

How can I be an effective leader?



Flexible Leadership: Bringing Out Your Employees' Best

As a leader, it can be challenging to give up control and trust your employees to get the job done. Some leaders need to be the smartest, best and most capable person in the room. Unfortunately, this approach can sometimes cause managers to underutilize their people and talents, stifle creativity and restrict great ideas. On the other hand, good leaders recognize that when their employees are doing well, they are too.

To be a manager who brings out the best in employees, you may have to make a few changes to your leadership style, be wary of the fine line between a boss and a friend, and put your ego on the back burner. Try to:

Avoid micromanaging. Empower your employees by allowing them to make key decisions related to their role. Many managers waste time worrying about the little details that should be left up to your team. Trust the skills and judgment of your employees (once they've earned it) and resist the temptation to ensure every little task or decision is done the way you want it. Your employees will be grateful for your confidence and this will

free up your time for other responsibilities. When you coach instead of direct, you will help your staff learn, grow and work better.

Respect time. Your employees have lives outside of the office and the more you acknowledge and respect this, the more loyal and productive they will be. Avoid unnecessary meetings, set realistic deadlines, be clear about your expectations, allow for flex time and telecommuting (if possible) and always offer your help when you can. This will ensure your employees do a better job because they care about the company and the task they're trying to accomplish.

Capable leaders not only make their team members feel smarter, but actually become smarter and drive them to achieve extraordinary results.

Draw the Line

As a leader your role is to help people develop, grow and become better employees and not to be their friends. Confusing being liked with being trusted or respected is a classic mistake made by many managers. Certainly, the more your staff likes you, the easier your job can be. They will be more inclined to talk to you, share their concerns and bring issues to your attention.

But when the line between friend and boss is blurred, it can become difficult to make decisions, offer constructive feedback, remain objective and maintain your authority.

Setting boundaries between you and your employees is a balancing act that isn't easy to achieve. There are no hard-and-fast rules on how close your friendships should be but there are tips you can follow so you can foster relationships without crossing the line. Be sure to:

Be fair. Meet and greet your employees, talk to them about their weekends and don't shy away from being friendly. Just try to treat everyone fairly and consistently regardless of their role. If a team member approaches you about a personal problem, offer your ears without giving your opinion on the issue. It's a very fine line you have to tread as a manager, so be prepared for a little trial and error along the way.



Although it's not an easy balance to strike, it is possible to be a friendly, likeable and respected boss without being friends—you just have to find the middle ground.

These tips will help me support my team.



Reward and celebrate. Set aside time out of your busy schedules so you and your employees can have a little fun—for a job well done! Learn what motivates and inspires your team and realize that these rewards don't have to cost big money. Offer lieu time, tickets to an event, a potluck or a game of baseball in the park. Make sure you also allow for professional rewards for star employees. If funding is available, support extra training outside of work and be sure to promote opportunities for learning and growth on the job. If an employee is interested in a specific area, have them shadow someone who is more experienced. By offering educational rewards, your team will be able to pursue their goals, strengthen their skills and stay motivated.

Set an example. If you want to bring out the best in your employees, you have to be at your best. Commit to being open, honest, diligent, punctual, respectful and anything else you ask of your team. Model the attitudes and behaviors that you value so you can help set the expectations, standards and attitudes for your organization.

Accept and acknowledge. Although it seems easy enough, many leaders make the mistake of accepting credit for a team's success and passing off blame for their shortcomings. When your team reaches a goal make sure you give the right people credit and if an employee goes above and beyond, don't let it go unnoticed. Take responsibility if a team initiative doesn't go exactly as planned and work together to find a solution. Regular reinforcement and constructive feedback will encourage your staff to develop their skills and challenge them to be the best they can be.

Encourage feedback. Employees can offer fresh ideas and inventive suggestions, but often hesitate to speak up because they don't feel like their opinion is valued. Communicate an open-door policy and regularly encourage their contribution through brainstorming sessions, surveys and suggestion boxes. This will ensure that your team is comfortable approaching you when they have a problem and will give you great ideas for the future.

By supporting and respecting your employees, celebrating your achievements and setting the ultimate example you can be a leader that both expects and gets the very best out of your team.

Draw the Line (continued)

Limit social time. Although it's important to socialize and develop a friendly relationship with your employees, try to keep events outside of work activities to a minimum. Lunch, industry functions and post-work drinks are all things you can and should be a part of, but keep activities work-related and attend events only when everyone is invited. Make your rounds, limit your alcohol consumption and never be one of the last ones to leave. If you participate in activities outside of work, like a sports league or a fitness class, keep a clear distinction between work and play. The general rule is to never discuss one during the other.

Avoid gossip. It can be very tempting to treat employees like friends and participate in petty office gossip. Don't get involved in or encourage office politics even if there's no way of stopping it. Never share confidential information, complain about new policies or work results or discuss confidential information like salary, hiring or firing decisions. It undermines group trust, can alienate you from other employees and can have a big impact on morale.

Many supervisors say that these boundaries can make them feel lonely at work, but recognize that this is an unfortunate part of professional success. Consider developing relationships with other managers at the same level and appreciate and develop the friendships you have with people outside of work.