



Leading With Compassion

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



LEADERS WHO ACT FIRST AS HUMANS AND SECOND AS MANAGERS WILL EXPERIENCE A MYRIAD OF REWARDS

Each day, humans have an array of opportunities to demonstrate compassion, from opening the door for a young mother pushing a stroller to providing a listening ear to a neighbor who is going through a rough patch. Whether the person needing compassion is a total stranger, an acquaintance, a friend, or a family member, the benefits of acting with compassion accrue to both the recipient and the giver.

This same principle applies in the workplace, where acting with compassion can make a world of difference to an employee who needs support or understanding, especially during a difficult time. Leaders who act first as humans and second as managers will experience a myriad of

rewards that will have a lasting impact on the people and organizations they lead.

A title from a recent article in the Harvard Business Review caught my eye by posing the question, “Why Do So Many Managers Forget They’re Human Beings?” The authors provide statistical and anecdotal evidence which indicates that many managers lack self-awareness and believe they are more inspiring and motivating than they really are. In a 2016 Gallup engagement survey, 82 percent of employees rated their leaders as uninspiring. Ouch! It is no wonder that many forward-thinking organizations are working hard to make their workplaces more people-centered by training their leaders to be more human.



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So what does being a human leader look like? Here are a few examples:

- An employee's beloved pet has just passed away. A human leader might provide paid time off under a PTO policy or even send a card and/or flowers.
- A team has been working long hours to finish a major project. A human leader would acknowledge this extra effort in person and/or via a card or email, as well as consider extra time off, a free meal(s), or gift card.
- The weather forecast is calling for more snow and dangerous road conditions. During rush hour, a human leader wouldn't just plan to personally work remotely, but instead look for ways to maintain productivity while keeping the entire team safe by an early closing, telecommuting options, etc.

In each of these examples, the article recommends the leader can ask the following question: "If my child or parent or good friend worked here, would they appreciate this decision?" By translating the managerial questions that arise in any given day into personal questions, the chances of striking a healthy balance

between business and individual needs are greatly increased. As a double-check, a leader should also consider whether they have something personal to gain from any given decision or if they are truly acting in a selfless manner that will positively impact others.

I can guess what you're probably thinking. Some of the above examples of being a human leader don't seem very realistic in your line of work. Your position requires that you and your team meet the nutritional needs of others—sometimes hundreds of people—each day, so it's difficult to grant time off without jeopardizing the well-being of your clients.

Also, the labor market in food service is extremely tight, and choosing to give time off could mean you're understaffed. I'm not suggesting that you compromise your mission of providing safe and nutritious meals to your clientele. Instead, I'm advocating that you look for ways to show compassion and humanity to your staff. Yes, granting time off is challenging, but if the spirit of human kindness is strong among your team, other staff members may be willing to fill in for a fellow employee in need of (or deserving of) time off. Once you help cultivate that

Continued on page 28

CONSIDER CARDS, GIFT CERTIFICATES,
OR other tokens of appreciation as a way to
inspire or acknowledge staff.



culture of kindness, your employees will recognize that their needs will also be met if their unique circumstances require time off. Your staff will see that if Sally is permitted to attend a special Monday morning recital for her daughter, she may be willing to fill in for a fellow employee at another time who wants to visit their gravely ill aunt. Ever heard the expression *one hand washes the other*?

In order to avoid scheduling nightmares, be judicious when you grant time off so no one has the expectation that it can be a frequent occurrence. Every workplace is different, so check with HR to confirm you have the latitude to occasionally grant time off to reward a hard worker, or to permit an employee extra time to grieve their cherished pet. Above all, make sure the needs of your clients are never compromised by your desire to lead your employees with compassion.



BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE LEADER

is a marathon, not a sprint. Slow down your process and think through your decisions. Be a human first and then a manager.

If granting time off or flexible scheduling just isn't an option or presents too many challenges in your workplace, then consider cards, gift certificates, or simply kind words as tools to inspire or acknowledge staff. Whatever you do, express your gratitude in a sincere and timely way. Don't wait for an employee's annual performance review to give them that well-deserved accolade or pat on the back. And don't shower them with false praise. They should be meeting performance expectations and receiving regular feedback about their strengths and weaknesses.

If you feel that certain employees are taking advantage of your caring nature by requesting an inordinate amount of time off or expecting "perks" whenever they perform well, be clear about your expectations. Be human, but not gullible or foolish.

The bottom line when leading with compassion is to follow the "golden rule," which tells us to do to others what you want them to do to you. So if you enjoy an occasional shout-out for a job well done or time off after a marathon strategic planning session, chances are your staff would appreciate those gestures too.

Becoming an effective and successful leader is a marathon, not a sprint. Some days it is easy to make tough decisions with compassion, and other days it is more challenging.

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RESOURCE

Why Do So Many Managers Forget They're Human Beings? Rasmus Hougaard, Jacqueline Carter, and Vince Brewerton. Harvard Business Review, January 29, 2018.

My advice is to slow down your process and think through your decisions. Be a human first and then a manager. Over time, you will find that acting with compassion becomes second nature once you begin to see the transformational power it has on employee motivation and workplace culture. In this day and age, a little compassion goes a long way! **E**

CE Questions | MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



This Level I article assumes that the reader has entry level knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a foundation of basic concepts of the subject matter.

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- In a 2016 Gallup engagement survey, what percent of employees rated their leaders as uninspiring?
 - 36 percent
 - 49 percent
 - 82 percent
- In the Harvard Business Review article "Why Do So Many Managers Forget They're Human Beings?" the authors recommend that leaders ask this question:
 - Would I benefit from my decision to act with compassion towards my staff?
 - If my child or parent or good friend worked here, would they appreciate this decision?
 - Would my desire to show compassion be viewed as a sign of weakness?
- After you cultivate a culture of kindness in your workplace, you must
 - Meet the individual needs of every employee
 - Ensure that your employees don't take advantage of your caring nature
 - Punish staff members who don't practice kindness toward fellow employees
- If you lead with compassion, your mission of providing safe and nutritious meals to clients
 - Can be compromised to ensure you meet the needs of your employees
 - Should be changed so your employees come first
 - Must never be compromised
- In order to avoid scheduling nightmares, you should
 - Be judicious when you grant time off
 - Allow employees to trade hours routinely so their individual time off needs are met
 - Accept that your mission will occasionally be compromised to accommodate staffing needs
- Cards, gift certificates, and kind words are
 - Always better than flexible scheduling
 - Are effective means of giving staff members a well-deserved accolade
 - Must be used often in order to be effective
- If you enjoy an occasional shout-out for a job well done or time off after a marathon work session,
 - Then you shouldn't be in a management position
 - You need to express that to your supervisor
 - Chances are good that your staff would appreciate those gestures too