

Getting the best out of your team

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I consider myself very lucky to have always wanted to work in conservation. I remember my class mates discussing a whole host of jobs in our career advice sessions at school, but I always had my heart firmly set on conservation. I just knew it was what I wanted to do. I still feel the same and get up each morning to try and make a difference to the natural world.

This week [Barry discusses the idea described by Stephen Covey in his book, The 8th Habit, that we are engaged at four levels: body, heart, mind and spirit](#). I think it's fair to say I am engaged in conservation in spirit – and I suspect that most people working in conservation feel the same. Let's face it, we're not doing it for the money!

Even though most people who work in conservation feel completely dedicated to the cause, it is vital not to take anyone – or their goodwill – for granted. Even the most passionate and enthusiastic conservationist can become disheartened and demotivated given the wrong leadership. Our challenge as conservation leaders is to make the most of our limited time and resources. If you want to do that it's essential to have a motivated team who are completely engaged in their work. That's where Covey's four stages of engagement come in. At this stage in your career you may not be line managing staff, but as we've discussed in previous weeks, you will almost certainly be working with volunteers in some capacity or other. It's just as important to get them engaged, as it is, staff.

So, how do you get your team really engaged in their work? Let's look at each of the four ways in turn.

Body

As Barry describes, this is all about meeting the physical needs of your team. It's vital that you ensure they have a safe working environment and that they have all the necessary tools or other resources to complete the job. This might be particularly important if you're leading a conservation work party, but it goes for any kind of work in the conservation sector.

Heart

This should be an easy one because it relates to how you treat people, but it's amazing how often people overlook it. Showing you are grateful to a volunteer or member of staff for helping you with a task is one of the simplest things you can do, and yet people often forget to do it. Equally if someone does a good job – make sure you tell them. Don't assume that they know what you're thinking. Praising people at the appropriate time will boost their confidence and make them more motivated the next time they're working with you.

Finally, don't forget to have fun. Conservation is a serious business, but it can also be incredibly rewarding. Don't take yourself too seriously and make sure you can have a laugh with your team. Some of the most memorable and rewarding conservation work I have been involved in has been due in no small part to the people involved, and the fun we had.

Mind

One of the things I have always tried to do for people who work in my team – whether they are staff or volunteers, is to challenge them. I believe that it's only once we push ourselves out of our comfort zone that we are truly able to make a difference. In order for people in your team to be able to do that, though, it's essential that you provide clear instructions and the necessary resources to do a job – freedom within a framework as Barry describes in *Lead Like Mary*. They will not always feel ready for the challenge you have set, but if you show trust in people and encourage them, then it's amazing what they can achieve. Giving people more responsibility makes them feel empowered and enables you and your team to get more done. Its win-win! I also find in conservation that we are often worried about asking volunteers to do things. Don't be! They want to help and will feel more motivated if you trust them with an important task. It's so tempting sometimes to think it's easier to do a job yourself. This may be true in the short term, but it will be better for you and your team in the long run if you delegate the task to someone else.

Spirit

As I have already said, I believe many people working in conservation are already engaged in spirit – that's why they do what they do. This means we are at an advantage compared to people working in other sectors, but it is vital not to take this for granted. As Barry points out in *Lead Like Mary*, it is really important that there is a link between the values an individual holds dear and what a whole organisation stands for and demonstrates. I believe that if you think carefully about how best to engage your team in their work – in body, heart and mind – then you will be well on your way to make sure they are completely engaged in spirit; that's how positive change starts to happen.