

The Journey to Great Leadership Starts with You

By Charlie Westra • MMTc

Leadership is changing. Employees are no longer satisfied with the traditional, “Do as I say, or else” method of managing. According to a recent Gallup study, 50 percent of adults reported leaving a job to get away from their direct supervisor. They left in search of true relational leadership, in which their supervisors communicate appreciation frequently and value them as people. These leaders know that by bringing out the best in themselves they can in turn bring out the best in their employees, leading to better business results than ever before.

This is the type of leader that supervisors must become in order to maintain staff and success within their companies. Although the journey to becoming a relational leader is complex, I have boiled it down to four critical points:

1 *Identify your leadership style* and its strengths and weaknesses. Becoming a better leader requires time and dedication, and potentially a complete character transformation. This process begins with knowing yourself. Once you have gained an understanding of your personal leadership style and recognize its impact on your workers, you can then begin to modify and perfect it. Not sure where to start? Here’s a hint: Leaders can maximize results by earning the respect of those they lead. Once respect is established, opposition among employees decreases, while productivity soars.

2 *Find out, and relate to, what your employees value.* The environment within your workplace can be greatly improved by building friendships with your team. Engage with employees on a personal level by learning their likes and interests, and share your own. This will help employees feel noticed and valued as people, which will positively impact their performance. After all, it only takes three words to ruin employee relationships: “I don’t care.”



Three more detrimental words? “Not my problem.” By knowing and relating to what your direct reports care about, they will feel accepted, understood and cared for.

3 *Sacrifice some time and energy* to connect with each team member on a regular basis. Getting to know your co-workers will establish a personal connection with them and improve your leadership abilities. As you discover different behavioral characteristics and values among workers, you can then determine the best approach for how to effectively lead each person based on their personalities and needs.

4 *Communicate appreciation.* Communication is a complex process requiring positive affirmations, both verbal and non-verbal. When interacting with workers, a little gratitude goes very far. Employees want to know that their work is important and valued. In a recent survey conducted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, employees identified appreciation as the most desired

quality in the workplace. They want more than just a paycheck; remember to thank each employee personally for a job well done so they know they are appreciated and noticed.

Following these steps could mean the difference between being a person that employees *have* to follow, and a person they *want* to follow. By treating workers as people first and employees second, improved business results and workplace environments will follow. External leadership training may be necessary to begin this leadership journey, but it will be worth the return on investment. Your employees will thank you for it (after you’ve thanked them, of course). ⚙️



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