

What's Different About Leading Today? Touch.

In The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood, Robin advises: "Tell us thy troubles and speak freely. A flow of words doth ever ease the heart of sorrows; it is like opening the waste where the mill dam is overfull."

It's obvious that physical touching in the business environment is a delicate issue, better avoided to stay safe. However, the net positive effect of "emotional touching" (inspiring, coaching, encouraging and motivating) may surprise you: enhanced immune functions, significant drop in visits to the doctor, higher productivity, fewer days missed from work, etc. Without emotional (and physical) "touching" we lose confidence, self-esteem, our sense of security and even our health.

Today, household size is shrinking and it's estimated people living alone in Australia will comprise the most common household type by 2006. Loneliness can lead to withdrawal, further isolation and more serious ways of "checking out of society".

New technology promised to "connect us" but results instead in "pretend relationships" and new fences (voice mail, e-mail, etc.) that are often times disruptive, disappointing, even dangerous (emotionally and physically).

Social scientists imagine a world where people are comfortable and satisfied creating private zones, fenced off from the rest of the world, "safe caves" (as Hugh MacKay calls it) where we cocoon and bunker and hide away from one another. Sports events, pubs, shopping malls, clubs, restaurants and other previously popular gathering places are shrinking in appeal. People are tired from working longer hours and wary of public places, so they watch more TV and order meals in.

Now, more than ever, the workplace is the place where people can belong, can "touch (make a contribution) and be touched (be encouraged)" and find self-worth and meaning. The most successful leaders make an effort and take time to build and develop relationships with their employees so they stay longer to help grow the business.

What are the 5 most important components of leadership "touching"?

1. Availability - Be intentional with making time for building relationships with your people. There are no easy answers - consider blocking out an hour or two each week for this
2. Affability - Be approachable, easy to talk with, positive, encouraging, rather than nagging, cynical or negative.
3. Flexibility - Be adaptable, accepting, make allowances for others to be different from you, be ready to forgive their mistakes & help them learn from them
4. Vulnerability - Staff need to know you trust them with your humanness. It doesn't have to be "true confession", but share how you sometimes don't have all the right answers or need help.
5. Malleability - This column began with six styles of leadership and how the most successful leaders use the right style for the changing situations.

A leader who can create an environment where people feel important, where they can achieve and be recognised for those contributions, is a leader who can help change the results of their contact centre's business performance.

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