

# The Leading Edge

1st Quarter 2015 Manager Newsletter



## The best leaders challenge the status quo

How can you spot opportunities for improvement that matters? Once you do, how can you make an impact? What leadership legacy will you leave when you...you know, leave? Asking yourself the right questions can lead you to greatness. **More...**



## Seek out feedback to grow as a leader

Everyone loves praise. But you can (and should!) learn to love criticism, too. All feedback can help you grow and find even better ways to lead. **More...**



## Work-life balance: Don't ask your family and friends to call you "boss"

Do you give your kids a raise in allowance based on performance metrics? If so, you might be taking your role at work home with you. Find out why and how it can help to be a manager at work and just be you at home. **More...**

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Who comes to mind when you think of a great leader? Chances are it's someone who helped create important changes in the world. Or maybe it was a person who struggled against overwhelming odds and led others to a better place.

Sometimes being a great leader means stepping out into new territory. And being a leader also means you get to go first. It's okay to be scared. You've just got to keep moving forward.

Here are some things to think about when it comes to finding aspects of the status quo worth challenging:

## **Are there customer needs that aren't getting met?**

There could be an issue with all customer needs or just a certain part of your customer base. Either way, challenge your team to find a way to meet them. Then be sure to give them structured time and a testing environment to think up and try out possible solutions.

**Are there unmet needs you can meet to attract new customers?** If you take meeting unmet needs one step further, you can pay attention to the needs of people outside your customer base. If you can build a better system for meeting those needs, it could help grow your business.

**Are employees treated fairly?** If you're not sure, take a look at your turnover statistics. How many employees leave your area each year? How does that compare with other areas or other organizations in the same industry? And you don't need statistics to get a sense of how happy your team is while at work. Increasing morale doesn't even have to cost anything. Appreciation is free.

**Are there obstacles to greater success?** What might the "next level" look like for your team and your organization? What challenges would need to be overcome to get there? Inspire your team with your vision. Then you can all work together to find a way.

You might not have all the answers all at once. That's okay. Your response to these questions can be guided by one simple question: When you leave, how will your work area be better for your having been there? Keep this in mind and you'll find that your answer can become your vision to help guide you through any and every challenge that comes your way.

# Seek out feedback to grow as a leader

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Everyone loves praise. But criticism can be just as helpful. As a leader, you can expect both positive and negative feedback. What you do with it can define your contribution.

Praise (as long as it's genuine) can often be self-explanatory. The message is, "Keep doing this. It's working!" You can look for ways to build on strengths and increase their impact and scope.

When interpreting criticism, it can help if your first step is a step back. That is to say: Try not to take it personally. Remember, it's about the work and how it impacts your team and your customers. It can often point the way to opportunities for improvement. Think about it: A valid criticism (whether phrased in a constructive manner or not) can be the spark of a great new innovation!

## Ways to get more feedback

Maybe you're one of the lucky ones who gets so much feedback you can't possibly process it all. But a lot of managers say that even when they ask for feedback, they don't get enough. Try some of these tips for hearing more about what matters to your team and your customers.

**Pave a two-way street.** Give praise generously. And give constructive feedback in a non-threatening way. Ask for and act on your team's feedback often. Set up customer surveys to see if the people you're serving can give your team ideas for working even smarter to help them.

**Use or create anonymous employee surveys.** Some manager development programs include the use of surveys. They gather feedback from those with whom you work the closest and help you identify your strengths and areas for improvement. Anonymous feedback can help you see traits that may fall in your personal "blind spot." If you get feedback you're not happy about, remember: The first step to fixing a less than flattering perception is to know it exists!

**Keep your ear to the ground.** Your team gives you informal feedback every day. It's in the way they work with you. Do they trust you to make things better for them? Do they believe you'll exhaust all avenues to help them? Or do they sweep bad news under the rug because they're afraid of your response?

**Ask for real-time thoughts.** Hold a town hall meeting or conference call to see what's on your team members' minds. Or host an online session through instant messaging or another virtual platform. Asking for feedback in response to news or process changes can be a great way to identify and start a plan to overcome any resistance to change.

By being more conscious of the feedback you're already getting and actively asking for more, you can grow as a leader and improve your team's results.

# Work-life balance: Don't ask your family and friends to call you "boss"

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Being a leader at work can easily spill over into your home life. Sometimes it can be hard to switch out of work mode.

Maybe you've even caught yourself asking your teenager to e-mail you a homework status report. Or directing your significant other to please call "IT" to see if your computer speed can be improved. Or insisting that your best friend always book the tickets for movie night even though you're choosing which picture to see.

Acting like the boss all the time in your personal life might not be so well-received by family and friends. If you feel like you've forgotten how to be "just one of the gang," here are some ideas that can help:

**Let others make decisions.** At work, your opinion is the final word. At home, be sure to make room for everyone's preferences.

**Be flexible.** If things don't go exactly according to plan, that's okay as long as no one gets hurt. Smile and go with the flow. *Bonus tip:* Try to avoid saying something like, "This will be reflected on your next performance review!"

**Offer leadership, but only where appropriate.** Small children need you to be a leader. But once they start striking out on their own, there's a balance between their need for autonomy and guidance. Micro-managing your kids can lead them to be dependent even when they don't need help. Likewise, your adult family and friends might appreciate you taking the reins sometimes. But probably not all the time.

**Try not to take work home.** Talking about work or working in your off hours can easily get to be a habit. But your family and friends might prefer to spend time with you on other things. If it's been a while since you've enjoyed a hobby or a fun night out together, now might be the best time to see if you can pencil, ink or type something into your schedule.

**Leave your inner boss at the office.** It helps to invent a ritual for transitioning from work back to home life. Some people make the shift with the closing of their office door or the powering down of their computer. Others use the trip home to decompress.

However you turn off your work self at the end of the day, your family and friends will thank you for it.

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