



MENTOR

Leadership & Duty of Care

Dr. John Oesch, Senior Lecturer at the Rotman School of Management University of Toronto, has numerous recommendations for new aspiring leaders. When challenged to choose one, he selected the concept “duty of care.” He stated that it is hard not to be platitudinal, but it comes down to how leaders think about the folks that work for them. Yes, these people are working for you and there is that transaction of money. However, more of the managers, CEO’s, more of our leaders need to recognize a duty of care and move away from that ‘transactional model’ of thinking.

Transactional thinking is that if I pay them more money, they will work faster and better. However, if I truly care about them (love them as people), allow them to participate, be involved in the work design, learn from them because they are the experts in their job and not me, and care for them, then they will love me back. It sounds trite but true leaders love the people that work for them. You see it in business, hospitals, government and

Dr. John Oesch, Senior Lecturer Rotman School of Management U. of T.



agencies. It isn’t just about the business. We have a strong element of reciprocity in every culture on earth. To answer this question as parsimoniously as I can, “duty of care” is the most significant recommendation. It is essential to appreciate your employees as people and not just exchange units. Purely transactional thinking doesn’t cut it. I am more of a relational thinker.

Tasks are one fourth or one fifth of what happens. Research shows that to care about people is really efficient because no time is wasted trying to figure out if they can trust you, or think about self-doubt as to whether this is a good idea or not. They just get on with the work. No cognitive load is spent on “what is she really after?” “Should we really be doing this?” I don’t have enough empirical base for this line of thinking yet, but I believe it is there.

If a leader approaches the concept of “duty of care” there are tremendous efficiencies to be gained.

CREATIVE THINKING

When asked from where do all the good ideas come. Dr. Oesch shared a story about Fred Smith at Fed Ex. Fred returned from Viet Nam and wondered how the banks process cheques in one day. “If I cash a cheque, how does it get processed overnight?” He learned that they

had one central processing place and then asked himself why couldn’t Fed Ex do the same thing. Is that creative or simply reorganizing the same concept?

John stated that, “I listen hard to the students questions and often that may lead me in a different direction.

Leadership Mistakes

Dr. Oesch suggests that leaders often go “on record” too soon. Leaders will say they want input but then state their ideas before any ideas are shared. By speaking too soon, it stops the creativity of others. People may not be willing to share their ideas if you, the leader, have already decided what you want to have happen. Some, in fact, will simply support the leaders idea even if they don’t agree. It may be that



they think that is how you act as a team player. They may also think that it is inappropriate to disagree with the boss. John stated quite simply, “if you want input, ask for it, and then, listen hard.”

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