

It's a good thing for a leader to be liked. People are motivated to do their best for someone they like. But good leaders know that warm and fuzzy feelings can't be the most important thing. Like a doctor, good leaders even need to be willing to inflict some pain when appropriate.

Let me first make a distinction between management and leadership. They are two important, but different skillsets. Management is about driving for results to make the organization successful. I define leadership as influencing others for their success – in other words, making people successful.

Good managers know that good leadership skills improve their management success. But from a pure results-driven perspective, it's not hard to see how a manager might not place much value on being liked – except if it gets results.



Some people think that the people-focus of leadership means making people feel good all the time. That's not the goal. Positive feelings about ourselves, our work, our organization, and our co-workers do contribute to success. But whether we like it or not, so do being held accountable and challenged to do hard things we've never done before (and may not think we can do). So what should a leader consider before choosing how to respond when we don't get the results we expect?

- **My Motivation.** Is my desire for a strong response motivated by my anger or frustration, or by the best interest of the other person? Leadership *always* prioritizes the best interest of the other. But be careful – it's easy to deceive ourselves into thinking our venting is in their best interest. And don't forget the apology when we fail to manage our own emotions...
- **Their Motivation.** Seek first to understand. Were they trying to do the right thing but failed? Took a risk for the right reasons but it backfired? Were they trying to be true to organizational values but misapplied them? Or was it laziness or another character flaw that needs some attention? Don't jump to conclusions, first talk about what happened and why.
- **Expected Outcomes.** What are we trying to accomplish for the person we're leading? Knowing that person, what kind of response is more likely to lead to successful outcomes? Your autopilot response won't work for everyone.
- **Context/timing.** Keep the big picture in mind and choose your battles wisely. Having called someone into account three times today for falling short, does the latest minor infraction warrant another hard conversation? What else is going on with them that will impact their receptivity at this time? A key part of context is whether we've been demonstrating our support for them and appreciation of their successes. Think of credibility as a bank account. If I've not deposited enough affirmation, I can't afford to make a withdrawal.

Remember the goal we're striving for is our follower's *success*. Success doesn't come without struggles. Our role as leaders is to guide them through the struggles, not protect them from struggles that cause growth.

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