

How Leaders Can Command, Not Demand, Respect

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The only way to command respect from others is not to demand it.

Leaders who are admired and respected have earned that admiration and respect. Respect is given to others only when they are deemed worthy of receiving the honor. For that simple reason, leaders who demand respect from others will never get it, because respect must be given. In my conversations with other leaders on the topic, several key comments were presented consistently. Are you doing the right things to command respect from others? Here are a few pointers on how you can gain a deeper level of respect from your peers and subordinates.

Walk the Talk

One of the top complaints I receive from colleagues is that many leaders don't provide a positive example for others to follow. They live a double standard by saying one thing and doing another. We have all met talkers in the business world ("She's all talk and no action"). We command respect from others by walking our talk. This means Do as I say, and as I do. In my workshops, it is imperative that I model my material, or my audience won't respect me as a leader in my field. Leaders put their personal and professional philosophies into action. If a leader says, "My door is always open," but in reality practices a closed-door policy, people will quickly perceive it as just talk, and the leader loses respect.

Influence; Don't Manipulate

There is a vast difference between manipulating and influencing others. Manipulation deliberately uses and abuses other people to act out your intentions. Influence, on the other hand, requires buy-in on the part of the person being influenced and a willingness on their part to support your goals. You cannot influence another without that buy-in taking place. People respect other people who have the power to positively influence others and get things done. Manipulation is the dark side of management. When you manipulate others, you give away any chance of gaining respect from others. It doesn't matter whether the manipulation is overt or covert; manipulation has no role in a true leader's skill set...influence does. A simple review of Dale Carnegie's best-selling book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People" expands on this topic.

Include, Don't Exclude

The most effective leaders are those who use inclusive language to make others feel they are part of the team. Turn me into we. Rather than couching your comments with "I think...I believe...I know...I feel..." which puts the emphasis on you, consider using inclusive language, such as "We can review...our challenge is...Let's look at ...". The more inclusive you are when presenting ideas to others, you will be perceived as less of an egoist and more of a team player. Inclusive language helps you to influence others.

Participate...Equally and Openly

Ivory towers? Forget about them! If you hold yourself above everyone else, you will be seen as egotistical and self-serving. You will score big points when you admit you don't know everything and are willing to learn something new. If you are willing to assist at any level, you are perceived as someone who is real, not artificial. Treat the janitor with the same respect as one of your shareholders. Treat everyone equally. Why do you think employees love seeing their bosses in casual clothes, relaxing with a beer in hand, at the annual company picnic? It allows them to see you as a real person, as one of them. When you flip burgers at the company picnic alongside your staff, and you are doing it because you truly enjoy it, people will feel it.

Back Up Opinions With Facts

Most of us share our opinions about the world around us, and how it affects our business and personal lives. If you openly share your opinions with no factual back-up, you will be perceived by others as a rambler. You can quickly become labeled as someone who “has an opinion on everything.” If, however, that opinion is supported with facts and a solid rationale, then you capture the listener’s attention and respect. If your opinions are non-threatening and you allow others to pause and reflect, and look at things differently, then you are seen as a team player. If you cannot support your opinions with a solid argument backed up by facts, you can lose face, and respect. When you offer an opinion, be prepared to support it with facts.

Get A Real Image

So many leaders believe they are “doing all the right things” by belonging to the right clubs, associating with the right leaders in the community, attending highly visible community functions, or belonging to the right professional associations. That’s just the persona. It’s not the person. Unfortunately, there are too many leaders with “manufactured” images rather than real ones. People can tell the difference. When you peel off the veneer, you often find the different person hiding behind the “professional” image. Sometimes the real person underneath isn’t a very nice person. Leaders who command the greatest respect are those who are themselves 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There are no Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde surprises with a real person. You will command a deeper level of respect when you let your human-ness show. It demonstrates to others that you are not afraid to let your true colors show.

Respect is something you must earn as a leader. You cannot demand it from anyone. The only person you can demand respect from is yourself. Demand that you become more of the leader you were meant to be. When you respect yourself and others, people will respect you in return. Examine how your actions can enhance your ability to influence others and command their respect, not just demand it.

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