

How to Inspire Team Spirit



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Tell us about your leadership philosophy, which helped you win a regional Strategic Leadership Award. How does it help you build successful teams focused on a common goal while also fostering individual talent?

There are many kinds of leadership style. Mine is to consult and to guide. Certainly, Toray's success in building great teams depends on hiring the best people, but that's only the beginning of the story. To inspire the best from the best, a leader must give his teams a creative stake in their work and control over their outcomes. That requires a lot of trust. It means trusting your people to work things out and make the right calls. As the leader, I have to be the coach who listens carefully, who creates an environment that fosters success, and who then praises his people for what they've accomplished.

Another core value is "safety first," which is especially important during these challenging times. We're a manufacturing company, and we greatly value high output. What I tell my team, though, is not at the sacrifice of safety. If something's wrong, don't run a broken process. Take a step back. Ask, "What do we need to do to fix the equipment or adjust the environment so that no one on the team is injured?" Our commitment to safety extends to our local communities in the U.S. and to the global society, as well.

How does your leadership vision tie in with the "Toray way" of business and innovation to build solutions for humanity? And how do you impart a sense of being part of the wider Toray Group?

A former president of our largest client gave an inspirational speech on what he called "servant leadership". The corporation exists to serve society, not the other way around. It's a message I took to heart.

To be a successful leader, you have to move beyond the straight management-by-objectives approach. Don't misunderstand me; at Toray we're goal-focused and our success hinges upon our meeting objectives. To meet targets, however, you have to inspire people, make them believe that the team's objectives are truly important. By working together as one, we achieve goals for the good of society. That's the Toray way.

An excellent example of how the Toray spirit has flourished at Toray Plastics (America), or TPA, is found in our story. TPA was established in 1985 and for the first ten years it was a manufacturing extension of Toray Industries. That meant 100% of products were designed in Japan and manufactured in the U.S. Jump ahead to 2021, and 80% of what we produce is designed, developed and commercialized based on our U.S. R&D team's efforts. We're proud of that achievement, but it could never have happened without the support of our parent company. Investing heavily in R&D with the goal of contributing to society is in Toray's genetic make-up, and it is what makes Toray Group, and TPA, the preferred partner of choice among our largest customers. We are a dynamic organization that has entrusted its teams with creative responsibility, inspired by the common goal of working for the benefit of humanity and the planet.

Your team is focused on the R&D of eco-friendly plastics, and yet within the pursuit of that goal resides a paradox: the development of sustainable solutions may require the consumption of more resources than are affordable or even available. How does TPA forge collaborative strategies for renewable innovation?

It's true that we face huge challenges across the materials industry. According to recent research, the world needs as much as a tenfold improvement in the eco-efficiency of resources and materials by 2050 so that an estimated population of nine billion will be able to live comfortably within the planet's means. At TPA, one of our greatest challenges is the development of food packaging that phases out hydrocarbons [compounds made from fossil fuels]. The final product must provide to the food the same protection that we have today and simultaneously meet the long-term economic targets set by the current film options. It's a big challenge!

We believe that Toray is ideally positioned to meet that challenge. Our winning will be based on the same collaborative spirit that has driven all Toray breakthroughs—from carbon fiber that reduces the Boeing Dreamliner's carbon footprint to biofuel made from sugarcane waste in Thailand.

Our breakthroughs will be built on R&D synergies between TPA and the entire Toray Group, as we work together as a team to devise cutting-edge packaging solutions. Once again, global teamwork will enable the critical task of bringing viable products to market. It also means collaborating with global food companies to understand their needs and objectives. The Toray Group's fundamental understanding of "Innovation by Chemistry" and its commitment to

contribute to society position us to tackle this complex problem and be the innovator of new sustainable products that we believe can have a positive impact on the world in which we live.

In leading a firm with a Japanese parent company, how do you in Rhode Island and Toray Industries in Japan foster team spirit across cultures that can be quite different?

I'm an admirer of President Theodore Roosevelt and in particular his speech "Citizenship in a Republic." It offers a message that transcends East and West and captures the "never give up" spirit for which the Japanese people and Toray are renowned.

In the speech, Roosevelt salutes the indomitable spirit of people who, no matter how difficult the challenge, rise up time after time and continue to do their best. Among them is that individual "whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause."

It is that kind of spirit, which I find every day in the men and women who work across the Toray Group, that leads our people and our teams to make such a positive contribution to society. In cherishing it, we embody the best of both worlds—we share common traits of curiosity, perseverance, diversity, creativity and, above all, commitment, which make a difference to humanity's common journey.

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