadow. It's the idea that the leader's values, style and actions cast a larger shadow of influence on those around her. Leaders can eloquently say what they care about, but the shadow is determined more by the choices they make.

To be purposeful, we need to make courageous choices. We have to say no to some things, like comfort, certainty and other opportunities. Our purpose is defined as much by what we say no to as what we say yes to. ●

Conclusion

You're Already in a Virtuous Cycle

We often don't know the effect we've had on others when we were simply trying to connect, encourage and empathize. Only the other person knows the true effect and where it leads. When we're a force for others to find purpose, when we help them ignite their passion, when we give the gift of our full presence to connect personally, then we are part of a virtuous cycle. We create a ripple effect of positivity, confidence, excitement, agency and possibility. When you have interpersonal connections at work, you want to do more, be more and give more.

It's Always Been About the Connection

We can decide to take an Inspire Path approach to any conversation by deciding to be present, making the connection personal, bringing passion and illuminating a larger purpose. The ways we inspire aren't hard; they aren't even complex. When we put intention behind our communication and bring as many of these elements together as we can, then we develop a personal strategy to be more inspiring leaders. We make inspirational communication our default rather than a pleasant accident. ●

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Summary: *Speaking as a Leader* by Judith Humphrey. Leading communication coach, Judith Humphrey, shows how to make the most of your daily communications — the seemingly “insignificant” interactions in everyday work life — in order to create a presence on the job as a genuine and constant leader.

Webinar: *How the Best Leaders Energize People Every Day* by Kristi Hedges. In this webinar, executive coach Kristi Hedges reveals that inspiring communication isn't about grand gestures but about doing things that motivate us routinely, consistently and intentionally. Great leaders inspire action with their words, sparking enthusiasm and commitment.