

Would You Want to Work for You? (and 7 Things You Can do to Change a “No” Answer)

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I asked a manager recently, “Would you want to work for you?” Stunned, he stopped, wordless for once. Then meekly, he admitted, “No, I wouldn’t.”

Why this manager (and many others) answer “No”

Manager Mike knew he was difficult and habitually gruff. Demanding and impatient, he was often accused of being in a bad mood. He was constantly complaining to his employees about his boss, his peers, the company, the policies, and even the economy and politics. He was so busy managing up to his bosses and out to his customers, that he forgot to lead down and around.

But shouldn’t they just feel lucky to have a job?

Manager Mike admitted to thinking at times, “I’m the boss and this is how I run the ship. They should just feel lucky to have a job!” That myopic approach might work to keep people shackled to their job today, but it is no way to partner with people for your long-term success or theirs.

The Missed Opportunity of Malcontent Managing

When you recklessly manage and forget to lead, you limit the contributions your people can make to you. Here’s what happens. Feeling the threat of your rejection looming, people will go out of their way to reject you first, undermining you, your reputation, and your projects. Feeling like they can’t make a difference with their work, they’ll funnel their energies elsewhere – even if they don’t physically leave. Finally, feeling like you’re not committed to them, neither will they be, thus forcing them to look elsewhere for opportunities – even in a bad economy.

People as a Strategic Advantage

Now think of your people as your strategic advantage. They can partner with you in success. They can help you think better. They can innovate for you. They can be your spokespeople to others in the company and to customers in the community.

But they need to *want* to work for you. So, you must first discern: would *you* want to work for *you*?

7 Ways to *Want* to Work for Yourself

1. Look in the mirror regularly.

As you pass your reflection, what do you see? A malcontent manager or an enthusiastic captain? Record yourself giving feedback, sharing instructions, or leaving voicemails. Re-read your emails, memos, and notes. Would you want to be on the receiving end of any of those?

2. Check your emotions at the door.

Does your demeanor dictate the kind of day your people are in for? Does your bad mood drip on everyone else? It's unacceptable to expect your people to serve as your sounding board. Get a friend, a coach, or a therapist. Just make sure as you walk through that door that your game face is on.

3. Remember what's influencing them.

There are 2 factors influencing people's actions and inactions every day: (1) fear of rejection, and (2) need to matter. Every day, people strive to avoid your rejection and to make their work matter. What are you doing to help them meet these needs? Or are you too busy worrying about your own to help them with theirs?

4. Become an "Undercover Boss."

Just like the reality television show, step into your people's shoes and do their job for one day. Now imagine working for you while doing that job. How enthused would be to show up for work the next day and give your best?

5. Assess and self-assess frequently.

Ask people what it's like to work for you. Do it anonymously, do it openly, do it often, even do it as they walk out the door of employment. What is it like to work for you? What could you do differently? How could you better serve them? This one takes guts. Your own fear of rejection will want to defend, but instead stay committed to the exploration.

6. Engage in reverse mentoring.

Once a quarter or once a year, select someone below you on the corporate ladder to mentor you. Request that they guide you in your assessment, share (risk free!) their perspectives on your leadership, and offer ideas for changing your game.

7. Remember your best and worst bosses.

Remember the best and worst bosses you ever worked for. What did they do or not do to contribute to your success? Which characteristics and practices do you want to emulate? Which ones have you adopted unknowingly and which ones should you actually stop emulating?