



Can You Fly? By Dr. Jim Beaubien

As a kid, airplanes fascinated me. I spent hours and hours building models and studying the phenomena of flight. I read everything I could get my hands on. Somewhere along the way I learned that people who design airplanes must deal with four primary forces: lift, thrust, drag and gravity. Thrust makes the airplane go forward, lift makes it go up, drag slows it down and gravity pulls it back to earth.

The motor provides thrust. The airplane's surface resistance to air causes drag. (The more aerodynamic the airplane, the lower the drag). Wings do the lifting and gravity, which is always present, gives the plane weight and pulls it back down to earth. Flight depends on sustaining enough lift to overcome gravity and enough thrust to overcome drag. As an adult, I've learned that leading organizations is a lot like designing airplanes. Leaders have to deal with forces that are analogous to lift, thrust, drag and gravity. Like aeronautical engineers, effective leaders must create organizations with enough lift to overcome gravity and enough thrust to overcome drag.

Vision gives an organization wings. Vision provides the lift an organization requires to overcome the gravity of inherent in its present circumstances. Through vision, effective leaders help people see what is possible and what they can become if they look beyond the current state of affairs. Powerful visions are the force that can lift organizations to new heights of accomplishment and help them soar.

Passion and enthusiasm provide the focused thrust an organization requires to move forward. Without concentrated effort, energy will diffuse and the organization won't be able to gain or sustain enough momentum to rise up on the wings of its vision. Effective leaders bring a sense of passion, enthusiasm and zeal to an organization and harness focus these forces to move it forward towards its vision.

Drag is the organization's natural resistance to forward movement. Cumbersome organizational structures, ineffective processes, bureaucracy, crisis management, clutter and disorganization are the biggest sources of organizational drag. Effective leaders constantly work to streamline their organizations and reduce drag so that forward and upward movement can be maximized.

Effective leaders know that gravity is the one force they can't control. Gravity is opportunistic. It's always there waiting to pull an organization down the moment it loses its lift or thrust. Since gravity can't be controlled, effective leaders sustain their organization's flight by focus on the other three controllable forces.

Check it out. Is your vision strong enough to inspire the people around you to lift your organization out of its present circumstances? Have you put your heart and soul into your leadership effort? Are you freeing people's passion and focusing their energy so that your organization has enough power to take off and sustain flight? Are you constantly streamlining your organization, eliminating clutter and minimizing drag?

If you do these things you will sustain enough lift to overcome gravity and enough thrust to overcome drag. And you will help your organization soar.

Your plane awaits.