

“There exist limitless opportunities in every industry. Where there is an open mind, there will always be a frontier.”

Charles Kettering

The Untapped Frontier

Leaders and managers can study, train and be coached. But if they fail to work on their interpersonal skills, they will not succeed when given more complex responsibilities.

Until recently, there has been little focus on what goes on within the relationship between two people in an organization. Almost all professional development programs focus on the individual: what you can do to improve yourself.

Obviously, pursuing personal growth is worthwhile. Now, however, experts suggest that executives who develop their interpersonal skills will finely hone their ability to lead and influence.

The best managers in the world are not only experts in systems, processes and technical competencies. They are also proficient at managing their employees, personal strengths and preferences. Thus, they increase employee engagement and productivity. Unfortunately, most people's experience with bosses falls short of these goals.

The Boss Is Last

A recent Princeton University study revealed how individuals feel about spending time with associates: Clients and customers were first, followed by coworkers—and the boss came in dead last. Interacting with the boss was rated, on average, as being less enjoyable than cleaning the house.

The Gallup Organization conducted a famous study of workplace attitudes, asking 8 million people to respond to the following statement: “My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.” The results show that people who agree with this statement:

- Are more likely to stay with an organization
- Have more engaged customers
- Are more productive

We spend 50 percent more time with our customers, coworkers and bosses than we do with our friends, significant others, children and other relatives combined. To be sure, finding a few strong friendships at the office will help anyone be more engaged and productive.

What Great Managers Do Differently

Top managers get to know each employee as an individual, tailoring their management style to people's personal needs and preferences. Marcus Buckingham emphasized this point in *The One Thing You Need to Know* (Free Press, 2005):

“To excel as a manager you must never forget that each of your direct reports is unique and that your chief responsibility is not to eradicate this uniqueness, but rather to arrange roles, responsibilities, and expectations so that you can capitalize upon it.”

“Caring is a powerful business advantage.”

Scott Johnson

Studies by The Gallup Organization and other groups delineate four necessary management skills:

- Pick good people.
- Set clear expectations.
- Recognize excellence, and praise it often.
- Show that you care about your people.

This fourth skill is uncomfortable for many—far too “warm and fuzzy” for results-driven managers. But as soft as this skill may appear, data support it is tangible and critical to managerial success. Employees who feel cared about are:

- More productive
- Less likely to miss workdays
- Less likely to have accidents on the job
- Less likely to file workers' compensation claims
- Less likely to steal
- Less likely to quit
- More likely to recommend the company to friends and family



Set the Example

If you want your company to undergo a positive transformation, you must set the example. Forge bonds with your people. Don't be afraid to ask about—and listen to— what they want, what they like and what has meaning for them. Be deliberate and explicit. Tell them they are important to you and that you care. Explain that you want them to succeed and help them achieve their goals.

Keep their confidences. Learn about their private lives, within appropriate boundaries. Be willing to accommodate challenges in their personal lives within the work schedule.

Above all, be genuine in your show of respect and caring. Don't hesitate to intervene when facing poor or mediocre performance. When you really care, you help people confront their difficulties and outline the path to success.

“Learn to be quiet enough to hear the genuine within yourself, so that you can hear it in others.”

Marian Wright Edelman

Up Close and Personal at Work

Some companies go so far as to prohibit close relationships between employees. Only 18 percent of a group of 80,000 managers and leaders Gallup interviewed work for organizations that provide opportunities to develop friendships on the job.

Companies that discourage such friendships do so at their own peril, as employee satisfaction increases by almost 50 percent when friendships thrive.

Only 30 percent of employees report having a best friend at work, based on Gallup research. These individuals are seven times more likely to be engaged in their jobs.

Close friendships at work also double the chance that workers will have a favorable perception of their pay. As Tom Rath writes in *Vital Friends: The People You Can't Afford to Live Without*:

“When we asked people if they would rather have a best friend at work or a 10 percent pay raise, having a friend clearly won.”

What You Can Do to Strengthen Work Relationships

Progressive companies encourage socialization through team sports and outside activities. Astute managers recognize that friendships should be encouraged and that work life needn't be separate and distinct from one's personal life.

Rath encourages employers to promote workplace friendships by creating a fund to pay for employee outings, some of which include family members. They also create a work environment in which people can socialize. In *Vital Friends*, he identifies eight roles our friends play: builders, champions, collaborators, companions, connectors, energizers, mind openers and navigators. (Some friends will fulfill more than one role.) He suggests using these roles to identify the types of relationships that exist in the workplace.

Everything begins with dialogues in your one-on-one relationships, according to Rath. As with other areas of self-development, strengthening relationships takes practice.


As Rath says, *“It is possible that most of the magic, and our room for rapid personal and professional growth, lies in developing our friendships...The real energy occurs in each connection between two people, which can bring about exponential returns.”*

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Our passion is helping people and organizations reach the highest levels of achievement and success, creating and building successful businesses and prosperous lives.

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“Thoughts and action, aligned fearlessly to purpose, become crowning achievement.”