

Leaders Need Appreciation, Empathy, and Forgiveness (A Bossâ??s Day Message)

Description

We hear a lot about the need to show appreciation and empathy to employees. But with National Bossâ??s Day coming up on October 16, here is my message: Leaders need appreciation and empathy also. Even some forgiveness helps at times. (We focused on forgiveness as a cultural value last week. Itâ??s important to remember that leaders need forgiveness too!)

There was a time when I thought being a manager would be easy. When teaching, I thought being the principal seemed like a great job. While each day I had students and a very structured schedule, the principal had no students and a more flexible schedule. I never became a principal, but I have met quite a few. My perception was wrong. Being a principal is a challenging job.

When I first started in healthcare, being a manager seemed like a good job. Again, managers had more flexibility and more control over their schedule. The manager seemed to be out of our area quite a bit. They also got to go to department meetings and so forth. Sounds sweet, right? I would sit at break with coworkers critiquing leaders. I recall making statements from, â??I canâ??t believe they are doing that,â?• to, â??They should hold people accountable,â?• (I likely should have put myself in that group!) to, â??We need to get more appreciation,â?• to, â??This was cut out of the budget; how can they expect us to do our job?â?•

I recall the day my perception changed significantly. It was when I became a supervisor. It turned out my hours were not less; they were more. Seeing the budget up close changed my view of what can be bought and what cannot. The accountability issue was hard. I had never written anyone up. Add in scheduling, dealing with complaints, and so forth, and the job was not as fun as I thought it was going to be.

Besides the challenges leaders face, there is that feeling of â??I am in over my head.â?• The training received usually lags behind the new role for a while.

I have reverence for those in leadership. Writing books, doing podcasts, giving talks and workshops, and offering advice is easier than actually taking the action. I have done hundreds of workshops on having difficult conversations, including those on letting someone go. I know it is much easier to teach this than to do it.

People in leadership seem to have it in their DNA. From a young age, they have gravitated to leadership roles. Leadership can be rewarding. It is a role that can have such a positive impact. It can also be quite lonely. In a non-supervisory role, people usually work side-by-side with their peers on a regular basis. For example, a nurse is working on a unit with other nurses and other caregivers. They do similar jobs. When one becomes a nurse manager, while they will often still work at times with staff, it is not the same.

My goal of this column is to suggest that while they donâ??t ask for it, leaders benefit from appreciation, empathy, and forgiveness. Here are examples of each.

Appreciation. In talking with workers who are not in an official leadership position, I will hear comments that the manager is not showing enough appreciation or recognizing performance enough. No argument if people feel that way. But I then will ask the person, â??Do you demonstrate appreciation for your manager?â?• More often than not, they give me a look that suggests, â??That is not how it works.â?• But it can.

I have never gone into a managerâ??s office and been unable to find them for their desk being piled high with thank-you notes. In my workshops, I suggest to people that when they recognize leadership behavior, it will happen more often. For example: *Thank you for explaining the situation today; it was helpful*. Or, *Thank you for the feedback. It helps a great deal.* Or, *It was great having you in the area this afternoon. It makes a positive difference.* This kind of feedback seems a lost art. Itâ??s not that leaders expect recognition, but it helps. It makes a difference.

Donâ??t underestimate the impact you can have on your manager, senior executive, or company owner.

Empathy. Leaders make decisions that at times they wish they did not have to make. This can include staff reductions. The pandemic has changed things. For some businesses, there are now fewer customers. For many, the cost of goods is skyrocketing, causing major financial pressures. Often leaders get battered about the tough decisions that need to be made.

I met with a CEO who let over 600 employees go. There were over 10,000 in the workforce. He felt terrible. He and the team had taken many steps to try not to make this reduction call. Yet they have debt. In order to meet the debt payments, they had to reduce expenses. If they had not made the tough call to reduce staff, the entire company was at riskâ??meaning the loss of 10,000 jobs.

I understand that leaders are paid to take heat. However, showing empathy or understanding in these situations goes a long way.

Forgiveness. Leaders take many actions that build the emotional bank account of those they supervise: investing in employeesâ?? development, being flexible in scheduling to account for family situations, doing all that can be done to make sure a person has the tools and equipment to do their work, celebrating birthdays and work anniversaries, providing team-building activities, and more. Yet leaders will also make mistakes. Unfortunately, people will take one leader mistake and give it much more weight than all the positives.

I am not talking about major issues, but, for example, an email the person does not like or a written statement that may be perceived in a negative way. I have seen people who have spent years

providing good things for the organization make a misstep, and all of a sudden, they are not a good person and/or leader. We need to give others the same benefit of the doubt we want for ourselves. Remember the Rick Farris quote, â??We want forgiveness for ourselves and judgment for others.â?•

In summary:

- Take time to send your leaders notes when they do something you appreciate. Donâ??t make it a one-and-done. Also, verbally share appreciation.
- When tough decisions are made, from budget time and beyond, show empathy. Let the supervisor know you understand that these are difficult decisions.
- Forgive mistakes that leaders make. When you are disappointed, before reacting, take time to pause and measure the positives, not just what you do not like.

People in management work hard. Take time to recognize this. Bossâ??s Day is a good reminder

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