

There is a bit of elitism sweeping Corporate America these days. It isn't new. It isn't pretty. It is that annoying attitude made famous by CEOs with a flare for self-promotion and a care-less attitude about what people think of them. More of a boss than a leader, these "old school" leaders lack an important leadership skill -- self awareness.

Senior leaders develop a callousness about them that fails to recognize and respect their employees. They shout selfish demands that do little to engage others in the pursuit of vision or encourage teamwork. A sense of entitlement to the "trappings of power" that come with the position are a common symptom of this ineffective leader. Their behavior and attitude toward others send unspoken cues signaling contempt, lack of interest and a general apathy for needs other than their own.

To be a successful leader you need a highly tuned sense of self awareness that enables you to self-monitor your words and actions. In its simplest form, being self-aware involves controlling the negative cues you send off and replacing them with positive cues. For example, if it is your practice to carelessly toss paper toward the trash can never noticing if you miss or not, you are sending a cue to the janitorial staff that you are "too good" to throw away your own trash. Employees constantly read a great deal into the behaviors of leaders; more than we ever intend.

The key to avoiding negative cues is found in a leader's ability to "endear" people to their leadership. Leadership is most effective when people are not forced to follow the leadership of another based on the organizational chart, the threat of discipline or job loss. Coercive leadership can be highly effective in the short-term, but it will certainly not create a lasting environment of trust, innovation, admiration and efficiency. Leadership is effective when employees have a strong desire to follow.

Endearing employees to your leadership requires that you see, listen and treat them as a human being who desires to be appreciated and is eager to make a difference in the organization. Everyone desires these two things: (1) to be cared for and (2) to make a difference. The leader that can create a caring environment and provide a forum for employees to make a difference, will endear his or her team to their leadership. A focus on others will naturally remove the focus on ourselves creating the proper dynamic for success.

Begin your journey as a self-aware leader by caring for others and giving them an opportunity to make a difference. In doing so, you will become a more effective leader.