

It is Business and You Should Take it Personally

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Donald Trump's motto, "Don't take it personal, it's just business" continues to encourage business leaders to ignore the importance of effective communication and meaningful coworker relationships. Throughout our careers, we have personally witnessed arrogant and abrasive behavior from supervisors and managers in dealing with employee relations. As we continue to grow in our respective fields, this haughty behavior is still observed in dealing with employees and at times even esteemed among others in leadership. It is as if business leaders from all fields have hardwired Mr. Trump's motto into their minds to reassure themselves that talking down to employees is an acceptable business practice. Don't business leaders owe their employees dignity when communicating expectations and job performance? What happened to cultivating a respectable rapport with employees and recognizing the personal commitment and sacrifices they dedicate to the business?

The fact of the matter is that the way an employee is treated in the work place will make a significant impact on his or her personal life. Business leaders, your employees take your business personally because they sacrifice their time, energy, and relationships for the success of your business. Consider this: a typical work week for a non-exempt employee is 40 hours during a five day week. Keep in mind that five full days consists of 120 hours and 40 of these hours are spent working for an organization. Therefore, at the bare minimum, one-third of a non-exempt employee's time during a five day work week is dedicated to work. Harter et al. (2010) commented, "On the basis of time allocation alone...the connections between work and well-being are apparent" (p. 378). Clearly, if an employee's wellbeing is affected by his or her work environment, it will have an impact on his or her personal life.

However, the aforementioned hours are only those strictly dedicated to work, as opportunity costs associated with work intensify the stress and anxiety created by the workplace. Employees have numerous decisions to make related to work. Should I pack a lunch or buy lunch? Should I carpool or drive to work? Should I work overtime or spend time with my family? What is my disposable income this month; should I save it or treat myself (after all, I do deserve it after everything I go through at work)? These questions constantly plague the minds of employees during time outside of work. Then decisions surrounding commuting, meals, and disposal income are compounded with apprehension concerning layoffs, performance expectations, and organizational results. When sleep time is accounted for, how many hours of personal time does an employee really have?

Because employees devote so much of their time to work, it is especially important to ensure they are treated well during the hours they are at work. If employees are treated poorly or neglected, it will negatively impact employees' perceptions of work. This in turn directly impacts employees' attitudes, leading to a decline in employee retention and customer service: key metrics that significantly impact the financial performance of an organization. Harter et al. (2010) reported that "improving employee work perceptions can improve business competitiveness while positively impacting the well-being of the employees" (pg. 388). Isn't this what business leaders strive for: Distinct competitive advantage in the market place? If all we had to do to improve our organization's competitive position in the market was to invest in the well being of employees by dedicating a small amount of time daily to give constructive feedback and support, it would be a no brainer to capitalize on this strategy.

Poor treatment of employees at work can yield adverse psychological and emotional effects on employees, which can create a negative perception of the work place—ultimately making work personal. Business leaders, your employees sacrifice time, energy, and relationships for the success of your business. Our message to aspiring business leaders is this, "It is business and you should take it personally." Healthy working relationships between management and front line employees are vital for success. Kick arrogance and abrasive attitudes to the side and be authentic and humble. The next generation of business leadership understands that the future success of business is determined by business leaders' ability to capitalize on their human capital.