

# Brief

## For those too busy:

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## Why won't they just get it? How to use emotion and meaning to unlock the brain and engage people

*If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea* Saint Exupéry

We are wired to base decisions on instinct and emotion. So why do leaders try to persuade, and manage change, in purely rational ways? Some use meaning and emotion naturally. Others are embarrassed to show their feelings or believe it is entering a dark world of spin, or it is simply too fluffy. We look at research on bringing emotion and meaning into how we connect with employees and all key stakeholders.

### Emotions – and the routes to building an emotional response

Emotions are central to how the brain monitors and responds to change. Without an emotional response it is unlikely a person will do something different. I will not believe something until I *want* to believe it. To *want* to believe requires an emotional hook. How do you let emotions in? The research suggests these aspects:

**Powerful:** being strong and clear about a core big idea – one that is powerful enough, or suggests enough difference from the past or present to make people stop and think

**Empathy:** the desire to listen and take notice will be directly influenced by whether the message comes from someone who sounds like they know how you already feel

**Concrete:** sounding real, practical, and tangible in ways that people will imagine having an impact on them is much more likely to be embraced than abstract ideas

**Unexpected:** If anger makes us shut down options and make actions quick and predictable, the unexpected makes us (literally) open our eyes, stop talking, listen and look for new information

### Meaning

The research suggests that *meaningful* work engages people more than anything - there is clearly strong overlap between meaning and emotion. Ideally leaders will want to use both to strengthen what they say. There are four levels of meaning that motivate and each organisation and job will bring different combinations and degrees of emphasis of each:

1. *Making a difference to your own colleagues:* the satisfaction, fulfillment and fun of teams
2. *Making a difference to customers:* making an impact on their lives in small and big ways
3. *Making a difference to the company or market:* beating competitors, changing an industry
4. *Making a difference to the world:* to the environment, the economy, society

Research also shows how to build meaning and what leaders often do to destroy meaning:

**Clarity:** simple, clear direction and purpose. What the US military call 'commanders intent'

*Evil twin:* the curse of knowledge – you are so close to the subject, you find detail irresistible

**Credibility:** ensuring reality matches rhetoric, with consistency across leadership

*Evil Twins (many):* attention deficit disorder ("yet another initiative of the month"), or castles in the air ("Where's the training program?"), or false promises ("don't fake 'nice', if you're not")

**Connection:** creating a clear line of sight between the employee and the big idea

*Evil Twin:* meaningless mantras - 'Maximise shareholder value' and others

**Celebration:** the emotional, meaning – what is different about what we are doing

*Evil Twin:* the icebox – sounding like you are auditioning to play Star Trek's Spock