



## Five Reasons To Lead by Example

Successful businesses rely on infrastructures—systems, technology, policies, procedures, chain of command, and others. Businesses have an emotional infrastructure, too, made up of values, traditions, habits and attitudes. This infrastructure is to your corporate culture what plumbing and wiring are to your home, and employees are a huge part of it.

Some leaders are overwhelmed by the idea of emotional infrastructure. It's intangible—touchy-feely. Yet it's as important to success as any other infrastructure. You can tweak your financial infrastructure once a week and stay on course. But emotional infrastructure needs nurturing every day. Here are five ways that leading by example can provide the recommended daily allowance of TLC for your emotional infrastructure needs.

### 1. Example > Trust > Motivation > Engagement

People follow leaders they trust. If you want to test this, try saying one thing to your staff and then doing another. If you undermine trust, employee motivation and engagement will suffer, which will then negatively impact your bottom line. Leaders have to hold themselves to the same standards as everyone else, and maybe even higher ones. Trust isn't automatic—you have to demonstrate that you are trustworthy.

It's true that leaders' first responsibility is the fiscal health of the company. In most cases, employees' interests align with the interests of the company, but we all know there are situations in which interests conflict. If you have a robust foundation of trust, it will be easier for employees to understand and come to terms with unpopular decisions. Ultimately, you can't maintain a fiscally healthy company if your emotional infrastructure is diseased.

Here are some important best practices in leading by example:

Be present and attentive when interacting with others.

Respect others' time; don't be late, and keep meetings on task.

Respect others' ideas by listening.

Always follow through on your commitments.

### 2. That's Just the Way Role Models Roll

There are countless idioms and parables around the idea of leading by example, from "do unto others" to "walk the walk" to "be the change you want to see in the world." Leaders have plenty of opportunities to do this, for example, while modeling a proactive approach to self-improvement by getting involved in professional organizations. We heard another great example from a hiring manager recently: "Let candidates know that if I ask them to come in on a Saturday, they can expect to see me there, too." When times are tough, leaders should be seen fighting the fight. Julius Caesar wore a bright red cloak into battle for the express purpose of letting his troops see him fighting beside them.

### 3. Micromanagement is a Model T in a Maserati World

The landscape is constantly changing, and what worked before may no longer be effective. For example, more and more companies allow remote and telecommute options—and they should—but in those situations, you simply have to give up a degree of control. Values are changing as well. While it's always dangerous to generalize, the Millennials, who make up an increasing percentage of the workforce, see themselves as independent contractors, regardless of their employment status. It's part of their Me, Inc. mindset, and they expect to be empowered.

The best alternative to micromanagement is leading by example. We call it micro-training and macro-managing: hire passionate people,

train them well in your vision and processes, provide them the tools they need, and step out of the way. Then provide guidance and reinforcement through role modeling.

#### 4. Signal booster for values

Assuming your company's values are more than just a cat poster in the break room, they are a core part of your emotional infrastructure. Just as your IT infrastructure broadcasts WiFi signals, your emotional infrastructure needs to broadcast values. Your leadership team should pick up those value, and broadcasts and boost the signal in every situation so that your employees maintain a strong connection to the values.

An excellent guideline for reinforcing values via leading by example is servant leadership: sharing the power, putting the needs of others first, and helping people improve their skills and performance. Many companies on *Fortune's* list of Best Companies to Work For employ servant leadership, including SAS, Zappos.com, Aflack, Starbucks, REI, and others.

#### 5. Accountability? That's a Big 10/4, Good Buddy

Some may be concerned that accountability suffers under this kind of approach, but it actually increases. Employees are accountable to leaders, but leaders also are accountable to employees in a servant-leader model. A commitment to leading by example is also a commitment to holding one's self accountable.

Dawn Kohler, president and CEO of The Inside Coach, has created a great tool for channeling this two-way accountability. It's called a 10/4 report, and it's a way of *sharing up* rather than *managing down*. An employee uses a 10/4 report to share accomplishments, challenges, learnings, and opportunities with a leader. The name says it all: it takes about 10 minutes for the employee to write, and four minutes for the leader to read. It encourages a consultative engagement between leader and employee, including partnering on establishing goals, monitoring progress, and brainstorming solutions.

In the final analysis, a lot of this is just common sense. And, frankly, if your leadership team is NOT leading by example, you might want to look into the disconnect. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to be common sense to nurture your company's emotional infrastructure, but it should be. It's not as difficult or "fuzzy" as a lot of people think, and leading by example is a great way to get started.

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