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Difficult Conversations

You're a Leader Now. Not Everyone is Going to Like You.

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Summary. As a manager, almost everything you do will have the potential to trigger conflict. You have to make decisions that not everyone is going to like and you can only do that if you get comfortable with conflict. The best place to start is with your own team. The next time... [more](#)

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If you're a new manager, you probably feel a burning desire to be liked and accepted by your team. It's human nature. You want to win people's approval, keep them happy, and demonstrate all the desirable attributes of a great boss.

Even so, as the person in charge, almost everything you do will have the potential to trigger conflict. Consider your core responsibilities: Stretching your team to reach higher standards; coaching people one-on-one; setting collective and individual goals; making tough calls; negotiating; drawing out and resolving tensions to unlock diverse thinking.

Most of these tasks will involve some form of conflict, and none of them will go hand in hand with being liked. If you're not comfortable with that, you'll struggle to do your job well and gain the respect of others.

The truth is leadership is hard. It demands that we sometimes do things that are opposite our primordial instincts. We constantly risk not being loved by the masses. It's one of the most difficult psychological barriers to overcome, but ultimately, your job is to deliver results. This means you have to make decisions that not everyone is going to like and you can only do that if you get comfortable with conflict.

In my experience as a corporate executive and CEO in a number of different industries, I've had the opportunity to coach and mentor leaders at all levels, many of whom were able to overcome conflict aversion to become stronger, more confident leaders.

Here's my advice to them, and to you.

Confronting Conflict

The best place to start is with your own team. If you can master giving them one-on-one feedback — good or bad — everything else will follow.

The DNA that underpins a high performing team is high-performing individuals. Bringing out the best in each person will require you to have countless direct, honest, and empathetic conversations. Some leaders never master this. They spend years avoiding confrontation until it's virtually impossible to ignore. This is a career killer that I've seen derail many otherwise outstanding performers.

Right now, there's probably a conversation that you're putting off, that you know deep down you need to have. If you don't want your career to flounder, stop rationalizing and avoiding. Start developing the discipline of providing your team with the feedback they need to succeed.

If you deliver your words with compassion, your team will sense that you have their best interests at heart. Being closely connected to your people in this way is a prerequisite for building trust — and if people trust and respect you, there's nothing you can't say to them. Your mutual ability to have these kinds of conversations will soon become the bedrock of your collective achievements.

The five lenses below can help you shift your mindset and find the inspiration to initiate a potentially trying chat with your team member. The next time you find yourself avoiding, consider looking through them to remind yourself why you *must* get over your fears and get on with it. This is the first step to building the trait of a great leader: a willingness to do the hard thing when it needs to be done.

Lens #1: You have a duty of care to your people.

Everyone deserves competent leadership — it's a right, not a privilege. You are responsible for your people's physical and mental wellbeing while they're in your charge, and this is a responsibility that shouldn't be taken lightly.

If you learn to put yourself in your people's shoes, your duty of care to them will outweigh your fear of giving them critical feedback. Even though it may still be daunting, you'll be more likely to push ahead.

Lens #2: You can't get results from a subpar team.

The job of a leader is to build a high-performing team that delivers results, and it's impossible to build a high-performing team unless you can challenge, coach, and confront your people to bring out their best. Strong leaders put their commitment to building team capability and performance above any fear,

anxiety, or discomfort they may experience. Remember this the next time you feel hesitant to offer a team member constructive criticism.

Lens #3: Your people deserve the opportunity to improve.

It's heart-breaking to see how many people go through their careers without ever receiving the blindingly obvious feedback that would have made a difference. Choosing not to give constructive feedback to your people because you don't want to hurt their feelings or because you fear they will dislike you robs them of the opportunity to improve.

If someone isn't performing, that's one thing, but don't compound the felony by letting them live under the misapprehension that everything is fine if it's not. If you can muster the courage to give them the feedback they need, you'll give them an amazing gift — the opportunity to change the trajectory of their career.

Lens #4: Everyone knows the strong and weak performers.

If you allow poor performance to go unchecked, you'll kill the culture. When top performers see poor performance being tolerated, they become disenchanted. Eventually, the good people leave and mediocrity becomes the norm. Not managing individual performance marks you as a weak leader — and no one likes working for a weak leader.

Lens #5: What if you need to let them go?

Sometimes, when people choose not to meet the required standard, you have to make the tough decision to let them go. Before you go down this path, which is likely to have a significant impact on another human's life, you need to be confident that you've done everything within your power to help them. Giving feedback early and often will give you this confidence.

Respect Before Popularity

As you go into these conversations, let this be your mantra. The sooner you accept that you cannot please everyone, the better.

For every decision you make — and this includes giving tough feedback — there will be someone who thinks you should have made a different one. As a leader it is your job to listen to everyone. Give them the respect you want to receive. But, in the end, all things considered, you do what you believe is right. Although it can be disconcerting to realize that not everyone agrees, it's also strangely liberating: If you accept that you can't please everybody, it clears the path to do what you think is right, not what's popular.

Popularity doesn't matter. Doing the right thing does.

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Martin G. Moore is the founder of Your CEO Mentor and author of No Bullsh!t Leadership and host of the No Bullsh!t Leadership podcast. His purpose is to improve the quality of leaders globally through practical, real world leadership content. For more information, please visit, www.martingmoore.com.

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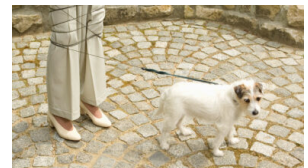


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