



# Avoiding Leadership Mistakes

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



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Leaders of today are followed because of what they do and how they make employees feel, not simply because of what they say. We've probably all encountered a leader whose example said, "Do as I say, not as I do." This kind of attitude sets the wrong tone in your workplace. You may have this attitude without even realizing it! Here are some ways you can make sure you are setting the right tone as a leader.

## BE A LEADER WITH VISION

Have you taken the time to develop a mission statement for your food and nutrition department? Does everything you do fit within that mission and vision? Your vision is what will help you find purpose in mundane tasks and

guide your team through difficult changes. A leader without vision is subject to all the varying visions of employees. As good as some of their ideas may be, having several visions within a department can create chaos. As you approach new ideas, decide whether they fit into your vision, keeping the end-result in mind. If an idea doesn't fit, discard it and move on to the next suggestion.

## LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

We often think we are listening when we are actually formulating a response in our minds. Stop and listen! This is a valuable skill when communicating with staff members, the people you serve, and even your family. Listen for an understanding of what the person is trying



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to say. Repeat back to them what you heard to give them an opportunity to confirm or correct your interpretation. Ask questions. Perhaps you've had an employee who has been late to work several times. Approach your conversation with her to understand why she's been late, not just to tell her she's violating a policy.

*Case in point:* A manager once told me she was going to have to fire one of her best employees for repeatedly being tardy. This was uncharacteristic for the employee, but he had arrived at work late five times in a row. Instead of confronting this employee and informing him that he was being fired due to habitual lateness, she said, "We need to talk about your tardiness, which falls short of our policy. I know this is out of character for you. Is there something going on?" The employee went on to tell his boss that the only alarm clock he had was his cell phone and it had not been holding the charge overnight, so this employee didn't have anything to wake him up. The manager bought him an alarm clock, and this simple gesture solved the problem and helped the manager retain a valued team member. In addition, it showed the

employee that he was well regarded by the manager.

### BE A LEADER PEOPLE WANT TO WORK WITH

The majority of employees leave a job because of their relationship with their boss, according to the Gallup report, "The State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders." It doesn't always come down to money! When you communicate with your staff members, get to know each one on a personal level rather than just someone who works for you. You don't need to spend your non-working hours with them, but at least show an interest in their lives. Try working alongside an employee once a week. Always be asking questions! This generally makes you more likeable and trustworthy. As you gain trust, you gain followers (also known as gaining influence). As you gain influence, you can accomplish more through your followers and achieve your departmental goals.

### VALUE OTHERS MORE AND YOURSELF LESS

Working in the service industry, you may think it's obvious that you are there to serve others. However, it's not always

the case. Have you ever made rude comments about other department heads or overheard others do so? Have you ever told your employees, "I can't help you right now, I need to leave early today"? Have you complained about a request made by one of your customers, such as "We always have to make something special for Mrs. Smith"? You can even give others the impression that you are more important if you aren't present during meal service and willing to help. Valuing others more than yourself doesn't mean you put yourself down or that you have to work all the holidays, all the called-off shifts, etc. It *does* mean that you give your team the tools they need to be successful. This will look different everywhere. One way to gauge would be to ask your team if they have everything they need from you for any given task.

### BUILD INTO OTHERS

Foodservice employees are coming to work with varying levels of skills and knowledge bases. You can't assume they know how to chop an onion anymore. After you've assessed their skills and knowledge, provide them

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with at least the basics. I've heard people say they didn't want to teach employees because they might just leave and take that knowledge with them. Yes, they are right. It's not as common now to have a cook who's been around for 30 years. However, if you provide work that is meaningful to each employee, they are more likely to stay longer and perform better. Your goal is to build into them, so they don't need you to hold their hand, so they can have some freedom in how their tasks get done and maybe even discover something new.

### BE AN ETHICAL LEADER

As a leader in your department, you're often faced with ethical challenges. Don't allow personal prejudices or the views of team members to cloud your professional judgment in any way. Keep your department vision front and center in all decision-making, and show every

employee and every client respect, even though this might be difficult at times. Use this same good judgment when dealing with your foodservice suppliers. Resist the urge to play favorites, and keep the best interests of your operation top of mind. Make sure that in all you do, your conduct is beyond reproach!

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## FOLLOW WELL

Yes, even leaders follow someone. Be an example of what following authority looks like. You certainly know how frustrating it can be when an employee wants to follow her own drumbeat or refuses to be part of the team. For example, imagine your director asking you to implement a new salad bar or dessert cart without breaking the bank. Do you tell your director how your guests don't really

want that sort of thing and drag your feet? What does that say to your staff about how to follow leadership? It tells them they only have to follow when they agree! Being an experienced follower gives you empathy as a leader. Great leaders should be great followers too! **E**

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- Which practice is *not* a good way to set a positive tone as a leader
  - Value yourself more than others
  - Listen to understand
  - Follow well
- Developing a mission statement for your department
  - Is time wasted because employees will ignore it
  - Helps your team find purpose in mundane tasks and difficult changes
  - Is unnecessary because the overall organization has its own mission statement
- One way a leader can demonstrate their listening skills is to
  - Repeat back to the person what you heard and allow them to correct your interpretation
  - Show proof of a hearing test conducted within the past 90 days
  - Ask another person if you've accurately interpreted what the employee was trying to say
- According to the Gallup report "The State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders," the majority of employees leave a job due to
  - The perception they are being underpaid
  - Long hours
  - Their relationship with their boss
- To be a leader that people want to work with, it's good to
  - Get to know employees on a personal level
  - Work alongside employees and ask questions
  - Both A and B
- Valuing others more than yourself means
  - Putting yourself down in front of others
  - Working all the holidays and called-off shifts
  - Giving your team the tools they need for success
- Foodservice workers come to your organization with varying skill levels so
  - Don't invest much training time in new recruits because they will probably take their skills elsewhere
  - Provide work that is meaningful so they stick around
  - Require that everyone who interviews for a position demonstrates cooking proficiency

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