

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2020 Edition

Ask the Expert

Today's Best Managers: What Makes Them Great

Building ideal relationships with employees



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Q: Have you ever wondered what employees really want? What's involved in building these ideal relationships with employees?

A: If you search Google for leadership or management skills, thousands of results are catapulted to your computer in a nanosecond. Models, theories, articles, books, podcasts, You Tube, the list is endless. How complicated is it? We know employees expect a lot from their managers. Some managers are very successful in building strong results-oriented, satisfied teams. What are they doing well?

While waiting for a client in a coffee shop, I overheard two employees complaining bitterly about their supervisor. I fessed up, told them what I did for a living and asked them if they would be willing to talk about what 'better' would look like. Their answer was not complicated. It is however very hard for some managers to action.

Excellent managers understand who they are, how they show up and the impact they have on others. They have a way of BEING that includes Caring, Compassion, Courage and Conviction, Clear Communication and are Confident in their Competence without being arrogant. This way of being helps build their own and others' skills to produce results in a positive work environment.

Really effective managers work on themselves first. They are self-aware. They understand and manage their emotions. They respond. They don't react. When people are blind to their own emotions, they are poor at reading them in others. Successful managers frequently ask for feedback to help them build their skills.

They seek to understand their impact on people, issues, situations and teams. They create safety and ask in a non-threatening way. They listen and act on what they hear. Sometimes it is as simple learning the answers to:

- what do I need to keep doing because it works?
- what do I need to fix? Good idea but needs a little work
- what should I stop because it does not add value and may do more harm than good? And finally,
- what should I start doing because it would really make a positive difference?

Start with CARE. Caring means to start with the heart. Collaborative managers keenly invested in team building create ground rules for behaviour to build a supportive and trusting culture. Caring also means holding people capable. That means not micromanaging. It does mean enabling people to be responsible and accountable by giving them autonomy and flexibility in their work. Caring managers treat employees as adults who know what to do and how to do it. Caring engenders trust. A culture of trust and support enables managers to work with staff in a way that inspires growth.

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Show COMPASSION. Compassion goes a long way in shaping how employees think about you and whether or not they will give you discretionary effort. That's the effort between the minimum they have to do and what they are willing to give freely. Compassion is important when catastrophe strikes and with the smaller stuff. Compassion helps when someone needs a day off because a pet passes away, when someone is going through an unusually tough stretch with aging parents or sick children or with an unexpected minor emergency. All too often these types of requests are met with resistance. Saying no to the employee in these circumstances is not forgotten when the moment passes. It sets up a negative tone for the relationship.

Demonstrate COURAGE and CONVICTION. These two are game changers. All too often, courage often means telling the truth to power. It means going against the grain. It's often out on a limb saying the hard thing that needs to be said for the sake of the greater good. Employees need to see your courage and to know you have their back. Conviction is sometimes tough. Excellence comes in striking the balance between believing you are right and sticking with it while preserving relationships. It is a fine but critical line. Successful managers are courageous and speak with conviction and humility. They deal in facts not assumption and invite others into the conversation. They also listen with heart.

COMMUNICATE effectively and CLEARLY. Successful managers also know what and how to communicate. They constantly develop their communication skills. They are present and attentive to others. They say hello. They engage in small talk about what matters to their employees. They get to know people on a personal level. Sometimes we have to have the soft skill of communication to do the hard thing of conversation. This is where empathy, clarity and conciseness are key. It's important to eliminate the guesswork in conversation. Skilled communicators take the time to address assumptions, clarify misunderstanding and clearly state expectations. They practice other centeredness and look after mutual interests.

Demonstrate CONFIDENCE and COMPETENCE. This is not about knowing it all or having to have the answers. It is about being confident and competent in dealings with people and trusting that the answers are in the room. It is about coming with the right questions to coach and coax people out of their comfort zones, take risks and grow. It's growing with them.

To sum it up, successful managers care and show compassion. The demonstration of compassion enables courage. Courage in balance with conviction creates trust. Mastering skilful communication enables the hard conversations in a respectful, caring and compassionate way. When we have the hard conversations with care and clarity, we build confidence and competence both in others and ourselves. It all starts with self-awareness. It requires leading oneself first before being able to lead others.

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