

Why you shouldn't always treat people the way you would like other people to treat you.

The Golden Rule Is Wrong

BY PETER LANGTON

In business, in sales, in relationships, and in life, we often hear about the Golden Rule. Our mothers and grandmothers expounded upon its glory, and Mrs. Dennen, my fourth-grade elementary school teacher, told our class to always follow it: Do unto others as you wish done to you.

Treat others as you wish to be treated. One problem. What if I don't want to be treated like you? Fundamentally, people are different. Individuals have unique wants and desires.

Significant amounts of research show that people perform better when given the skills they need to be successful. As a manager, I am more likely to be successful if I can motivate my employees the way they want to be motivated. Some employees see public recognition as a virtue; others cringe at the public display. Some would rather be invited to a strategy session with senior management; others would like flex time to coach their son or daughter's baseball team.



Assuming that an individual wants to be treated as I want to be treated neglects the basic tenet that we each are motivated by our own desires. Tools such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), DiSC assessment, Hersey-Blanchard situational leadership model, and many others all have one basic concept in common: Individuals have a core general style of interacting with the world.

If I were to suddenly toss a tennis ball your way, odds are you will reach up with your dominant hand to protect yourself and either skillfully catch the ball or at least knock the ball out of the air, protecting yourself from harm. Blocking the ball is a natural reaction. The way we interact with the world around us also is a natural reaction.

We don't think about how to react when someone asks us to give directions, for example. We simply react. Some of us will give fine-tuned detailed directions: Proceed north on Route 114 for seven-tenths of a mile and take a right onto Main Street. Others among us will give more conceptual directions: Head down the road for a mile or so and hang a right at the old theater. If you are lucky enough to communicate with someone with the same style, the outcome is predictable.

On the contrary, if you mix styles by having a conceptual thinker give directions to a detailed thinker, you will quickly see a confused individual pulled over on the side of the road googling turn-by-turn directions. Matching styles is a management priority; figuring out which styles to match takes greater nuance and purposeful involvement.

Assess your strengths and weaknesses

Step one in the transition from the Golden Rule is a keen self-awareness. Before I can begin to understand your

needs, I must have an understanding of my own needs, my own style, and how I am looking to be treated.

Have you ever attended a meeting led by someone who was disorganized, late, and didn't even have an agenda? The fact that the meeting occurred demonstrates the leader's lack of awareness that running a meeting takes some skill and know-how. Our fictitious meeting leader needs better awareness of his blind spots.

To unlock your basic instinctual reactions, recognize that becoming a more effective leader requires an honest assessment of your strengths, weaknesses, and blind spots. The first step of leadership is an acceptance and understanding that all leaders have skills they do well and skills they could improve.

As a leader, I have great conceptual insight about how things will flow, who will work well together, and how to create a strong team. I have a significant blind spot about details. I'm not good working off a list and I often neglect to make sure times and dates correspond. I also "forget" that double-checking avoids scrambling on the back end. My self-awareness is pretty good. But it requires some humbling analysis and a healthy ego to realize that I don't have to be the best at every aspect of my job. Once I recognize my own weaknesses, I am better able to relate to others and seek a natural balance by either pairing with someone who is detail-oriented, or by using a system, software, or approach to balance out my blind spot.

Becoming more self-aware takes some purposeful activities. Many find that developing a journaling habit of things that seemed to work and things that didn't helps to identify trends. Review the trends and seek input from others about what they see. Find a mentor, coach, or trusted adviser and

seek direct feedback. Someone willing to tell us the honest truth will catapult our own understanding of our true strengths and weaknesses.

Identify others' strengths and weaknesses

After you have gained a sense of self-awareness, it's time to apply the inner reflection outward to begin to develop an understanding of the needs of someone else. This process can be overwhelming and appear like a climber standing at the bottom of a mountain she is about to scale. There are, however, great tools to make the slow climb pass in leaps and bounds.

A true recognition and acceptance of my own inadequacies and strengths places me in a better spot to work with and assess someone else's strengths and weaknesses. If I know you are strong with details and I am weak, I can now support you with projects and opportunities to play into your strengths. I also can help develop you more effectively, manage you more effectively, and—most importantly—motivate you the way that has real meaning for you.

The Platinum Rule

Treating others as you wish to be treated places significant organizational strain on creating effective work environments. Odds are, 75 percent of those around you have different approaches to seeing and interacting with the world. Success as a leader is understanding your strengths and weaknesses, then, looking outward to understand those around you. Once you master the assessment, the true key to management is what I am going to call the Platinum Rule: Treat others as they wish to be treated.

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