

# Are You an “Upper” or a “Downer” To Others?

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Whether you affect people positively or negatively doesn't only determine what people think of you and their willingness to help you. It also profoundly influences how valuable you are to your employer—and therefore, your “Employability Quotient.”

This comes from the research conducted by the University of Virginia's Dr. Rob Cross and his associates.

## **It's Not Necessarily What's In Your Head, It's What's In Your Heart**

When Dr. Cross and his team began studying collaboration and information flow in organizations, they discovered it wasn't intellectual factors that determined who the “go to” people were in an organization. It wasn't a person's subject matter expertise, access to knowledge bases, or years of experience that determined whether people sought their advice, listened to their ideas, and wanted to collaborate with them.

To their surprise, they discovered that the number one factor determining an individual's overall productivity was whether they were a...

*...De-Energizer or an Energizer.*

In other words, people who uplifted others, who encouraged others to explore possibilities, who truly listened, and who showed respect for different points of view...

*...These people made things happen.*

Colleagues came to them for advice. When they needed help, others were eager to assist. When they had a new idea, people listened.

Conversely, co-workers avoided De-energizers whenever possible. People didn't want to hear what De-Energizers had to say and would find creative “work arounds” to avoid them.

## **Nothing Else Comes Close**

Dr. Cross's research revealed that whether people were considered to be Energizers or De-Energizers was four times stronger of a predictor of their productivity than the next closest factor.

Four times.

Therefore, if you're interested in maximizing your effectiveness—not to mention your employability—it will pay to reflect on whether you are perceived as an Energizer or a De-Energizer.

## **Characteristics of Energizers**

In his writings, Dr. Cross identifies core behaviors of both groups. Energizers:

1. Communicate a compelling vision when advocating an idea.

2. Create opportunities for others to make meaningful contributions.
3. Actively engage others when discussing issues.
4. Facilitate progress toward a goal, without forcing their preconceived agenda or bogging others down in unproductive meanderings and time wasting meetings.

### **Characteristics of De-Energizers**

On the other hand, De-Energizers:

1. Constantly air negative viewpoints.
2. Fail to listen to others.
3. Favor their own solutions.
4. Do not keep commitments.

When asked about what makes someone a De-Energizer, interviewees repeatedly talked about how:

*De-energizers “drained the energy of the other co-workers and groups, stifled creativity and hindered progress on initiatives.”*

Given that employee energy is the fuel that powers productivity, and makes courage and determination possible, De-Energizers cost their employers dearly.

While De-Energizers sucked the life out of those they dealt with, Energizers had a very different effect on their colleagues—and ultimately on the effectiveness of their organization:

“To a person, (our interviewees) indicated that energizing interactions enabled them to see new possibilities by integrating different expertise or perspectives. Energizing interactions

helped overcome natural disconnects between people with different backgrounds and expertise by creating the social space—the mutual respect, confidence and openness—that enabled possibilities to emerge.”

“In terms of implementation, energizers excel at attracting others to an initiative and convincing them to act on their ideas. The energizer’s ability to enthuse helps them get discretionary effort—and more of it—from those around them.”\*

### **It’s More Important Than Ever to be an Energizer**

Given the challenging times we face, we all need to do our part to uplift each other. This is not a time to be petty, whiny, or nitpicky. It is not a time to expect others to bear the burden of our bad moods or put up with our disrespectful behavior. If you are an individual contributor and not a manager, this is not the time to say “It’s up to management to improve morale.”

Each employee can have an effect on morale—whether positive or negative—based on whether he or she engages in Energizing or De-Energizing behaviors. At this point in history, each employee MUST do their part.

### **Are You More Of An Energizer Or A De-Energizer?**

To find out, answer the following questions in this simple self-assessment. While Dr. Rob Cross’s original self-assessment consists of 8 questions, I took the liberty of modifying some of his questions and adding a few more:

1. Do you make an effort to build relationships as a regular practice—getting to know your peers, colleagues from other departments, improving

communication, etc?

2. Do you keep your commitments (and if you drop the ball, do you apologize)?
3. Do you address tough issues without blaming or judging, and do you take responsibility for your part of problems?
4. When you disagree with someone, do you focus your discussion on the merits of their idea, rather than personally attacking them by questioning their judgment or intelligence, or expressing disapproval?
5. Are you “present” and engaged in conversations and meetings, rather than distracted or multitasking?
6. Are you open to other’s point of view or is your goal to show them why you are right (or smarter)?
7. Do you use your expertise and intellect to facilitate discovery when discussing challenging topics, rather than to steamroll the other person into accepting your point of view?
8. Do you look for opportunities to catch people doing things right, rather than point out their mistakes or minor slip-ups?
9. In meetings, do you track conversations, so your contribution is relevant and useful, rather than allow yourself to go off on tangents, despite their lack of relevance or importance to others?
10. Do you use humor to lighten the mood rather than as a weapon to put others down?
11. Do you offer help to others rather than focus primarily on how others can help you achieve your objectives?

## How to Put This To Use

1. Notice your reaction to the people you interact with over the next week. Observe whether they’re an “upper” or a “downer” and then examine what they did to create that effect. Ask yourself “Do I do these things?” (whether they are Energizing or De-Energizing behaviors).
2. Pay attention to what comes out of your mouth. Ask yourself “Is it primarily negative or positive?”
  - a. Negative = Focusing on what’s wrong, things you can’t change, why things won’t work, gossip, others’ mistakes, etc.
  - b. Positive = Focusing on the positive aspects of the current situation, hidden opportunities, ideas for making improvements, contributions people have made, how helpful someone has been to you, etc.
3. Notice if you focus on things you can’t do anything about, or on those things you can control or influence. When we focus on things we can’t do anything about, it brings us down. Engaging others in conversations about things you can’t control brings everybody down. It fosters helplessness and a victim mentality. Focusing on, and taking responsibility for, things you can do something about fosters a winner’s attitude.
4. When people bring up ideas or discuss challenging situations, practice keeping an open mind and focus your attention on possibilities.

## **By Doing This, You Win, and Everybody Wins**

By practicing becoming even more of an Energizer, you will not only be contributing to your success and “Employability Quotient”, you will also be doing what you can to improve morale, teamwork, and overall esprit de corps in your organization. By becoming more of an

Energizer, you will become an informal leader in your organization, regardless of your title and position. Your presence and way of being will inspire others to become their best selves and increase the odds they too will act as an Energizer.

**\*Source:** Charged Up: Managing the Energy that Drives Innovation from The Network Roundtable at the University of Virginia

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**About the Author:** David Lee is an internationally recognized authority on organizational and managerial practices that optimize employee performance, morale, and engagement. He is the author of *Managing Employee Stress and Safety*, as well as over fifty articles on organizational and individual performance that have been published in trade journals and books in North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. For more of his articles, go to [HumanNatureAtWork.com](http://HumanNatureAtWork.com). For information on David Lee’s services and programs, call 207-929-3344 or email: [Info@HumanNatureAtWork.com](mailto:Info@HumanNatureAtWork.com).

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## **Related Articles By David Lee**

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## Comments about David Lee's Work:

"Thank you for doing such an outstanding job keynoting our conference. As you could tell by the response, participants loved both the content and the delivery of your presentation."

*Dr. Ian Gawler, Director, The Gawler Foundation, Victoria, Australia*

"David's presentation style is unparalleled! The substantive and timely content of his subject materials is immediately adaptable to the workplace making his seminars an invaluable aid to an employer seeking to be an "Employer of Choice."

*Lynn M. Lombard, VP, MMG Insurance Company, ME*

"I've now worked with over 150 presenters since you last were a part of MEBSR's Spring Conference, and still you stand out as the best person we've ever had come and present on how we best work with one another, increase productivity and thrive."

*Sanna McKim, Executive Director, Maine Businesses for Social Responsibility, ME*

"Having seen a lot of speakers, I can't tell you just how impressed I was by David. I even waited in line to talk with him... I learned a great deal and laughed my butt off in the process... When we have someone who is so genuine and so well prepared, we owe it to each other to spread the word.... I take it very seriously when I recommend someone else's work and... he's great!"

*Naomi Judd*

"It was a sheer delight to sit back and listen, learn and laugh as David weaved his extensive knowledge of the material with his abundant practical wisdom generously sprinkled with personal reflections, stories and his own wholesome humor. David brings a rare blend of practical knowledge and genuine humanity to his presentations.

One cannot help but leave his sessions smarter, and a better human being, as he has a way of touching one's heart as well as one's head."

*Bill Gaertner, MD, Wisconsin*

"I was inspired by David's presentation. As onboarding new ladies and gentlemen at the Ritz-Carlton, Hotel Company LLC is one of the cornerstones of our success, I cannot agree more with his statement that, 'Everything you do in onboarding matters'."

*Diana Oreck, Vice President Global Learning & Leadership Center, Ritz Carlton, Maryland*

David, I wanted to thank you for being part our show in Las Vegas. The feedback I have received about your sessions was fantastic!!!! Three cheers to you.

*Julie McNeney, COO, International Council on Active Aging, Vancouver, BC*

"David's unique blend of humor and professionalism provides an engaging forum to absorb the content of his presentation. David does not hesitate to encourage participation and captures the audiences attention consistently throughout the seminar. I left the seminar feeling that this experience was well worth the time and money."

*Dennis Hebert, Jr., President, Merrimack Valley Chapter of the NH Credit Union League, NH*

"I can honestly say that your sessions were highlights for me at the conference. Since then I have perused your website and read many of the articles posted on there. Again, thank you and kudos to you for the great presentation!"

*Rob Huppée, Amica Mature Lifestyles Inc., Vancouver, British Columbia*

“Without you realizing, David woos you into learning by appealing to what you naturally know to be true by your own experience. He's incredibly down to earth and balances stories, humor, statistics and research to engage his audience in a time defying way. His programs will benefit anyone looking to gain awareness, passion and spirit in the workplace (and beyond).

I was so riveted and inspired that when David said he was wrapping up his program, I was dumbfounded by how much time had passed. I was convinced my watch was mistakenly an hour ahead. Thank you, David, for following your passion & curiosity from which we greatly benefit.”

*Krista Irmischer, Human Resources  
Manager, Jøtul North America, Maine*

“David has an uncanny ability to not only capture the attention of his audience, but also maintain a consistent level of interest in his students... Although I recognized and easily understood most of the concepts that

David presented in his class, his perspective (which I value immensely due to his knowledge and intellect) and innovative style of teaching sparked my curiosity and interest, and more importantly, triggered my brain to ask more questions, deeper questions...

David also has that rare ability to teach effectively to individuals that are at different levels of comprehension and understanding, and exhibit different styles of learning. ... Lastly, I would like to add a very important detail regarding David's style of teaching and his personality. His wit and great sense of humor were very appreciated in the class by all. He has what I like to call 'intelligent' humor which is a gift.”

*Aditi N. Thakur, Accenture, Colorado*

“What makes David unique is his ability to take analytical information, creatively apply it to real life workplace situations, and then deliver it in a really fun way.”

*Fran Liataud, DialogueWorks, Maine*