

Good Leaders Don't "Lord it Over"

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Have you ever experienced a "lord it over you" boss? If you have, I bet you're rolling your eyes at this very moment. You know exactly what I mean, don't you?

Although women are certainly capable of arrogant behavior, let's presume your "lord it over you" boss was a man. He thought pretty highly of himself, didn't he? How often did he show genuine concern for your needs? Not often, huh? But he was always aware of his needs, right?

Did he come to you at inopportune times, telling you to handle something immediately? Was he often unclear in the direction he provided? Did he usually find something in your work to complain about?

Why do some leaders adopt that overbearing style? Unfortunately, that domineering model of leadership is far too frequently adopted by individuals who simply want to do a good job. They may not know of a different approach to leadership. And if they have somehow obtained results in the past, that harassing behavior has likely been rewarded in a variety of ways.

Make no mistake; fear works in the short term. Nobody likes the thought of withheld pay, demotion, termination, or other punishment. So, most folks respond to provide whatever is required to meet the immediate need. But there are significant downsides to terrorizing tactics.

There is a different approach, of course. Every major religion of the world includes the concept of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Jesus took it much farther. Jesus taught his disciples, "You know that the rulers in this world [Romans] lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them [the Jews]. But among you, it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.... for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others." (Matthew 20:25-28, New Living Translation)

The dictatorial model of leadership is so prevalent! It even exists among the excellent organizations with which I work. For individuals who know no other alternative, the concept of "servant leadership" is foreign. The idea is frequently met with extreme skepticism.

The leader bellows, "These people *work for me*, don't they? What do you mean when you suggest I *serve* my employees? It's crazy for you to think I'd deliver coffee and doughnuts to their workstations!"

I'm not suggesting the kind of service a waiter provides. I suggest the kinds of behaviors that any of you can deliver if your perspective is one of empowering those under your authority to serve the customers of the organization. Most team members treat customers like you treat them. Here are some examples.

You provide opportunities, resources, and skill development. You provide a compelling vision, a healthy and safe work environment, and clear expectations. You offer expanded responsibilities, coaching, respect, and feedback. You listen a lot. You offer encouragement, balance, and obstacle removal.

You say, "Thank you." You link people with allies. You say, "I don't know, but I'll find out." You find out, come back, and provide the requested information. You tell the truth. You plan well so that you don't make last-minute requests. You keep promises that you've made. You ask people what they need.

Two paragraphs of examples just begin to define the service you can provide to those under your authority. They all are in the context of empowering individuals to serve your internal and external customers. And in the process, you build future leaders and organizations of excellence!

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