



How to Show Employees the Love on Valentine's Day...and Every Day

Description

As leaders, we don't want to set aside just one day out of the year to show employees the love. We need to do that every day. But Valentine's Day is a good reminder to take a step back and assess the quality of the relationships we're building with our employees—and, if need be, to commit to a reset.

Sometimes we can feel uncomfortable expressing love to employees and coworkers. Maybe it seems too personal for work (especially for those of us who were taught a more “old school” method of leadership), or we worry it will detract from our ability to hold people accountable. Or it might just be that we have a hard time being vulnerable.

It's okay to let people know we love them. In fact, it's a vital part of creating the human-centric workplace that today's employees expect—one that puts their needs at the center. Today's employees crave strong, caring, meaningful relationships with leaders. This has always been true, but right now they need love more than ever. Chances are your team is battered and bruised after the last two years—even if they don't show it.

Of course, telling people we love them is only part of the equation. It's nice to hear, but it's even more important to demonstrate love through our actions and behaviors.

We show our employees love when we invest in them through development, when we make sure they have the skills they need, when we give them clarity around goals, when we help them prioritize, when we reward and recognize them. They know we care when we prioritize their well-being.

Love means being there. People know we care when we consistently show up to check in with them. Lately I've talked a lot about Relationship Rounding™. Essentially, this means having regular one-on-one conversations with employees to see what would make their lives better, to see how they are doing mentally and emotionally, and to build those crucial relationships.

I find that in challenging times, leaders can sometimes become less accessible. This is the opposite of how it should be. While I don't believe it's on purpose, some leaders may subconsciously become less visible to avoid tough questions they aren't sure how to answer. But it's when times are hard that people MOST need to see the leader's face and hear their voice.

A few tips to keep in mind when practicing Relationship Rounding (and "showing the love" in other ways):

Control the things you can control. No, you can't fix everything for employees. But there is almost always something you can do to make people's lives easier, to alleviate their anxiety, to help them feel safe and protected and supported. Doing what you can and telling employees that you're going to do these things makes them feel loved.

Don't just ask, "How are you doing?" You'll just get a canned response like "fine." Instead, use language that forces people to think and give a real answer that you can act on. Here is a tip I learned from Dr. Jay Kaplan, who learned it from Dr. Alexis L. Morvant, a palliative care physician at Children's Hospital in New Orleans. Ask, "How charged is your battery today?" If they say they're at 90 percent, great. We can disperse them into the workplace to recharge others. But if they're at 25 percent, or even 40 percent, that's a red flag. If the number is low a couple of days in a row, we can sit down with the person and ask, "What can we do to charge your battery more?"

By the way, [Dr. Kaplan](#) will be speaking at Replenishing Yourself, Your Team, and Your Organization (RYTO), on February 23, at 1:30 p.m. Click [here](#) to register for this in-person and virtual conference.

Ask how you can help—right now, in the moment. We need to always remember love is action, not just words. When asking what an employee needs, don't just say, "I understand." Ask what you can do right now—in *this moment*—to make things better. Real help is specific and granular. [Liz Jazwiec, RN](#), an authority on leadership, employee engagement, and service excellence, said something I really like. When she spoke at our month-long Gratitude Symposium, she said, "Ask what people need from you. Not what they need from the Universe, but from you, RIGHT NOW."

Normalize the struggle. Let people know it's a brave choice not to conceal struggles with mental health. Not only may it open the door to needed treatment, it gives a sense of relief. People feel they are being seen, perhaps for the first time. It often has a positive ripple effect, giving others the courage to talk about what happened to them or how they are feeling.

This might mean leaders need to go first: Being open about your own struggles creates a sense of psychological safety and makes it easier for others to ask for help.

Follow up. If someone has a request, meet it if at all possible. Do the best you can to get the person what they need and circle back to let them know what you did.

Just say the words. From time to time, actually tell the employee, "I love you," or at least, "I care about you." It may feel awkward at first but it means so much. Over time it will feel more natural.

When we lead from a place of love, we transform people. It can be easy to be a transactional leader when times are hard. The message we may unintentionally send is "get it done, push it through, meet

the deadline, suck it up.” But great leaders resist this urge. They know the kind of relationships employees want are transformational ones.

When we inspire people and make them better, that’s love. It isn’t always comfortable or easy, but it’s always worth making the effort.

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