



Transformational Leadership & Service Podcast

Episode 20 Transcript

That's No Way to Treat Your Favorite

Are you ready for a tough question? I hope so, because I have one for you. If you are in some sort of leadership capacity, do you have a “favorite” employee or team member? Go ahead, be honest, no one is watching you. Do you?! Who is it? How old are they? What do they look like? How long have they been associated with you? Most important, what makes them your favorite?

Tough questions, aren't they? Tough because few of us feel comfortable admitting what deep down we know is true. Of course, we have favorites! We all do! Our natural likes and dislikes cause each of us to be drawn to one person over another, whether the relationship is between a teacher and a student; a pastor/priest/rabbi and a parishioner; a coach and a team member; or a leader and a follower. I'm not referring to some illicit, immoral, illegal, or even unethical relationship. What I'm referring to is Human Nature 101 – simply put, we all like some people better than others. But, boy, it's tough to admit that fact publicly. In doing so, we anticipate and fear a negative backlash from those “not so favorites.”

Let's examine this issue a little more carefully. Specifically, let's consider what makes one employee more favored in the workplace than another. Many would argue that physical looks are the key. No doubt, a pretty face (male or female) has always had a way of turning heads, but that's not it. Vaulted levels of education or specialized training are often seen as a breeding ground for future “fair-haired boys and girls,” but that's not it either. What about age or seniority, you might ask. No golden right yet.

Let me dispense with the suspense. In a workplace setting, the universal determinant of who becomes the leader's favorite of choice is simply the person who gets his/her job done with the least amount of direct supervision and organizational disruptions. Said a different way: the person who gets their work done and makes life easier in the process will be my hands-down favorite. That's a good thing for the employee – the favorite – right? As a result of their diligence and hard work, the favorite ends up with the best assignments, right? One would logically think so, but reality is often radically different.

What awaits those committed souls who do the bidding of their leaders without causing so much as a ripple in the sea of organizational calm, is often a heavier workload, a more difficult assignment and most certainly higher professional expectations. On the other hand, those who have griped and complained loudest about even the most elementary assignments or requests are often released from their professional obligations by their leader. Why? Because in the mind of the leader it is easier to ask the "favorites" to do the job. Easier because, over time, we have come to expect our favorites to do what we ask without question or reservation.

So, what is my advice to leaders? Set your performance standards high and then make sure everyone, not just your favorites, performs at that level. Otherwise, you may begin to see those favorites either slipping away from you in search of greener pastures, or worse still, gradually becoming the gripers and complainers that surround us. And that's sure no way to treat a favorite.