

Being close is very good

Gone are the days when the leader was the figure of authority, far away from his collaborators. For a company to grow and keep itself up, the relationships between leaders and employees must be consolidated through transparency and long-term confidence. Understanding the motives and intentions of others, listening with empathy and regulating emotions and reactions are some of the keys that will guide a team towards success.

In 1944, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a play called "No Exit." The work presents three individuals in a room without doors and with the windows blocked. These characters get along pretty badly with each other. They try to change themselves and that does not work. It only causes their frustration to increase. Slowly they come to the conclusion that hell is not about fire and perdition or the torture chamber they imagined, but hell is the others. People will not make or change or behave as we want.

From this story, Todd Davis, author of the book *Get Better*, and current Chief People Officer at Franklin Covey, asks: How many times do we meet people in our office who irritate us and try to change or fix them in some way? And what happens when our attempts to make them change does

not work? "If we were in Sartre's work, we would like to go to another room, we would find other people. Those that -we believe- do not need to change, but soon we would discover that they also have problems. And we would go to another and another room, continuously looking for the perfect people, who do not exist."

Bearing in mind that the main way to qualify the work of a leader is through results, and that these achievements are obtained through other people (peers and employees), the quality, nature and effectiveness of our relationships are key factors to achieve any goal. It is up to each person to build strong relationships that allow them to get the best out of each person.

What would be the starting point? In Sartre's work there is another im-

portant detail; there are no mirrors in the room. Even if they wanted to, these people who are so busy trying to change each other do not have the opportunity to see themselves or see what they need to change. What could they be doing differently? "As leaders, the biggest competence we can develop is our ability to influence others," says Davis, "and we do that, starting with ourselves."

Dr. Stephen R. Covey said that everything starts with the individual because all the important changes come from the inside out. Systemic and organizational changes will not happen without changes in individual behavior. Effective leaders start with themselves. Great leaders, successful ones, look in the mirror every morning and ask themselves: what should I do differently? What should





I change ?. Successful leaders know themselves."

Changing personal paradigms

In his book *Get Better: 15 Proven Practices To Build Effective Relationships at Work*, Davis lists that the first practice for achieving effective relationships at work is "wearing glasses that work." It's about seeing things as they really are. "A lot of what we do in our personal lives and in the office is the result of the personal paradigms we have. And what we do, in turn, affects the results we get. The word paradigm means pattern: the pattern we hope to see or the image of how things are.

We see everything from the perspective of our own paradigm. If you see your industry as a company where growth is impossible,

How does that affect what you do every day? On the other hand, if people see the unlimited prospects for growth in their industry, how would that change their actions? Unless we consciously move away from our paradigms and examine them, we may never see that perhaps many of them are distorted, myopic, or just plain wrong."

A clear example of how we see and how we work has to do with being a controlling micro-manager. "I see my people as incompetent. He is critical, checks three times, shadowing them all the time. What kind of results does this team get? Poor, mediocre at best. And then, what do I say to myself as manager? Look, look how bad they are. Can you imagine if you had not flown over them? It would have been horrible." Thus, Davis asserts, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Seeing things as they really are leads to thinking, feeling and acting differently, spontaneously. Paradigms are deeper than attitudes and behaviour. "If you want to make small changes in your life, work on your behaviour. But if you want to make significant and quantum advances, work on your paradigms," concludes Davis.

Safe Base relationships

One of the biggest problems in leadership is when leaders tend to be controllers with a teaching mentality, instead of using questions or having a dialogue with their employees. It is the comprehensive, transparent and equitable relationships that will allow honest feedback and successful development for both parties.

"Today, the leader is no longer a figure of "authority", but a high-per-

formance, dynamic individual, who summons us to reach a common goal, for mutual benefit and that also guides us in times of change and even of pain. This new type of leader does not lose his temper, asks the right questions and listens to his people.” This is how George Kohlrieser, a professor at the IMD Business School in Switzerland, defines leadership.

Understanding the motives and intentions of others will guide the team towards success. Authentic leaders, who listen to their people, are needed, and only those who know themselves create genuine bonds with others. They are the “safe base” leaders, according to the negotiating expert.

In his book *Care to Dare: Unleashing Astonishing Potential through Secure Base Leadership*, Kohlrieser details how that safe base allows the employee to feel protected, safe and confident. “When you have that confidence, that base is established, you feel safe and then you open up, you are creative, you are willing to take risks and do all those things that make you a very committed employee. Defensive employees can not commit at all. Some studies show that in the US up to 80% of people do not trust their boss; this is catastrophic because it means that their mind is focused on danger, the defensive nature of the brain to protect itself from pain “. In today’s world, change, ambiguity and uncertainty are common, so this is a very important moment for leaders to consolidate as a secured base.

Nowadays, relationships between boss and employee, and among colleagues, are of a very important value. That’s why companies that treat employees as clients, and that understand the needs and preferences of their staff, even with low

AUTHENTICITY IN DIGITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Being an involved leader is the epitome of what leadership means. You cannot be a leader in isolation. However, today many leaders are completely absent from the digital and social channels in which their clients and employees are. Charlene Li, author of *The Engaged Leader: A Strategy for Your Digital Transformation*, believes it is time to change the trend. Leaders, in Li’s opinion, should connect directly with their employees, clients and all those they lead and serve.

“If you can buy, you can tweet. The science of this does not lie in technique. It is rather an idea. What to say? When to participate? What are the stories I must tell? That is the art of leadership. If there is one thing that leaders know how to do is lead. However, for whatever reason, when faced with an incipient technology they lose all confidence in their ability to lead and believe that they will not know what to do with the new instrument. It does not make sense”, explains the author. As she describes it, it is much easier to teach leaders to use these technologies, than to teach them to lead a native digital expert in social networks, because if someone does not know how to lead in life, much less will be able to do so in those channels.

Li, stresses the importance of maintaining authenticity first and foremost. “Authenticity is not something that comes out of people naturally, which is because there is a sense of vulnerability when opening up to other people. For there to be authenticity in a relationship there must be trust. If someone is not confident in how he is expressing himself or is not sure of what kind of relationship they are building with people in these types of channels, pretending to be authentic is very difficult.” As a starting point, Li usually asks leaders to listen, to get an idea of what people want. Then, she advises them to tell stories, those that inspire them to carry out the action that the leader intends to promote, according to their objectives and strategy. “Stories told from a personal point of view, from the perspective of the individual, will always generate interest. Of course, nobody wants to know what the leader had for lunch, right? But many would like to know what he talked about during lunch. What is important to him? The leader can tell the story of how he talked with an employee, a client or a partner about issues that help visualize the purpose and mission of the company. That’s what people need to hear from a leader, and that’s absolutely authentic.”.

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budgets to award rewards, are more likely to have motivated and committed employees. They will have people who will better serve customers, who will propose innovative initiatives and will take care of protecting corporate assets. Data and experience suggest that excellent financial results will also become part of the equation. Employees - like consumers - perceive a higher value when they receive

clear messages from empathetic leaders who respond directly to their interests.

For Kohlrieser, an attentive, empathetic leader who stands up for his beliefs is the one who knows how to develop people’s potential. Now, how empathetic does a leader have to be? The answer, surprising to many, is 100% empathy. “How can I be 100%



empathetic if I have to fire someone, if I have to make a negative review? The answer is to be totally empathetic, but also completely imposing (caring and daring). Kohlrieser details this paradox of empathy and grandeur and how they work together. "Being able to show empathy is mainly being able to be interested. It does not mean you have to be a psychologist, it's being able to show genuine interest." However, it is not enough just to provide support to employees, but also to impose challenges that push them out of their comfort zone, encouraging them to greater achievements.

Long-term bonds

For a relationship between peers and colleagues to last, both parties need to maintain, first and foremost, credibility over time. "Personality is a crucial component to have credibility. It is not about being infallible, about never making a mistake, but about

behaving in a reliable way even when nobody is watching. We have to take a long-term perspective when we are developing credibility," says Todd Davis. And he adds: "credibility is personality and trust".

For the building of trust, you also have to learn to regulate emotions and reactions. Kohlrieser considers self-regulation to be fundamental for relationships to flourish: "If you are an impatient person, you will not be a good listener. You have to teach people how to engage in dialogue. Most organizations are filled with a totally ineffective dialogue, people talk too much, do not answer questions, they are passive. Good dialogue means that you engage the other in a productive exchange."

Also, Davis highlights the importance of playing well the roles that each one has in their lives to achieve balance in their relationships. Execu-

tive, friend, coach, son, father ... "It's about examining the most important roles in one's life and then deciding what behaviours to use to perform those roles in the best way. How authentic and so present am I in some of the most important roles I have to play?" According to the expert, you should also think about what kind of assessment one would obtain in each role. ▼

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