

# The Performance Igniter Toolkit for Leaders

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Do these today.  
Thank us tomorrow.

**Who is this for?** It's for any leader seeking simple, actionable, and cost-free ways to light up their teams, inspire results, and deliver outstanding performance.

# Introduction

“Business” is not a term that was coined accidentally. Business is busy. And as we become increasingly engaged in all of the “busyness” — or the noise around us — we lose sight of what truly drives our business forward.

So how do we break through the noise and harness our leadership chops to deliver results that really move us forward? Well, we can start by leveraging these 9 incredibly powerful yet simple techniques with your team. You won't believe the huge results these little nuggets will deliver.

## So let's dive in...

## #1. So, this one time at band camp...

Tell them stories. OK, maybe not so much about band camp. But let your team get to know the "you" of way back when. Yes – your team looks to you for guidance and direction, for feedback and decision-making. But they also crave the knowledge that you didn't start out where you are today; that you've been where they are. That you tried things, you failed, you learned, you felt defeated, and yet you've pushed through it all.

Share the lessons you've learned. Not through lecture, but through real, human stories. Let them peek at your past failures and see that you've squeezed the learnings out as if from lemons. By doing this, you make yourself accessible, and you encourage testing, learning and failing. All of which catalyze innovation and growth.

## #2. Hit me with your best shot.

Invite your team members to share with you the scariest, craziest ideas they've NEVER had the "cajones" to share. Burritos by drones? Terrible idea! BUT... if you can get them over the fear-hump, and show them you're interested in their inklings and they won't be struck down for sharing even the stinkers, you'll open their creative spigots.

Great ideas come from all points on an org chart. And in this world that is nearly entirely mobile, digital, and be-tweeted, it's likely that your next best idea will come from a millennial who's too afraid to share what's on his mind. And the best part? Likely he'll share it in under 140 characters! You never know where your best ideas are coming from. But generally it's a volume game. So get those floodgates open!

### #3. I'm the thorn in your side – tell me where it prickles.

Oftentimes, with only the noblest of intentions, we – the leaders – present the greatest challenges to our team's effectiveness and efficiency. Truly, we mean well – right? But we are creatures of habit, and sometimes our seemingly innocuous habits create disasters unknown to us.

Maybe we expect our team to complete a weekly "simple" project tracking template to keep us up to date... but we don't realize that our teams are spending 3 hours a week formatting it to our liking!

Or perhaps we shoot off random musings via email between 1 and 3am, without realizing we're creating messy mornings when team members awake to the onslaught. Or maybe we presume people to be at our beck and call because, well - we're the boss!

But this makes structuring their days a challenge.

Are you doing anything that's inadvertently throwing your team's ability to be focused and prioritized? Maybe. Maybe not. But chances are, they're not going to tell you until you ask. Obstructions to focus and efficiency will be present. And it's critical to have awareness of the spots where you're creating the problem...but have the opportunity to present the solution!

## #4. I've got this great roll of duct tape.

Just point me toward the hole. Your most important job as a leader is not to deliver great work. But rather, it's to enable your team to deliver THEIR best work. There is no shortage of strategies you can use to drive performance. But for today, let's focus on the simplest strategy. Understand how they're spending their time, spot the potential inefficiencies, and help them plug the holes.

Is someone spending hours formatting a spreadsheet to look just-so, when it really could be scrapped together in minutes? Are they chasing down 12 decision makers, when really only 2 opinions matter? Are they manually pulling together data because an internal system has broken down and they've not wanted to trouble you with it?

Often our teams want to be seen as independent. They're scrappy and they'll get it done without involving you in the details. But sometimes as a leader, those details are precisely what we need. Find out where they are band-aiding a broken system so you can help get it fixed. Find out where they are perfecting a spreadsheet that should really be imperfect. Help them find the wasted spaces in their days so they can reallocate these moments to delivering more impact.

## #5. Help them know their north

We're all here to do a job. But the way we approach that job – the things on which we focus, the skills we leverage, even just the way we think about the value we're delivering in that job – has a huge impact on our ability to engage and deliver.

Today there is no shortage of research supporting the assertion that a sense of purpose leads to enhanced engagement. And engagement, in turn, electrifies the team to bring their best to the table every day.

A sense of commitment to the cause drives passion and great work. But the key to unlocking this magic is knowing each individuals' drivers.

Share your own inspiration, your own sense of drive, just to offer a template. But also recognize everyone's drive is unique. Maybe you love selling, or you get a work-high off of being "the" subject matter expert" on anything. But what drives and inspires you is unique to you. So don't assume.

Maybe others get their spark from being a mentor or a coach, or from having a strong external brand and network. So learn this about your team – welcome their insight, and help them infuse inspiration into their days. For those who love educating – invite them to host a weekly "Lunch 'n Learn" with your team. For those who love the external – help them find speaking gigs that will put your company in a great light. It's a win-win when its done right!

## #6. I dare you to make me laugh at you.

We've all had the experience of having a "dumb" question we're terrified to ask. You know – 'cause we really hate to look dumb.

But frankly, we expend so much energy hiding our knowledge gap, we're losing the chance to just do great work.

So dare them. Dare them to ask you the most fundamental question they can think of. And then your job is to be patient. But also appropriately critical. If you feel, over time, like they're not retaining your answers, and the quality of their questions isn't improving... then you may have a performance issue on your hands. But until then – put on your "cool" hat and let those questions roll!

## #7. You're not gonna believe what I just read!

Whether funny, geeky, insightful, or just plain holy-cow-worthy... letting your team know THAT you're reading and WHAT you're reading may elicit the same on their end. Reading both inspires and is inspired by curiosity.

Curiosity spurs learning and thinking in new ways. It doesn't have to be great literature. It can be Twitter. It can be the comics. It can be fan fiction - even the vampire stuff! But reading is a habit that inspires ideas.

And getting your team to read, and then bringing them together for discussions of great or interesting ideas can be an invaluable practice. And frankly, if you refer back to point 4 and you're able to free up some time in their days – well, consider taking 30 minutes of that newly created space and turning it into an insight discussion. You never know what pearls you might uncover!

## #8. So I've got this problem...

It can be scary to be vulnerable with our teams. It's tempting to want to nail a halo over our heads, and stay that way – kind of like Fabio and the fan that perma-blows his hair. But the truth is, we all have things that challenge us. And the greatest leaders understand this: your job is not to be all-knowing. It's to build outstanding teams full of complementary skills that lend themselves to constructive debate and diversity of thought.

So if you've done that, if you've hired the best for their skills and ideas, then take advantage! Let go of the need to be the authority on all things. Share your own challenges. Invite them to participate in solving them with you. Two (or more) heads are better than one. You'll get better solutions, stronger engagement, and you'll build the muscles required for real collaboration.

## #9. Thank you. No – I mean, say it to them.

I'll be honest. If this one's a mystery shrouded in enigma for you, then we need to bust out the Leadership First Aid kit and stop the bleeding! Truly, I know that you know how important this is. So this one's not a flash of brilliance, but rather a critical reminder.

This is one of the simplest tools in our toolbox as leaders, and yet we so often overlook its value. Always, always be authentic. Don't start tossing out thank you's like Elvis with his Caddy's.

Nope – be thoughtful about the when and the where... but also don't be stingy.

Use it broadly. Not just upon successful project completion, but along the way. Thank people who've asked a bold question, or brought forth an insight. Thank them for taking a risk, even if it failed. Thank them for challenging you, and bringing constructive debate to the table. Take responsibility for making sure everyone feels valued for the contributions they've delivered – not just the shiny ones, but for all of the ingredients in the big beautiful sausage we call business!

## In conclusion...

Truly we hope the insights within this toolkit were helpful. If not massively insightful, then we hope they serve as a reminder of how we can bring our truest value to the table as leaders.

Do you have challenges? Questions? Then please be in touch any time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...about Lead Above Noise, or about Rachel Cooke (the author) please visit [www.LeadAboveNoise.com](http://www.LeadAboveNoise.com) or send us a note at [rachel@leadabovenoise.com](mailto:rachel@leadabovenoise.com)

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