

LEADERSHIP: SIMPLE WORDS

Word Count: 1,555

The most important word a leader must always keep in mind is the “P” word: It isn’t persistent, or perseverance, or even purpose, though each is important. NO, this one is far more important because without it, there is no need to persevere or have a purpose. The “P” word is: People. There is no substitute or even exchange for this commodity. Successfully led sports teams are living proof of the importance of the “P” word in leadership. A coach can be the greatest motivator, organizer, strategist, and taskmaster, but he or she is ultimately dependent on the talent, courage, and dedication of the people recruited for the team. The unfortunate truth is that most managers never realize the difference between the coach or a leader of a team and the manager of an office, figuratively or literally. These managers continue to believe that management is about managing or controlling or being the one in control of people. When was the last time you tried to control someone? How did that all work out for you?

The words are simple; management *should* be about the people. They are almost cliché, but words are often simple. People are not. Deadlines are simple; getting people to meet them is not. Projects and tasks are simple; inspiring quality work from employees intrinsically motivated to do their personal best, is not. Though management should be about the people, it usually isn’t. Simply put, management is about the things managed, whereas leadership is about the people. We manage things, we lead people. It’s that simple.

So, how is it done? How do you meet deadlines and inspire quality work that is perhaps even more than you asked for? Can you imagine? It’s simple: acknowledge, recognize, and respect the unique nature and value of each of the employees’ you work with. See her uniqueness and treat her according to who she is. See his value and respect his worth to the team, department, and organization. I must confess, admitting that each person that reports to you is unique, in all of its simplicity, is easy. Recognizing what that unique trait or quality is might be a little more difficult. Implementing this recognition and respect, if you have not done it in the past can be downright tricky. This is primarily because it involves risk and trust. Two more simple words. Right? Though we think leadership is easy to do, it isn’t. What is simple is talking about how we would like to do it differently. What becomes more complicated is implementing the changes necessary to become better. You can do, but that simple “do” word is what it takes.

Lessons in Leadership: Be Interested in Their Growth, Almost as Much as They Are.

Growth can be personal or professional, and I can almost hear some of you saying “why should I care about the growth of my employee --er--uh-- the people that I have the privilege of leading? Isn’t it enough that I provide their paychecks and give them time off?” Sure it is.

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There is a large gap between enough, or good enough, and great. Managing is good enough; leadership is great. It is enough to do as you do now, but I thought you wanted to lead those people and to do that you must be at least interested in their growth. (Don't you hate it when someone says yes you can do something and then points out exactly why you should choose not to do it?)

Being interested in a person's growth can take a number of forms and it will usually gain you his or her respect, dedication, and often loyalty, if done with sincerity. More importantly, it will develop a more productive, fulfilled and effective direct report. If in the past, prior to reading this book, you have displayed little or no interest in the employees on the team you manage and their growth, then start small and MEAN it. If you are not truly interested and have little or no desire to care, yet you know that it can gain you some significant benefits from those people that work with you, then fine, but know that missing this step in your leadership journey, may cause you to stumble, or even fail as a leader.

Lessons in Leadership: What do you care?

Do you? I have read many times that politicians make strangers feel like close friends. This is due in part to the fact that close friends are loyal and motivated to do well *for* their friends. Strangers usually are not. Treat employees with the same interest that you would a close friend on a professional level. Some politicians may do this to get votes. Leaders do it to promote growth and opportunity. Make them feel as if you care about their growth, who they are, and where they want to go, and give them some guidelines, parameters, and tools for the journey. I have been told that "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" and though the source of that quote is still unknown, it seems to hold true most of the time. The folks that work with you must have a theme, a goal, and a purpose in their lives, as well as at the office. If they don't know where they are aiming, they don't have a goal. (Or frankly, a chance)

The nation's largest fleet car buyer had a goal to live her life in such a way that when she died, someone could say, she cared. And look at the following of people she had. There are over 8,000 pink Cadillac's on the road and over five hundred thousand cosmetic consultants for a business that was begun by a very skilled and determined leader who cared about the growth of each and every one of the women who became involved in her business. Her motto was to imagine everyone out there with an invisible sign around their neck that says:

"Make Me Feel Special"

Who can argue with a motto that has the support of a whole fleet of pink people proving it to be effective?

Whether or not you truly harbor sincere concern for those you manage and their growth, is up to you. I offer two notes of caution in this area. First, insincerity is very easy to detect and creates a very ugly reaction from some people.

Secondly, if you try to fake really caring and are very good at, going through all the appropriate motions, which I recommend only if you have Grammy award-winning acting skills, you may be surprised at the positive feedback you receive. You may find that what you are doing becomes less and less insincere and more and more real with the help of that positive reinforcement. Remember Pavlov?

But, as a final caution, whether it is real and sincere or of the “fake it until you make it” variety, care about those that you manage at your own risk. They may actually change from headcounts to people right before your very eyes. They may actually grow and change and learn and then, they might care back, which in the event that you ever need help from them in your own growth toward leadership, may be highly advantageous.

What’s that? You would feel uncomfortable asking an employee you manage or lead for help? Asking for help is human. Oh, I see, being human causes us to remove the Super Manager (hear the echo?) cape and that could be a problem unless of course, you want to be a Super Leader.

Lessons in Leadership: Uh-oh is different than so there!

The people you work with and lead will make mistakes. Well, duh! A mistake is an action or behavior done differently than the guidelines or instructions set forth for such a behavior or action. Adding salt instead of sugar to your apple pie recipe is a mistake and a fine waste of a good pie! Taking your trusty Swiss Army knife that you got as a graduation gift, through airport security in your carry-on is a mistake that may cause you to miss your flight. Running a red light in the company car while you are on the cell phone and looking for the French fry that escaped the box and landed in between the seats, is a mistake that could cost you your life. Mistakes have varying degrees and varying consequences, yet for the most part, they can and should be forgiven. As no one is perfect, mistakes are a way of life...er... should I say learning.

We are given guidelines and instructions, rules, policies, recipes and instruction manuals. If we commit an action or behavior that is clearly outlined as prohibited and we do this without knowledge of the outline, it is a mistake. If we know the rule and break it anyway, it is called a violation and that’s a whole different book. Let us focus on those times when the people you lead, and that may report to you, break a rule or policy on accident. If you can allow them to make mistakes, as you know they will, then chances are good they will forgive yours... that is, if you make any. Managers make mistakes; Leaders must be different, right? Wrong.