

Great leaders don't follow Golden Rule

Envision a world where technical skills, educational degrees, professional achievements and awards no longer matter. Assume everyone is blessed with equal brains, talent and connections. Everyone is highly skilled, well educated and ambitious. Imagine that you lead an organization in this world. How would you decide whom to hire, whom to promote and whom to fire?

Though people skills should always be important, these skills (or lack of) become more pronounced and more important as one moves higher in an organization. This may seem like common sense, but why do so many leaders seem to forget to use their common sense? People skills are often referred to as the "soft" skills, but they can be the harder skills to learn and to practice consistently. The secret is to go against the Golden Rule — "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In the book "First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently," Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman concluded that people should treat employees as the employees would like to be treated, not as the leaders would want to be treated.

Long ago, leaders were warriors and the emphasis was on winning battles. This was followed by an era when leaders were kings and their focus was keeping people in line. Many executive coaches and authorities on leadership now are

coaching leaders to be healers, people who can heal the wounds taking place in many workplaces. Authentic, caring and honest people are needed to help people find meaning in what they do. We often

say that we aspire to be inspirational leaders. "Aspire" and "inspire" come from the Latin root meaning "breathe," which is connected to the word for spirit. Leaders should breathe life into people or fill them with spirit and hope.

Do you know how the people around you feel about your leadership skills? Do you have ways of finding out how you are perceived as a boss?

Assume you had to rewrite your resume and the only data that are important to the position concern interpersonal or soft skills. Could you say that you:

Listen well; give honest and appropriate feedback; receive feedback without getting defensive; share information; trust others and act in ways so they trust you; recognize people for work well done; admit your mistakes; defer to others when appropriate; resist playing favorites; allow for creativity in thought



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and work; respond to e-mail promptly; answer important questions directly and immediately; confront situations that could escalate into conflict; and thank people often, in person and in public.

Buckingham and Coffman concluded after 25 years of interviews with more than 1 million workers that the single most important variable in employee productivity and loyalty is the quality of the relationship between employees and their direct supervisors. What most employees want from their supervisors is the same thing kids want most from their parents: someone who cares for them, sets clear expectations, values their unique qualities and encourages their growth and development. In other words, the greatest sources of satisfaction in the workplace are internal and emotional — the soft skills. In fact, they found that people do not leave bad companies; they leave bad bosses.

Des Moines' own Jim Autry was a pioneer in the spirit-at-work movement. In his groundbreaking book "Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership," he writes that being effective is about caring for people and that management should be a calling to create an environment where people can grow personally, feel fulfilled and contribute to a common good.

We have to make good common sense more common. □

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