

## 8 ways to become a more approachable leader

Joel Garfinkle March 14, 2018



The **most effective leaders** draw people to them. You know from your own career that while tough, stoic leaders may be revered or even feared, they don't have that gravitas to build a truly great team of high performers.

If you want to ensure that your reputation for openness precedes you, read on for tips to improve your approachability.

### 1. Greet everyone

Just saying "good morning" builds your reputation in small increments every day. When you greet everyone warmly day in and day out, you convey that people matter to you. You let the office know that yesterday's tensions are in the past and you're ready to meet them all today for fresh new discussions.

Don't be choosy with who you acknowledge — greet those you don't work with directly, including the clerical and maintenance staff, if you really want to say, "people matter."

#### Do

- Learn people's names, and use them

- Make eye contact

### **Don't**

- Ask faux rhetorical questions, like “hey, how are you?” when you don't have time for a real answer

## **2. Show you care**

People are drawn to those who share a genuine care and concern for others. Set aside time in your week to **check in with your team**. Ask how about their tasks, about barriers they've encountered, about troubling factors and distractions from outside work.

Demonstrating that you care — even when everything is going right — makes it easier for people to come to you when they really need your help.

### **Do**

- Give your full, undivided attention
- Ask follow-up questions
- Reflect and recap what you've heard

### **Don't**

- Take on every issue or problem as your own; instead, encourage suggestions on ways to move forward
- Ask only when you know there's a problem

## **3. Offer help**

Asking “how can I help?” is a powerful tool in the effective leader's toolkit. This simple phrase conveys so much — it signals that you're listening and are willing to aid in the solution. It encourages strategic problem-solving and offers up intervention only where requested, empowering others instead of taking over.

### **Do**

- Allow people to fully answer before offering your own suggestions
- Be clear on next steps
- Follow up with actions you've agreed to

### **Don't**

- Simply take on tasks; instead, clear barriers and empower others.

## **4. Ask for help**

Similarly, asking for help is something that great leaders do, and do regularly. The less experienced might incorrectly think that taking the lead means never requiring assistance. Most people genuinely do want to help — it's human nature. Asking for help provides opportunity for others to shine in addition to making sure you get the best solution and the right person doing the job.

**Do**

- Be specific about the problem you're trying to solve and/or the kind of help you need

**Don't**

- Always ask the same people; share opportunity with your entire team.

## 5. Have a sense of humor

There are times that require absolute seriousness, and those that require levity. The best leaders know when to crack a smile, when to add in a joke and when to just laugh along with everyone else. There's no science to it, so think about the leaders you've admired in the past and their approach to humor in the workplace.

**Do**

- Be willing to laugh at the situation
- Use a little humor to break tension

**Don't**

- Use cutting humor at anyone's expense
- Be too self-deprecating; it can be uncomfortable and make others jump to your defense

## 6. Be optimistic

One key leadership quality that is showing up more often on companies' "most desirable" list is optimism. It can be tempting to **express frustration and cynicism** in the face of challenge, but great leaders can acknowledge that there are troubles, while expressing confidence in the team to make the most of it and get things done.

Believe in a better future, and then help make it happen. People are drawn to others with a positive outlook.

**Do**

- Stay positive whenever possible
- Acknowledge issues, but commit to helping find solutions

**Don't**

- Be disingenuous. When situations aren't ideal, it's still possible to believe in the ability to overcome or recover and to plan better for the future.

## 7. Make time to chat

It may seem most effective to be all business, all the time, but good leadership includes making time to connect with others on a personal level. Get to know people, discuss nonwork matters and ask about them and the things they care about.

This doesn't have to take up a large portion of your day and can often be done in the small moments near the coffee machine or the walk to and from a meeting.

**Do**

- Follow up from previous conversations – ask about kids, trips, activities. Show you're invested in what they say

**Don't**

- Forget those who don't seek you out or cross your path regularly. Make sure to ask after the team members who are more quiet or out-of-the-way

## 8. Loosen up

There's always going to be some separation between leaders and those who work with them. While your role may be more formal, try not to bring that rigidity into your demeanor — people are more likely to approach those who seem more familiar and on their level. When you can, ditch the tie or the formal attire in addition to the formal attitude.

**Do**

- Be casual, but not shabby

**Don't**

- Fixate on hierarchy; think of your role as leader as facilitator, not dictator.

People are most likely to resonate with a leader who feels at their level but with the power to make their jobs easier and more successful. Teams want someone who will help figure out how to do things better and then help make that happen, not someone to assign work and finish tasks for them.

If you want to be approachable, think of the ways you can encourage others to come to you when they need you most. Oftentimes, that will be by making time for them even when they don't.

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