

Love Your People, and They'll Love You Back

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In the traditional sense, love often is discouraged in the workplace, but in one case, it's actually encouraged.

"If you love your staff, they will love you," says Fiona Beddoes-Jones, PhD and founder and CEO of The Cognitive Fitness Consultancy, based in Grantham, England. "It's not a sex thing. There is no romance or attraction to it whatsoever," she adds. "It's about genuine compassion, caring and kindness."

By her definition, love is caring about people as human beings, not as numbers or subordinates. "I do a lot of executive coaching and I have to love my clients, because I have to treat them with unconditional regard and that's without judgment," Beddoes-Jones says. "They're fellow human beings." But *love* is not the same as *like*. "It wouldn't be possible to like everyone, but it is possible to love them because they are human beings," she adds.

She came up with a corporate “love model” — a four-quadrant measure of unconditional regard and conditional regard on one axis, and what she calls masculine and feminine styles on the other. In the masculine style, the leaders are focused on goals and targets. In the feminine style, leaders are often more nurturing and collaborative. “Many people will have a combination of both and will be along the continuum,” she says. Also, masculine doesn’t mean men only and feminine doesn’t mean female only. Those attributes are more about the qualities. “Not every woman has a feminine leadership style and not every man has a masculine leadership style,” she adds.

But one style is preferred over the other — sort of. Beddoes-Jones studied the style of more than 300 managers and leaders and learned the people who worked for them wanted more warmth and caring in the workplace. Seventy percent of those she studied said they wanted to work in a culture that is more supportive, but they prefer a management style where things are clear.

“There’s a dichotomy there,” Beddoes-Jones says. People want performance management with a human touch. They want to know goals and objectives, but also want to feel supported, and as Beddoes-Jones puts it, loved. “If you want people to give more of themselves, people are going to need to genuinely care,” she says.

Not every leader has this quality. “Leaders and managers are not taught how to love their staff,” Beddoes-Jones says. It’s a behavior that can be learned, but it takes dedication and an understanding of how it benefits the workplace.

In her research, Beddoes-Jones found 96 percent of people said they would work harder for an organization that they felt genuinely cared about them and their well-being. As for that environment already existing in workplaces, the research showed 65 percent of the respondents felt there was a lack of love in their workplaces. “We all know if someone genuinely cares or not,” Beddoes-Jones says. “It’s easier to love someone if you know something about them. You have a responsibility as a manager to care for them and make sure they’re OK.”

But the workplace must be open to such an approach. “I think it’s the responsibility of leadership and management to love their staff,” she says, “but that means putting systems and processes into place to allow and support compassionate decision-making.”

An example of a process or system in a medical environment might be adjustable work schedules or allowing for time off at a manager’s discretion. Such a system shows love and leads to less absenteeism, more engagement, better well-being, and an increase in productivity and creativity, Beddoes-Jones says. “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” she says.

Beddoes-Jones says physician leaders face unique challenges because they often are taught to cut off emotions as a way to protect themselves in sad situations, such as death and dying. “They often use language that is nonpersonal and scientific. They’re locked in a language that

is nonemotional," she says. But that often carries over to how physicians deal with other medical staff. "We don't need to self-protect from our colleagues," Beddoes-Jones says. Loving is not a sign of weakness; in fact, it is a show of strength for leaders. "They need to understand it's acceptable to love their staff and to be compassionate and kind."

It's a style that can fit into any workplace. The difficult part is how to balance it. "Trust and positive relationships are the major positives of authentic leadership," Beddoes-Jones says. "If you want an agile and flexible workforce, you need to care about them."