

## The Benefits Of The Pygmalion Effect And How To Harness It

[Previous](#) | [Next](#)  
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In business we often rack our brains trying to think of how we can get our team members' to increase their effectiveness and perform at their very best.

Well help is at hand.

J. Sterling Livingston (\*\*1) noted that what managers expect of their subordinates strongly influences the subordinates' performance and progress. In turn, subordinates tend to do what they believe is expected of them. This phenomenon is called the Pygmalion Effect. It's the power of expectations.

Your expectations of people and their expectations of themselves are key factors in how they perform at work. Those with poor expectations internalise their negative label, and those with positive labels succeed accordingly.

Evidence of the Pygmalion Effect was demonstrated by two researchers, Eden and Shani (\*\*2). They found that performance in a field experiment among leadership trainees in the army was improved by building their instructors positive expectations about the trainees. The instructors were led to believe that their trainees' had either a high, regular or unknown command potential. These staff expectations coincided with markedly higher levels in the trainees' objective achievement scores. And interestingly similar effects occurred for the trainees' attitudes - those in the 'higher potential' group reported greater satisfaction with the course and more motivation to go on to the next course.

If you want to harness the Pygmalion Effect you must have and show confidence in those who work for you. This will arouse expectations of goal achievement among your team members. This in turn encourages the self-fulfilling prophecy that they will succeed, and as a consequence, will actually increase their likelihood of achieving their goals.

The Pygmalion Effect enables team members to excel in response to your message that they are capable of success and are expected to succeed. Though the opposite also applies, your communication can sabotage staff performance if you tell them, even subtly, the opposite.

Here are some practical ways to harness the Pygmalion Effect:

- Make sure your employees are receiving consistent messages from others. (How you speak about employees powerfully molds the opinions of others.)
- Provide opportunities for employees to work on increasingly challenging assignments. Make sure they succeed at each step before moving forward.
- When coaching your employees focus on improving what the employee does well rather than on focusing on their weaknesses.
- Demonstrate a sincere commitment to your employees success.
- Have a successful senior employee play a developmental mentoring role with the employee.

So, use the Pygmalion Effect and you could create a more effective and more motivated team.

## References:

- \*\*1: Livingston, S, "Pygmalion in Management", Harvard Business Review, Vol 47, 1967, pp 8-9
- \*\*2: Eden, D and Shani, A. B, "Pygmalion goes to Boot Camp: Expectancy, Leadership, and Trainee Performance", Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol 76, 1982, pp 194-9
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&nbsp; [Previous](#) | [Next](#)

&nbsp; [Back to top](#)