

Valentine's Day and The Law of Indirect Effort

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“How many valentines did you receive today?”

That was the dreaded question the popular kids would ask when I was in elementary school. They asked, of course, so that I would feel compelled to ask them the same question. And they would proudly proclaim an astronomical number that supposedly proved how lovable they were!

The point of today's article is closely related to the spirit of Valentine's Day. “If you want to gain the approval and respect of others, the surest way is to give them your approval and respect in advance.” So says Brian Tracy in his audio product, “The Universal Laws of Success and Achievement.”

I first heard “The Law of Indirect Effort” from Brian years ago. I don't know if he coined the term or if he just adopted the idea and capitalized on sharing its truth. Here is a quote from his book *Create Your Own Future: How to Master the 12 Critical Factors of Unlimited Success*.

“Most often, you get what you want with other people indirectly rather than directly. If you use the ‘Law of Indirect Effort,’ you will be amazed at how successful you can be. For example, if you want to have more friends, concentrate on being a good friend to others. Take an interest in them. Ask them questions and listen to what they have to say. Be empathetic. Express interest and concern about their problems and their situations. Look for ways to help them, even if it is just by being a friendly sounding board. The more you concentrate on being a good friend, the more friends you will have.”

Maybe you can accept this logic on a personal basis. But does it work in organizations? A large scale example that I know fairly well is the Weyerhaeuser Company. About fifteen years ago, company officials made a conscious effort to focus heavily on safety. From the top down, heavy emphasis was put on the protection of people's welfare, including their physical, emotional, and mental health.

I don't know if this was an intentional application of the “Law of Indirect Effort,” but I know that employees responded with commitment, creativity, and diligence. The result? Improved quality, increased productivity, reduced cost, and improved reliability. By focusing on improving safe practices and working conditions for all employees, fewer injuries occurred, as expected. In addition, Weyerhaeuser also increased revenues, profit, and customer satisfaction.

Several weeks ago, I wrote an article entitled “Leadership is ‘Developing People through Their Work’.” (If you missed the article, contact me and I'll provide a copy.)

I wrote: “If you focus on executing the process, the work will get done. Over time, however, the daily grind wears people down. If instead you put your emphasis on helping people find ways to expand their awareness and skills, you build people up and make them stronger. Not only are the desired outcomes achieved, you have an organization with even greater capacity than before.”

Since then, I've had several conversations with clients and friends about focusing on building the confidence and competence of their teammates. They report seeing the payoff in increased loyalty and dedication to accomplishing the work.

I am sometimes asked, “What could I do differently to enhance my capabilities as a leader?” I typically avoid a universal answer, because each person has unique strengths. I prefer to build on those strengths while finding ways to work around any limiting weaknesses.

However, when pushed, my generic answer is, “A leader must have genuine followers. The surest way to gain the respect of others is to be deeply interested in and fascinated with them first. This involves asking questions, listening intently, and sincerely appreciating the uniqueness of the other person.”

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