

Communicate Personal Loyalty As a Leader

By DIANNA BOOHER JUNE 30, 2020



It would be great if every organization won the heart and mind of every employee so they felt loyalty just because they got a paycheck. But of course, that's not the case. On occasion, organizations set policies and make decisions that upset people. And that leads to the loyalty litmus test.

While HR professionals encourage managers to build camaraderie among their teams, some managers don't understand what they can do specifically to build *personal* loyalty. Personal loyalty to coworkers and their supervisor may be the only glue that sticks when employees have opportunity to jump ship.

What specifically can you and other leaders do to build that personal loyalty when things get tough?

Have Their Back

My daughter had a summer job as a cashier at a retail store during college. I still remember how irate she felt one evening after her shift. "I hate working there! My boss made me look like an idiot.

It was SO embarrassing!”

“What happened?” I probed.

“This customer came to my check-out and asked for a refund. For a dress that she said didn’t fit when she bought it. That was crazy, because it was obvious the dress had been washed—a lot. It was fading. So I told her we couldn’t give her a refund. But she insisted on talking to the manager. When I called him up to the check-out, he sided with her. He just gave her a refund—just like that! No questions asked. Like I wasn’t even standing there. And I’d just told her ‘no’ because that’s the policy—no refunds on used goods.”

“Hmmm. Well, just shake it off!”

“I can’t. He made me feel stupid! It was humiliating! That woman just stood there glaring at me like ‘ha-ha’; I won!”

Clearly, neither my daughter nor I understood the manager’s motives. On the charitable side, maybe he felt sorry for the woman and thought she needed the money. On the negative side, maybe he didn’t have time to argue with her and thought the refund would end the scene quickly. Whatever his reasoning, it felt wrong and bad to his employee who felt demeaned.

Such situations build barriers, not loyalty and commitment to the cause. You may have seen such a scene play out if you've ever sat in a meeting where a supervisor makes someone the scapegoat of a mistake. Or if you've heard a supervisor "dress down" an employee in front of a client — knowing the client is at fault. Or if you've witnessed sarcasm at someone's expense.

Sure, employees make mistakes. They just don't want them aired to people who are not part of the solution.

Communicate Implicit Trust

While it's a common mantra these days to say you trust employees to make the right decisions, that trust doesn't always get communicated in ways that count. Here's what adds up to trust:

- **Tell the truth.** Bad news, good news, whatever is relevant to your team. Avoid deception in all its form.
- **Give your reasons for the actions you take and the decisions you make.** Avoid treating employees like children. Even if your intention is to protect them from "harsh realities," to adults, secrecy generates mistrust.
- **Make your actions match your words.** A few years ago, I asked a colleague for a referral on a mutual acquaintance who owns a technology firm. "I notice that you're friends with Mitch. I see your comments back and forth on social media. I need some help with X, and I'm considering hiring his firm to help. What do you think?" She responded, "Oh I would *never* hire him to do anything for me. We're friends, yes. But I once served on a committee with him. He was always volunteering and promising to do things. But he never followed through. He's totally undependable."
- **Demonstrate competence.** No matter how much we like someone, we trust those people who have a track record of performance.

Invest in Their Professional Development

Make it a point to ask about the goals and aspirations of those on your team. Simply asking shows interest. But to build long-term loyalty, help them *reach* those goals. Mentor them in the immediate situations. Provide formal training and coaching for mastery in skills they need to advance long term.

Placing their personal and career success as a high priority generates long-term loyalty that a paycheck can't buy.

Organizations may fail their employees. But you as a leader can build personal, long-term loyalty through your own words and actions.



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Dianna Booher's latest books include *Faster, Fewer, Better Emails*; *Communicate Like a Leader*; *What MORE Can I Say?*, *Creating Personal Presence*; and *Communicate With Confidence*.. She's the bestselling author of 48 books, published in 61 foreign editions. Dianna helps organizations communicate clearly and leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence. National Media such as Good Morning America, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg, Forbes, FOX, CNN, NPR, and *Entrepreneur* have interviewed her

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