People-first Leadership: Why It's Important and How to Achieve It

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John F. Kennedy said, "leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

The President had a good point and a strong understanding of what it means to be a successful leader. As the most powerful man in the country at one point, Kennedy recognized that the people around him made a difference. That's the entire point of a democratic society over a regime or dictatorship. Great leaders put people first.

That kind of leadership is especially important in the workplace. Unfortunately, it doesn't always happen that way, which can lead to unhappy employees and unsuccessful

businesses.

According to a Harvard Business Review survey, 58% of people trust strangers more than their own bosses.

If you're an employer or in a management position, what can you do to change that statistic? Start by putting people first.

Why People-First Leadership is Necessary

You haven't been in a leadership role your entire life. You had to start somewhere. Think back on those days, and the kind of employers you worked under. Chances are, you would consider some better leaders than others. Now, consider why.

Successful leaders typically have certain skills and characteristics that truly make them great, including:

- A positive approach to their business
- Introspection
- A love for what they do
- Strong motivation
- A willingness to "do the hard stuff"

Great leaders are also often great listeners, recognizing that there is always room to grow and learn.

There is power in putting people first. It improves collaboration efforts, can introduce fresh ideas and perspectives, encourages diversity and inclusivity, and creates a more positive workplace environment.

When your employees feel valued and appreciated, they're more likely to remain loyal to your company. They're also more likely to stay motivated and productive, knowing they're than just another cog in a machine.

By being a people-first leader, you'll develop a stronger team that is more willing to work together rather than compete with each other. When obstacles arise, they'll be better equipped to handle them. That includes everything from a lack of clarity (even halfway through the project) to internal conflicts. When your group is strong enough to push through those obstacles thanks to your leadership, everyone benefits — including your business.

How to Put People First

So, how can you make the right choices in putting people first? What can you do to be a learning leader that listens? It's easier than you might think.

First, understand what it truly means to be a leader. It's not a dictatorship, but a position designed to keep everyone working toward the same goal. Think about the kind of leader you want to be and the things you want to accomplish. Then, you can start to focus on:

- Knowing your people and what they truly want
- Focusing on employee experience
- Recognizing human factors (people aren't numbers)
- Remembering your purpose

When you put your focus on these things, you'll establish a culture where everyone is on the same page. Encourage collaboration. Set SMART goals, and communicate with each member of your team regularly. By checking in and keeping your messaging consistent, you'll make your employees more comfortable and provide more assurance that you trust in the work they're doing.

Lead by Listening

President Kennedy couldn't have been more correct in his words about learning and leadership. But, growing as a leader

doesn't just mean obtaining more knowledge. In the workplace, it can mean learning and listening with the heart.

One of the best ways to be a people-first leader is simply to let your employees know you hear them. Their ideas are valued. They are an important part of the company, and you want them there. That doesn't mean whatever they say goes in one ear and out the other. It means giving them opportunities to share their opinions, perspectives, and even feedback.

A great way to encourage that kind of open communication in the workplace is through retrospective meetings. These are meetings that typically occur after a big project. They give the people involved a chance to review the success of the project while working on any issues that may have come up.

Because each employee has a different role, listening to those suggestions and areas for improvement can offer insight into things you may have never thought about on your own. It's when every employee recognizes that they have an important role to play that they are more willing to speak their mind and offer suggestions.

Those specialized suggestions and ideas for moving forward are necessary for your business to keep growing and improving.

So, take a look at your leadership style. Are you listening to your employees? Are you putting them first? How would you describe your workplace culture? There's always room for learning and improvement, and it's important to know that "with great power comes great responsibility". But, part of that responsibility is to the people looking up to you to lead them in the right direction. You can do that by understanding more about them, and valuing what they do for you every day.

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