

Likability matters

"You don't have to like me, but you have to respect my authority!" This is certainly one of the most destructive myths circulating among many managers and supervisors. Some people believe this statement as if it gives them the prerogative to not be liked. Being liked to some acceptable level requires attention, and here's why.

1. Commitment. People will commit to discretionary effort for those people they like long before those they don't like. In fact, if dislike between people is a strong factor, some people will go out of their way to sabotage both careers and projects as a means of evening the score. The use of the word discretionary in this context is pivotal. The word commitment is not often found on a position description and would be impossible to accurately measure. The lack of commitment often goes unnoticed or unchallenged because the result of commitment is so nebulous. Yet when it is present, it is easily recognized.

2. Information. Some of the most important information circulating in any organization is shared between people who like each other. Those who are not liked will often suffer from information drought. Dislike is akin to the cholesterol that clogs an artery and deprives the heart of the essentials it needs. To prove this point, the next time you have a piece of important information over which you have a choice in terms of sharing, make note of who you select to share it with first.

3. Synergy. When two or more people who like each other are combined in a team effort, the probability of getting more work done at a higher quality is almost guaranteed. Rather than being concerned with withholding job-related essentials, those who like each other will do the opposite. Minimum efforts give way to optimum efforts. Doing the maximum job is always an alternative when conditions prompt it. Leaders have to be careful not to burn out the maximum performers, a problem they seldom have to address.

4. Contagious. When people don't like each other they go to extra efforts to avoid each other's company. When relationships are strong and likability is rampant, it attracts others who want to be engaged as well. Some senior managers use a single criterion for whether or not they are doing well - "How hard do I have to work to recruit great talent?" People who work well together because they like their co-workers and supervisors are the first ones to introduce new

employees to the workforce in an effort to sustain a cohesive environment. Examine the recruiting records. An already cohesive work group will sustain itself whenever a vacancy comes along.

5. Openness. People are more open with those they like. So the possibility of a self-regulated work ethic is far more likely. Instead of relying on supervisors to level the workload, a self-regulated group will take the initiative to achieve balance. Supervisors will often complain that their employees are often like their children. Indeed in many homes the kids don't like each other at some point in their development. When a family is "tight" there is enough likability to withstand occasional turmoil.

We often measure an organization's requisite talent pool under two conditions. The gap is obvious between the talent available during exercises when likability is at its height versus under more "normal" conditions. In the absence of the fears that often accompany working with people who are not sufficiently liked, workers are guarded about their contributions - hesitant to engage. Senior managers often wonder why workers don't attend the annual picnic. First comes likability, then attendance at social events.

Along with a bit of planning, and prioritizing, we've never done team-building work that hasn't included a strong theme to also work on likability. To build a better workforce, work on the glue that holds it together as well as the skills to do better work.

Organizations that intentionally find ways to promote and cultivate fun in the workforce know the value of likability. Workers who like those around them work harder and smarter. They engage in friendly rather than destructive competition. They work to improve their own organization rather than looking for work elsewhere. They seek out those who can help them succeed and help those they like to succeed as well.



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