

Lead with love

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(Image credit: Jez Timms/Unsplash)

Love may seem out of place in a business context, but it's actually a key leadership quality today.

Employees want to feel their leaders know them, trust them and care about them as whole persons. And, when they do, they're more likely to be engaged and motivated to do great work.

Here are three ways to lead with love, as well as an example of former PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi.



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Transcript: Lead with love

What do you think is the most important leadership quality? Competence? Vision? Integrity?

I would like to suggest that it's Love. In today's business environment, leaders must demonstrate love for their employees.

I don't mean love as in a touchy-feely, warm and fuzzy emotion or a romantic feeling. I'm talking about love in the sense of a sincere and sacrificial care and concern for others. And for leaders, this posture is needed now more than ever.

These days employees don't trust their managers, much less feel cared for by them. The Institute of Internal Communication [reports](#) that only 63% of employees — less than two-thirds — think the leadership of their organization genuinely cares about them. [According to](#)

the Predictive Index, nearly a quarter (24%) of employees believe their managers would undermine their efforts. And that's no wonder when you consider that O.C. Tanner reports 65% of employees say they weren't recognized for their work even once last year.

3 ways to lead with love

So, what does leading with love entail? First and most importantly is taking the time to get to know your employees personally. This will require a sacrificial investment of time on your part, but you can't love someone you don't know, so make it a priority to be with your people. If possible, do it one-on-one. It's best if there's no agenda other than to get to know each other. And remember, God gave you two ears but only one mouth for a reason — do more listening than talking.

Second, demonstrate love for your employees by trusting them. If you want employees to trust you, you must trust them first because trust is earned. So, expect your employees to do the right thing, give them the benefit of the doubt and empower them to do their best work. That means establishing targets and providing training, coaching, and role-modeling — and then getting out the way.

And finally, leading with love involves being concerned about your employees as whole persons — caring about their overall wellbeing not only their contribution to the business. Of course, in the end, you need everyone working toward your business goals. But you're not going to get there if your employees aren't healthy physically, mentally, emotionally and relationally. And with nearly all employees (86%) reporting in a recent Willis Towers Watson study that mental health, stress and burnout is still a priority, you can't afford to assume that everyone is just fine.

One of my favorite examples of leading with love comes from former PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi. After Indra became CEO, her parents held a reception in her honor at their home in India. As people streamed in to congratulate her parents about Indra's accomplishment, she recognized how meaningful it was for her parents to be acknowledged and how it made her feel. So, she started a practice of writing personal letters to the parents of her direct reports to thank them for the "gift" of their children. This message of appreciation for her employees not only prompted emotional responses from their parents, but conveyed to employees a personal, sincere and whole-person care. In other words, love.