

The best Valentine gift for your employees is becoming a better leader.

## Description

Valentine's Day is almost here. Besides buying a romantic gift for your spouse or partner (you *have* done that, right?), you may be thinking of ways to show employees you care. Yes, they'll appreciate a nice handwritten card or a box of candy or maybe a great lunch. But if you want to really show employees the love long term, work on becoming a better version of *you*.

Part of the reason for becoming a better leader and a better person is that it creates a stronger company. That's good for everyone. But also, it allows us to do a better job of developing employees and helping them become the best they can be.

As leaders we can take people only as far as we've taken ourselves. I've said it in presentations and in writing probably hundreds of times: every leader needs to hold up the mirror. We need to focus on becoming self-aware, staying humble and coachable, and doing the inner work it takes to grow and improve.

It's only when we master our own attitudes, mindsets, and capabilities that we'll be able to create the kind of positive and engaging workplace culture that allows others to put forth their best efforts, grow, thrive, and find a powerful sense of meaning.

In the workplace, creating this kind of culture is how we show love. But it begins internally, inside a leader's heart and head. Great leadership is an inside job.

A few tips:

**Deflate your own ego.** Great leaders bring out the best in others. This cannot happen when you're too attached to your own ideas or convinced you're the smartest person in the room. Focus on constant improvement and growth. When you remind yourself of all you *don't* know it will help you deflate your own ego and move toward *humility*. (I have found when you don't deflate your ego, it gets deflated for you!)

**Build strong humility habits.** Humility is about seeing yourself as you truly are. It's about knowing your strengths and weaknesses. It's about taking yourself out of the center of the equation and keeping the spotlight on others. Here are three simple ways to quiet the ego and practice humility:

1. Give others credit by pushing compliments down to the team.
2. Never ask your team to do anything you aren't willing to do yourself.
3. Listen to understand, rather than respond. In a conversation, really try to empathize and understand what the other person is saying. You should always be thinking "How can I help this person?" or "How can I make things better?"

**Practice the pause and connect to kindness.** Pauses are important. They are the space between what we want to do or say and the moment we take action. Many times, not taking action or saying the words on the tip of our tongue is the better choice. When leaders forget to pause, we can do a lot of

harm. We may cause employees to become disengaged, or alienate our colleagues, or lose clients and customers. (I wrote a column on this subject a few weeks ago. Click [here](#) to read it!)

**Start each day by putting yourself into “beginner’s mind.”** Before you step into the office, set the intention to learn something new. This will serve you far better than having an attitude of “This is not what I’m interested in.” Instead, ask yourself how whatever you are learning could apply to you. If it is not useful to you now, perhaps it might become useful later.

**Sincerely seek out feedback. Make sure people feel safe enough to tell you the truth.** Whether you’re getting the team’s perspective on a decision you’re trying to make, or asking how things are going with their jobs (and your leadership), purposely create a culture of psychological safety. Great leaders always seek the truth, especially if it’s something you might not really want to hear.

**Be clear with your expectations.** Vague directions (or none at all) can cause employees to make mistakes or go down the wrong path. Keep in mind that most people want to do what’s right and will do the right thing when they are clear on what the right thing is. You can head off a lot of conflict by always being very clear about what you expect.

**Never run from conflict.** As leaders, we have to be able to handle conflict or we’re not doing our job. When leaders perpetually avoid conflict, communication breakdowns occur, important decisions are delayed or not made at all, high performers leave, and people begin to see you as a weak leader. Commit to handling conflict in a productive and healthy manner.

**Don’t wait until there’s “news.” Communicate regularly and well.** Don’t assume that your employees know what’s going on inside the organization; chances are good that they do not. And don’t shy away from delivering bad news. When things are tough, people imagine the worst. Your visibility and communication are vital during these times.

**If you make a mistake, say so. Admit when you are wrong.** People appreciate vulnerability in leadership. Don’t let pride control you or waste energy trying to pass yourself off as perfect. If you have made a mistake, apologize sincerely and move on. The words “I was wrong” will always serve you and can help to reset any relationships.

**Don’t be afraid to change your mind.** Many people think of strong leaders as being decisive and unwavering when there are decisions to be made. They may view changing your mind as a sign of weakness. It’s not. It’s actually a sign that you can learn and grow in real time. Have the courage to course correct when new information reveals itself.

**Yes, it’s uncomfortable, but learn to disrupt yourself.** Regularly reevaluate your department or organization. Put it on the schedule and make sure it really happens. Often, doing this helps you learn that what you believe is happening inside the company is not actually occurring. This is a great opportunity to disrupt yourself and make needed changes to keep your organization performing at its best. Push through any discomfort you feel—remember, discomfort is normal and leaders need to get used to it. You also need to help employees get used to taking action that makes them feel unsettled.

Of course, none of us can ever reach perfection, but great leaders work toward being their best each day. When we fall we get back up and try again. When we make a misstep we apologize and sincerely try to do better next time.

We can all keep getting better and better. It's tough, but we really owe it to our employees. This is how we inspire them to become their best selves as well—and that's really what love looks like in action.

Thank you all for being part of my journey. I am truly grateful. Happy Valentine's Day.

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