

## CHAPTER 6

# Respect as the Foundation of Leadership

*When people respect you only because of your authority,  
they will give you the minimum effort.*

—Jim Whitehurst (2015)

**J**OHN GEORGE, a system CEO, and Julia Garrison, a senior vice president, were overheard discussing the beginning of the era of clinical integration and pay for value:

**JULIA.** John, healthcare seems to have greatly changed since you first entered it 25 years ago. The field and its workers are not as respected today. Would you agree?

**JOHN.** When I entered healthcare, many of us saw healthcare management as a calling. We wanted to serve people, to make a difference. I think now too many people go into it as just another career.

**JULIA.** I'm not sure I agree. Most of us new administrators are still service oriented. The problem is that healthcare leaders have been viewed as villains, even though we do a lot, directly and indirectly, to improve the health and lives of

our patients and our workers. Don't you think the old days of the command-and-control healthcare CEOs may have something to do with this negative public perception? I think we could make some changes in our leadership's attitudes that would have a profound impact on our patients, physicians, and employees.

**JOHN.** Perhaps you're right, although I wouldn't say autocratic leaders are now a relic of the past. Unfortunately, they still exist, and they certainly harm the reputation of all healthcare administrators. I think, though, that the real requirement today is to have a deep and profound respect for workers and the care and services they provide.

Here is my challenge to you: Talk with your colleagues, do some research, and make a recommendation about how to effect a sea change in management. We'll discuss your findings, and we'll see how we can implement changes in our own backyard, so to speak.

**RESPECT IS THE** value that multiplies the desire of both the leader and follower to work harder and deliver consistently excellent performance.

Leaders who respect others also allow them to be themselves, with creative wants and desires. They approach other people with a sense of their unconditional worth and valuable individual differences.

—Peter G. Northouse (2021)

Leadership has traditionally been perceived as a prestigious position filled by influential people whose main role is to give orders and impose inflexible rules. This misconception may not be as prevalent now because more leaders have become aware that autocratic management begets only few and uneasy followers. Society frequently rejects selfish leadership. This type of behavior repeatedly leads to entitlement, greed, and other feelings of privilege, as has been frequently reported in the media in the past decade. As a result, many Americans

distrust and are cynical about the C-suite—not just in healthcare but in all industries.

Respect for self and others is the nucleus of all activities, especially in management. It is a value that enables leaders to restrain ego, admit mistakes, pay attention, care about and honor others, keep an open mind, give credit or compliments, and ask for help or insight. Leaders must return to this basic value to regain trust and amplify their effectiveness. Although the task is daunting, the undertaking is worthwhile.

For many years now, I have spoken and written about the protocols of leadership. These protocols are the often-unwritten behavioral rules society and organizations expect from their leaders. These generally accepted standards of behavior cannot possibly cover all situations faced by leaders, but they share a common element: respect.

This chapter makes a distinction between self-esteem and self-centeredness, two opposing forces in management style. While self-esteem boosts the persuasiveness of a leader, self-centeredness undermines it altogether. In addition, the chapter also suggests several approaches for showing and gaining respect (see exhibit 6.1).

## SELF-ESTEEM VERSUS SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Self-esteem is an individual's respect for her own convictions, actions, imperfections, and abilities. Without self-esteem, a person is not

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### Exhibit 6.1 How to Show Respect for Others

1. Give compliments, be courteous, and demonstrate good manners and pleasant deportment to show that you appreciate and honor the efforts that others bring to the organization.
  2. Learn the strength of collective action through the cooperative work of teams.
  3. Ask and listen to what others value, need, and expect.
  4. Participate in others' activities to show you care about their interests.
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mentally healthy; does not function well under pressure; cannot accept or give compliments and criticism; and tends to be egotistical, controlling, and in constant need of affirmation.

Self-centeredness, on the other hand, is an individual’s overly favorable sense of his own abilities, views, decisions, and needs. A self-centered person is arrogant, insecure (yet feels superior), and a nuisance (if not harmful) in any social or professional setting.

Leaders who have low self-esteem but are highly self-centered

- do not respect or trust others;
- alienate others with a domineering attitude;
- are exasperating because they seek and demand so much approval;
- cause unnecessary work and waste time; and
- engender disloyalty, stress, and fear.

Exhibit 6.2 contrasts self-esteem with self-centeredness.

**Exhibit 6.2 Self-Esteem Versus Self-Centeredness**

Self-Esteem		Self-Centeredness
Respects self	vs.	Has overly favorable concept of self
Accepts and gives compliments and criticism gracefully	vs.	Demands constant approval while being unduly critical
Collaborates and cooperates with others	vs.	Alienates others with an arrogant approach
Stays efficient by relying on colleagues for aid	vs.	Doubts others, creating unnecessary work
Cultivates an inclusive, team-oriented atmosphere	vs.	Fosters disloyalty and suspicion in the workplace

## THE CONCEPT IN PRACTICE

Following are some ways a leader can show respect in various facets of her position.

### Become a Collaborator

Collaboration is a partnership among people who have shared goals but distinct strategies or priorities. The reasons for collaboration are varied and include the desire to expedite achievement of results; combine expertise, experience, and resources; minimize or prevent mistakes and waste in effort, time, and money; and produce a better product.

Leaders who become good collaborators learn to

- hold judgment until all the variables and others' opinions have been presented;
- listen actively;
- reflect before responding; and
- ask questions to understand, not to cast doubt.

Exhibit 6.3 is a basic guide to effective collaboration.

Senior leaders must push other executives to seek collaborations with those in lower-level positions. Why is this necessary? Because collaboration is about the equal exchange of ideas, not a privileged activity of those at the top of the organizational hierarchy. An inter-office collaboration that includes multilevel partners is a sign that leaders respect the insights and contributions of all employees.

### Be Aware of Others' Definition of Respect

Respect means different things to different people. For example, Person A may perceive respect when he is asked for his opinion,

## **Exhibit 6.3 Key Requirements of Effective Collaboration**

*Common desired outcome.* The collaboration must offer a reciprocal benefit to all partners or participants. The stakeholders must believe that they are getting something good in return for their efforts and that the end product improves the current situation.

*Shared responsibility.* The driving force of a true collaboration is shared responsibility—from decision making to implementation to monitoring and assessment. All members of the partnership, not just its leaders, must be able to voice their concerns, opinions, and questions. Consensus must be reached at all times. Responsibility for failure or negative consequences must also be shared by all involved.

*Support.* In a collaborative situation, parties to the process support each other's right to express ideas and suggestions. When a decision is made to move forward, all stakeholders support the conclusion.

*Clear objective.* The group must have a clear understanding of the collaboration's purpose or goal.

*Trust.* Trust is built when all partners commit to being transparent and sharing information. A willingness to admit mistakes also helps in this regard.

*Open communication.* Suspending judgment, not assigning blame, actively listening, being interested and inquisitive, and checking in or following up promote open communication among collaborators.

*Celebration.* Gains and accomplishments must be celebrated. Doing so encourages participants.

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while Person B may feel respected if she is empowered to make an important decision.

For many people, the level of respect they give, get, or demand depends on superficial attributes such as job title. Unfortunately, respect for those who clean the facilities, for example, seems non-existent in many industries. Likewise, professors and students alike

may not show as much respect for their university's security personnel or cafeteria staff. In clinical practice, physicians are traditionally more respected than are nurses or allied health professionals. In management, executives garner more respect than do receptionists and other frontline employees.

A good leader understands these dynamics and recognizes everyone's human dignity and basic need for respect. When asked how he shows respect, a successful CEO says, "I hire the very best people I can find, and then I show them the respect they are due by staying out of their way and letting them do their jobs." Another high-performing CEO reveals, "All of my executive team members think and act like each is my COO [chief operations officer]—and most important, they make most of their decisions without my involvement." These two quotes exemplify how leaders can show respect by empowering their staff.

Being in a position to exercise power over other people . . . may be satisfying for a little while, but never in the long run. Ultimately it leaves you lonely. You command, and you receive fear and obedience in return, and what emotionally healthy person can live on a diet of fear and obedience?

—Harold S. Kushner  
(1986)

## Establish a Feedback System

The best feedback systems are those that provide constant, unfiltered, direct feedback and, when necessary, criticism. Feedback should be given on an ongoing basis and should be informal. The recipient of the feedback should be given an opportunity to respond, ask questions, or simply confirm his understanding.

In the book *Giving and Receiving Performance Feedback*, author Peter Garber (2004) indicates that in most organizations, it has become increasingly rare that true open dialogue occurs in traditional performance evaluation sessions. Executives' interactions are more often than not held in the C-suite,

It is difficult to imagine how work group or team performance could improve without feedback.

—Richard L. Hughes,  
Robert C. Ginnett, and  
Gordon J. Curphy (2015)

a setting that can intimidate most people. The fact that the leaders giving the evaluation have the power to hire and fire adds to the tension. As a result of these trappings, leaders may be less skilled at evaluating their direct reports and vice versa (Garman and Dye 2009).

Seeking and accepting feedback is a sign of respect, communicating that others' opinions are valued. When leaders interact with staff regularly, they appear accessible and are better informed.

This dialogue from the classic tale *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Williams 1922, 3–4) serves as a reminder of how everyone can develop an authentic presence.

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day. . . . “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. . . .”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. . . . Once you are Real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

## Be Genuine

Genuineness is referred to as *authentic presence*. It can be conveyed by being visibly involved in organizational activities and showing a vested interest in others’ work without being intrusive and pretentious. The unspoken message here is that “we are in this together.” Forman (2010, 4) states, “We need to listen with what has been called the ‘third ear.’ This requires an open mind that embraces discovery and welcomes possibilities. To do this, we must temporarily set aside what we think or know and listen carefully.”

Many CEOs practice management by walking around (MBWA), a popular strategy among leaders. MBWA’s primary purpose is to witness the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of various services and, by extension, those who perform the work. Although MBWA provides great insight and breeds familiarity, it should be carefully managed to ensure that employees believe the approach is sincere.

In Catholic hospitals, nuns (many of them top administrators) traditionally were known to be extraordinary influencers because they were frequently visible and consistently approachable. Physicians tend to gravitate toward physician leaders who are frequently seen in clinical areas and believe such leaders can better represent their needs, understand their concerns, and defend their demands. This tendency is even more true for the physician leaders who maintain some amount of clinical practice.

## **Give Credit and Acknowledge Accomplishments**

The mark of a great leader is his ability to step back from the spotlight and publicly recognize someone else's excellent performance. This simple acknowledgment is one of the most powerful motivators, much quieter than a standing ovation but more valuable than money.

## **Offer Help or Coaching**

Many leaders study coaching to enhance their abilities to evaluate, constructively criticize, and assist their staff's performance. By helping staff develop, the leader is saying, "I admire and respect your work so much that I want to invest in your growth and accomplishments."

## **Be Self-Aware**

Leaders must be able to look inward to discover their strengths, weaknesses, goals, and impetus. Creativity often springs from being self-aware. In *Exceptional Leadership*, well-cultivated self-awareness is one of the four key cornerstones of superb leadership (Dye and Garman 2015). This approach requires strong feedback mechanisms as well as a willingness to consider with an open mind the input received.

Résumé virtues are what we write about ourselves to measure up to the world's expectations.

Eulogy virtues are what others say about us at our funeral: what kind of person we were and how we cared for others.

—Bill George (2016)

## Take Responsibility for Mistakes and Apologize

This approach is often the most overlooked way of showing respect. Many leaders fail to realize that by simply owning up to their mistakes and apologizing, they are loudly proclaiming that they are penetrable, they are vincible, and they are human—hence, on the same level as others. What others hear when leaders say “I made a mistake and I’m sorry” is “I respect you, so I will not pretend or make you believe that what happened was your responsibility.”

## Learn the Principle of Affirmation

The word *affirm* comes from an ancient legal principle: The higher court must approve the decision of the lower court. In hospitals and health systems, leaders function as the higher court that affirms the work and contributions of their employees (the lower court). This principle serves as a powerful, positive message and a great motivator for better performance.

Positive affirmations are statements and behaviors that build others up and boost their confidence and sense of well-being. They serve to minimize the many negative distractions that occur in the workplace. The advice that leaders give in the workplace and the atmosphere created by leaders in an organization help to shape the attitude that others in that organization have.

## Show Appreciation

A note of congratulations, appreciation, or gratitude has always been a staple of good camaraderie. Many leaders still make time to

handwrite notes, but this practice has declined as e-mails, phone calls, video conferences or chats, and even texts have become more common for their convenience and speed. Whatever the means of delivery, the idea is the same: A small token makes a big impression.

## **Show Enthusiasm**

Some leaders may think that showing enthusiasm about an endeavor is inappropriate, unprofessional, or even silly. However, it has a positive effect on followers. Enthusiasm can energize people and boost loyalty to the undertaking.

Showing enthusiasm and support for the mission of the organization is also important because the rank and file models the behavior of its leaders. Employees can become cynical if they only hear but do not see their leaders' support of the mission.

Enthusiasm may also be expressed through attending or participating in employee events. Failure to make an appearance or embrace these events can drive a wedge between the C-suite and the front line, perpetuating the perception that senior leaders are only interested in activities that revolve around the power structure. As one executive's flippant remark expresses, "I really see no sense in serving hot dogs at the employee picnic. Let others handle that, and I'll handle my job."

## **CONCLUSION**

Respect may be commonsense knowledge to some leaders. However, the concept is surprisingly novel to many others. Admittedly, showing respect is hard to master, and convincing people to try it is even harder, especially in today's healthcare workplace already overwhelmed with too many "must dos." But giving respect is not a temporary fix or trend; it is a fundamental value in all aspects of life.

## Self-Evaluation Questions

- ☐ What does respect mean to me?
- ☐ Can I respect others and still be accountable for their actions?
- ☐ Do I have an appropriate feedback mechanism to assess how others view me?

## Cases and Exercise

### Case 6.1

Roberto Santiago has been CEO of St. James for the past three years, hired for his strategic visioning acumen. He spends his time in meetings with board members, community leaders, and physicians. Recently, he led a successful strategic planning retreat, garnering him strong support from the board and medical staff.

Roberto has put Jane Robbins, the chief operations officer, in charge of running St. James's daily operations. Jane oversees the vice presidents and attends all staff meetings. During a monthly housekeeping meeting, Jane fielded questions from the housekeeping staff. One asked, "We never see Mr. Santiago. Does he not care what happens to us?"

How would you answer this question if you were Jane?

### Case 6.2

Courtney Sample is the new hard-charging, tough-as-nails CEO of a system hospital. She is well known for delivering great results, but sometimes at the expense of many. Previously, she executed a multiyear, multimillion-dollar turnaround of a bankrupt hospital, replacing the entire senior leadership team in the process.

Six months into her position, Courtney is frustrated.

She has not been able to finish a single project, and morale among her senior leadership team is at an all-time low. Many of the employees and physicians are unfamiliar with her, and those who know her avoid eye contact. She schedules an appointment with her longtime personal coach, Will Cheng, to seek his guidance. Will spends a day talking with Courtney's staff and then meets her over dinner.

**WILL.** You intimidate your staff. They didn't even want to talk to me. They think you view them like tools, just there to get the job done.

**COURTNEY.** Isn't that what we all are anyway? Tools to get the job done?

### **Case 6.2 Questions**

1. How can showing respect help Courtney out of this scenario? What can Will do and say to correct Courtney's misguided attitude?
2. How is the concept of respect a constant in *all* leadership settings? Consider the leader who states, "Sometimes, I want my followers to fear me." Is this dynamic ever appropriate?

### **Exercise 6.1**

Review one of the following academic articles and describe its findings on the role of respect in leadership.

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## SUGGESTED READINGS

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