

# The One Thing Your Team Wants You to Stop Doing

by Vineet Nayar

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The other day, on the sidelines of a conference, a bright young manager sought my advice. “I’ve tried using different leadership styles, but I can’t seem to dispel my team’s sense of disengagement,” he confessed. “I don’t understand what I’m doing wrong.”

“Why don’t you ask your team?” I asked him.

The reply surprised him, but there’s no point in complicating leadership. As I described in a previous post, time-tested leadership traits are quite simple to adopt. Yet, as recent reports confirm, there’s a growing disconnect between teams and managers. Why?

On a hunch, I decided to conduct a flash survey of my social media universe. “What’s the one thing you’d like your boss to stop doing?” I asked on Facebook, Twitter, and HCL’s internal social media platform, Meme.

The number of responses that poured in shocked me. Everybody had something to say about that, and seemed to be waiting to be asked. The top pieces of advice:

**Don’t obfuscate; tell it like it is.** That’s typical of Gen Y, which wants its leaders to call a spade a spade. “Tell it like it is, stop worrying about hurting people’s feelings,” said one response. The next was even more direct: “Stop being outwardly nice and be vocal about dissatisfaction with my

efforts.” A third went a step further: “Let people know where they really stand. They know how to win if we tell them the score.”

No rose-tinted spectacles for today’s employee; they have the pluck to look at their failures and successes and have little patience for circuitous comments.

**Stop telling me what I know.** Coach me, enable me, support me... was the message, over and over again. Give us “freedom, exposure, and guidance,” wrote a young lady on Facebook, which was echoed on Twitter by “Learn to let go... Create the platform for your team to perform and back them by providing guidance and support.”

I could hear my kids’ voices in some of these comments. Trying to teach today’s Google-bred generation often blurs the lines between student and teacher; the former will tell you a thing or two that you didn’t know. It’s time leaders moved from being knowledge-providers to enablers.

**Don’t stray; walk the talk.** Megaphone managers have thrived for too long; people now want their leaders to be the change they advocate. They’re looking for role models, which was evident in comments such as: “Walk the talk and set me an example. I need to know that we are in it together,” and “Do away with the lack of congruence between your actions and your words because I need to trust you.”

Mahatma Gandhi’s success as a leader is usually attributed to character traits such as vision, courage, conviction, and perseverance, but what’s less known is the fact that he always practiced what he preached.

**Stop playing favorites.** Even if organizations have adopted key performance indicators with measurable goals and outcomes, it is worth reflecting whether they apply to us . A couple of comments: “A horse and a monkey cannot both be judged on the basis of which can climb trees.” Or “Reward performance, not sycophancy.”

We can all put a name to the employee who steadily rose up the corporate ladder despite weak performance because he was affable and didn’t bruise anyone’s ego. That was rampant until measurable goals came along, but the bad news is that it still happens. Indeed, the need to measure

and be objective cannot be stressed enough.

**Don't be a boss, be a leader.** There was an unmistakable call for appreciative, empathetic, respectful leaders. "Lead by example, not by rules," wrote one young man on Facebook. "Stop trying to control people..." added another. A third quoted Gordon Selfridge: "A boss inspires fear, a leader inspires enthusiasm."

These aren't isolated cases. As confirmed by the Kelly Global Workforce Index in September 2012, which studied the Leadership Disconnect in 30 countries, less than 4 out of 10 employees (38%) are satisfied with their current management's leadership styles. So if you see a decline in your team's enthusiasm, it may not necessarily be the economy! You may want to check if there's a disconnect between your leadership style and your team's expectations.

If that's a possibility, how about starting your Monday morning team meeting with a simple question: What's the one thing you want me to stop doing as your boss? Why, that could even turn out to be your resolution for 2013.

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