

How to Lead a Loving Organization

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In the recent pandemic year when so many businesses were compelled to require a remote workplace, many became acutely aware of the power of human relationships. In truth, it was the power of human connection that built the foundation for a successful telework environment. Now, as employers bring staff back into the office, it's an opportunity for leaders to rebuild these much-missed workplace relationships.

Sadly, it is the rare leader who recognizes the importance of cultivating loving relationships and laughter within the workplace. Yes, that's right: loving. And no, we're not talking about the romantic type of love, but the compassionate and caring kind. And yes, that's right: cultivating laughter. And no, we're not talking about just telling jokes.

Too often, leaders reduce interactions with employees solely to a measurement of their performance goals. Nothing matters but the work being done. As a result, the organization feels sterile and void of passion. Yes, professionalism has a place in workplaces, to a point. But it's important to note that humans weren't born to be professional — we were born to love and laugh. And professional organizations so often miss the boat on real human relationships.

Leaders also often focus on a self-imposed drive for external certification and development through formal pathways. While these have value, they fall short if the leader is missing a

foundation of what matters most — the ability to love and the willingness to laugh. Truly, it's a certification in self that's the bedrock of genuine leadership.

[Research](#) undeniably supports the impact of love and laughter in the workplace and its ability not only to reduce burnout, absenteeism and stress, but also to promote employee wellbeing, teamwork and engagement. The findings hold true across a range of industries.

Leading with love and laughter entails a lot of *putting it out there*, both professionally and personally. The loving leadership pathway can be uncertain, unpredictable and scary. The laughing leadership pathway can be daunting, unsure and risky. Leaders, just like everyone else, fear shame and ridicule. They fear not being good enough. There is a resistance to genuinely show staff that they care for their wellbeing beyond their work performance.

Creating a loving organization is a conscious choice that requires deep introspection and intentional work. To infuse more caring, kindness and laughter in a workplace demands the development of self-awareness, recognizing and understanding one's self and one's emotions. Leadership demands the removal of the cloak of formality behind which many leaders hide.

Here are some ways leaders explore self-awareness as they intentionally cultivate a loving and laughing organization:

1. **Show vulnerability.**

Teams are looking for connection, engagement and relatability. This doesn't happen without vulnerability. Vulnerability is about openness. It comes from being straightforward and honest. Instead of parsing communication to avoid bad news, leaders are open and candid with their observations and assessments. They're willing to admit that they don't know everything, and they ask questions. They are transparent when communicating with the teams they lead, creating an environment of shared information that allows for innovation, creativity and open-ended questions. Vulnerable leaders exhibit a fundamental leadership asset: they are themselves. It sends the message that they're not above those they lead, but that they're with them.

2. **Practice humility.**

[Studies](#) have shown the unquestioned benefits of humility in leadership. Humility in the top echelon of organizational leadership directly correlates with improved performance, teamwork, decision-making, vision creation and information sharing. Humble leaders are sincere and modest. They know their shortcomings and are able to laugh at themselves openly with regard to the day-to-day trials they face. They are unpretentious despite their success and understand that organizational success is tied to far more than their talents. They're confident but not arrogant. Authentic, humble leaders will always gain the trust and commitment of those they lead far more readily than the performers.

3. **Reframe defensive reactions.**

Leaders who exhibit strong self-awareness are in tune with their emotions and feelings. If, for example, they receive feedback for which their first reaction is to adopt a defensive posture, they're able to put the reflexive feelings aside, knowing that it's unhelpful. By consciously sensing what feelings certain comments evoke, and understanding how they

impact their performance, they're able to reframe their reaction in a more productive way. They become open to learning, growing and developing.

4. **Take a fourth-person perspective.**

Taking a third-person perspective on a problem means taking a step back and examining a situation from another angle. Yet, even more effective is to take a fourth-person perspective using self-awareness. This happens when one takes the time to observe oneself looking at a problem while embracing all the biases one brings. This is the first and most impactful step in getting to know ourselves.

5. **Embrace humor.**

Self-deprecating humor has an essence of innocence and purity. It allows people to connect. Simple self-effacing comments can bring leaders immediately to the level of those they lead. Their approachability factor skyrockets, and people are more easily able to feel at one with the leader. Laughter at one's self comes from being real. It also gives others permission not to take themselves or their work so seriously. While humor can be the ultimate bridge builder, leaders must also have the social awareness to understand when and how to use humor appropriately so that it isn't offensive to anyone.

Leaders who exhibit strong self-awareness and are comfortable in their own skin are in tune with their emotions and feelings. By embracing a little humor, being humble and showing vulnerability, they create a loving organization of compassion, caring and trust.

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