

Apply General HR Models Individually (People are Individuals)

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2014, published in the *Savannah Business Journal* on Mon., May 5, 2014

“Leadership” refers to how you as one individual influence other individuals. To be a skillful leader requires that you understand some generalities about people, things like:

- we all tend to be self-focused
- we want to be involved in decisions affecting us and our team
- we all tend to move toward what’s rewarding and away from what’s punishing
- no one wants your unsolicited advice
- we all tend to be motivated by autonomy, mastery, or purpose (according to Daniel Pink in *Drive*)
- there is a general process we all follow (and shortcut like crazy) in making decisions
- we all expect to have some freedom of choice
- the outcomes of our decisions are never totally predictable
- we all tend toward the easiest resolution of a problem
- we all experience emotions (anger, frustration, regret, embarrassment, etc.) and they often arise swiftly and unexpectedly

You could easily double the length of that list with some of your own universal observations about us human beings.

A leader will fail if he or she does not apply broad human resource knowledge to each person as if he or she is a unique case. In the eyes of that individual, he or she is not like everybody else. He or she is distinctive.

If you violate that reality, you can expect limited success.

Here’s how that person you will face later today sees himself or herself:

- I have unique needs.
- I care deeply.
- I am worthy. (Watch out on this one. Sometimes the person may be feeling unworthy deep down inside, but may not reveal that to you.)
- I want to contribute my skills and have them be stretched and expanded.
- I have the freedom to choose.
- I don’t have to do what you tell me.
- I could go elsewhere, you know.
- I’d rather be skiing (or playing golf, or at home with my family, or driving my sports car).
- I want it all.
- I want it now!

Some of these, you may note, are in conflict with one another. That variability contributes to the difficulty. Even with the same person, the factors you are going to deal with are different from one interaction to the next.

As human beings, we want what’s best over the long haul, yet we often make our decisions based on what we think will benefit us now. So, I eat those potato chips, even though I know that 1/3 of the weight is FAT, which is only diminishing my long-term health!

So, how do you deal with such a fickle entity as that human being you will meet with later today?

You appeal to his or her innate self-focus by setting up options and an environment where he or she is free to choose. You capitalize on your realization that you don’t know what you are going to find. You ask open-ended questions that begin with “What” or “How,” and you help him or her consider

answers that will serve in the long-term. You encourage him or her to generate multiple options, and you contribute even more possibilities if you are allowed. You don't argue, but you encourage him or her to delve deeply into the assumptions that you see so obviously, and you encourage an internal exploration of all opportunities.

Why? So that the person is making a meaningful assessment before he or she makes the decision.

As you near the end of the dialogue, you ask the question, "And how can I best support you in that decision?"

Finally, you are very careful about the promises you make, aware that you realistically can't do for the person many of the things that he or she wants.

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