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Be respected before being liked

by Calvin London

The title of this article may seem a strange topic for discussion. After all, doesn't everyone want to be liked *and* respected?

For managers—especially compliance managers—being respected must be the first priority ahead of being liked. Let's face it, compliance—like quality or human resource managers—starts behind the eight ball on the “likability charts” because their roles are associated with rules and regulations, training, “doing the right thing,” and all that fun stuff.

I was talking to a former employee and protégé a while ago, and she reminded me that this was one of the first life lessons I shared with her. While we all want to be liked and respected, it is my belief that compliance folks should particularly focus on being respected before being liked.

Respect for leadership is important when you want people to follow you. However, many leaders struggle because they also want employees to like them. There is nothing wrong with wanting people to like you. However, which is foremost?

Which is the bigger priority, and what if you have one without the other?

The value of being respected

Without respect, it can be challenging to accomplish what you want at work. At the outset, it is critical to understand that, for the most part, respect comes with experience. Age, level of experience, or how others perceive you in your role are all significant in whether you are respected.

Recruiters often ask managerial position interviewees whether they would rather be respected or liked, and what value they place on each. If you want to be a leader—and all compliance officers need to be leaders—respect is paramount, and being liked is a bonus. Being respected by your employees to the extent they enthusiastically carry out your directives only works if you give respect to them in return.

As a manager, I'd prefer to be respected. While it's nice to be liked—and can lead to a strong, effective team atmosphere—sometimes a manager must request or do unpopular things. Overvaluing being liked can make you reluctant to request that people do things outside their comfort zones. A respected manager can motivate people to work and complete tasks under any circumstances.

Several very positive benefits have been associated with respect.^[1] Employees are more likely to:

- Be committed to your direction
- Follow your lead and stand up for what the team represents
- Go over and above for you
- Be less likely to push back in your direction
- Want others to experience what they experience
- Feel comfortable that they are on the right track and that they are in good hands

As compliance officers, we want employees to engage in compliance policies and processes for the company's benefit. We want employees to set a direction and standard for others to follow and do so positively—even when they may not totally understand why.

Levels of respect

Many have no doubt heard parents tell their children many times to “respect your elders.” The logic behind this is that your elders (in the broadest sense) created the environment you live in. They have a lot of life experiences to share. The same is true for managers. We all would like our superiors to think we are a conscientious and respected manager because of their work experiences (good or bad), the abilities they have developed to deal with difficult situations, and the respect for others that they have learned. Being respected is a badge of honor!

The value of being respected is reflected in a survey conducted on nearly 20,000 employees.^[2] Just over half (54%) said they did not receive respect from their leaders. These employees were found to be less creative and more likely to leave the company. About half also deliberately decreased their effort or lowered their quality of work. On the other hand, of those who feel respected, 56% had “better health and well-being”; 89% found more enjoyment and job satisfaction; and 92% had “greater focus and prioritization,” greater engagement with the company, and were more committed to staying, reflecting the comments made in the previous section.

Another survey identified that more than half of employees in the workforce left their jobs because they “did not feel valued by their organization” (54%) or managers (52%) or they “lacked a sense of belonging” (51%).^[3] Additionally, 46% “cited the desire to work with people who trust and care for each other as another reason not to quit.” Employees want stronger relationships, a sense of connection, and to be seen and respected. Happy and satisfied professionals create better working environments for everyone, while dissatisfied workers are more likely to cause problems for the company. Employee satisfaction from being respected can help an organization's bottom line and promote a positive culture.

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