

# Creating A True Collaborative Environment By Honoring Your People

By Carole Nicolaidis

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We all know the benefits of creating a collaborative teamwork environment. Where we often fall though is in creating and sustaining such a united front. We often hire the brightest people, inspire them to be the very best that they can be and then we forget to do the simple things that will encourage their participation and loyalty.

If you are modeling a collaborative teamwork type of leadership you are definitely going to have a lot of followers. You will also truly make a difference in your world. You must honor your people constantly. You must show that you care for them. This means you, yourself, have to be in the best position you can be.

As we head into a new year, still reeling from the shock of 2001, it's time to bring our corporations back to the days of the local business. Everyone knew everyone else. Each manager cared about his/her employees and about their progress. I urge you, as a business leader, to rethink the way you are showing your people how much you care and need them. You are the one who can bring back the love in the game (yes, even with a negative economy).

Consider these questions. What are you doing right now that makes people want to work for you? What are you doing that pushes them away? If you are unsure of either, ask the two questions to your staff and request they submit their responses anonymously. These insights will open a new window of opportunity for you to improve yourself, and at the same time, improve your team.

Does it sound like honoring your people means practicing a soft leadership style? It doesn't. There is a distinct difference in "honoring" your people and babysitting them. I am a very aggressive leader. I am honest in telling people I need to see XYZ results by a certain deadline. However, I then ask what they require of me in order to get their job done. Part of my role as a leader is to make sure that they have all the resources to do their job. By making sure they have what they need, asking for their input and providing them the freedom to do their best, I am honoring them as a valuable part of my team.

In order for your collaborative team to prosper, there are certain things to keep in mind:

1. Tell them the truth- No matter how much it hurts. We must be honest with our people if we want their full devotion. If you see that your company may be facing lay-offs, be honest. Whether it is

legal or not, withholding information that about the security of a person's job is unethical. Be honest in all your communications and actions.

2. Open up your heart- Tell them that you do not have all the answers. Show them that you aren't a dictator but the leader of a team; and that all participants, yourself included, are needed to find the answers.

3. Ask for help- No need to be a superhero. Not to mention, your team members will feel a special sense of pride if you ask for their direct assistance with implementing a project or developing a solution.

4. Give them your full attention- When you are talking with them in person, on the telephone or in a meeting - be sure to lend your full attention. This simple statement exudes professionalism and courtesy. Expecting an important call that couldn't be postponed? Simply explain your situation and apologize in advance for the forthcoming interruption.

5. Stand up for them- This is another truth that most leaders fail to follow through with. If you are aware of a team member who is being taken advantage of... correct the situation. If an employee is being unjustly criticized, speak up! When you make a stand for your team, they will experience a greater sense of loyalty toward you.

6. Manage each person individually - Have you ever been present when a manager reprimanded an employee publicly? How extremely unprofessional! When you have a problem or challenge with an employee, deal with it in private. Attempting to "show off" in front of your peers or your manager always backfires. In reality, you come across as crass and unprofessional.

7. You act as a coach- Managing is something done for projects, not people. Coaching is a relationship where you and each employee work together as part of a team. Think coaching would take too much of your time? I guarantee it takes less time than managing by objectives and writing long company memos in regard to your policy. Review their objectives and progress once a month, in person. Also touch base weekly to stay up-to-date. You will find that when you and your employee work side-by-side, productivity increases and so does participation.

8. Work on yourself first- Set a good example. Whatever you propose to your employees, make sure that you have already begun working on it for yourself. If your objective is to develop a true collaborative environment and a team of authentic leaders then you will need to lead by example.

In order to gain everyone's voluntary participation... in order to create a team where members want to collaborate with you and others, you must honor your employees. When you put them first, the results will be tremendous and long lasting.

Carole is President and Executive Coach of Progressive Leadership Inc who thrives on helping individuals and organizations discover and leverage their unique strengths. She also offers training and consulting in Knowledge Management and Leadership Development. Visit <http://www.progressiveleadership.com> for more info & subscribe to her FREE Ezine.

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