

Four Easy but Powerful Ways to Serve the People You Lead

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Leaders that continually use their position for personal gain create unhealthy cultures. If the leader is always looking out for himself, so will everyone else. Thankfully, the opposite is also true. Leaders that use their position to empower and benefit others will create a healthy culture by the brush of their example.

That may sound like “servant leadership” but the truth is, there is no such thing as a servant leader. Either you are a servant or no leader at all.

Here are four ways to better serve the people you lead.

1. Listening:

There’s no doubt, good leaders have well-developed skills in speaking and writing. They inspire others through their powerful preaching and motivational messages. But the best communicators are as good at listening as they are at speaking and writing. Listening well to others is one of the most empowering things you can do for your staff. Great leaders are great listeners. They listen to understand, not to respond. They listen empathically, that is, from the other person’s perspective. They accurately reflect back the meaning of what is being said to the one saying it which helps that person feel deeply understood and validated. Most people don’t need to get their way, but all of us want and need to be understood.

2. Encouraging:

When it comes to believing in themselves, most people are agnostic. Think of it, if you want to make someone blush, pay them a compliment. If you really want to make them squirm, attach a specific example of their greatness and watch them wallow in the warmth of your words. Great leaders catch their people doing the right thing and affirm them for it. This simple act of acknowledging the good not only re-enforces the behaviour, but it also inspires the one that was encouraged to do the same for others. When leaders consistently affirm the good work of their people, they provide a powerful example that can animate the entire culture of the organization.

3. Coaching:

The greatest privilege of a leader is to coach his or her people to greatness. A coaching leader is one that communicates the dignity, worth and potential so clearly that they see it in themselves and act on it. That is what coaching is all about – raising awareness of the powerful potential of your people and a sense of responsibility to live it out. Your talents are God’s gift to you, what you do with them is your gift to Him. Great leaders are more about coaching toward greatness than they are about managing to minimal levels of performance.

4. Healing:

Many people you are working with are carrying heavy emotional burdens. Even those who appear confident and self-reliant can be struggling with one issue or another. Some are on the brink of a broken heart at home. Others are close to burnout. Some find it hard just getting out of bed in the morning. The COVID lockdown and on-going isolation have not helped. Those struggling before March could be in a very dark place right now. It’s not our right as leaders to pry open doors that are clearly marked, “do not open.” But if we are leading properly, trust is being built up day-by-day and those we lead undoubtedly will give unspoken permission (or spoken permission!) to journey into their personal story. Great leaders are prepared to go there when the opportunity arises. They listen, they empathize, they offer support and check-in at a heart level. The mere fact that you make time in your day communicates a profoundly healing message to their heart, “You matter, your heart matters.”

Your people will forget most of what you say but they won’t forget how you made them feel in your presence.

Our most valuable resource is not the buildings we own or the technology we operate or even our financial health. Our greatest resource is emotional capital – healthy, collaborative relationships are critical and providing servant leadership is key.