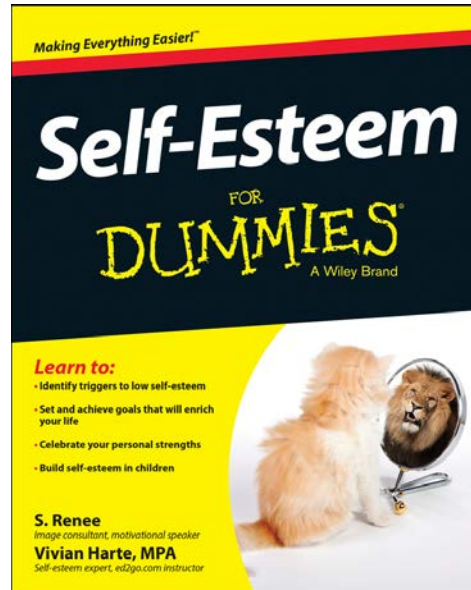


Chapter 19

Managing Your Relationships at Work



In This Chapter

- * Improving relationships with people at work
 - * Dealing with change
 - * Coping with a difficult boss
-

“I cried every day for two years,” one woman recalled.

“It was like she was being bullied in staff meetings,” her coworker added.

Tears poured down faces and voices escalated as I (coauthor S. Renee) listened attentively to the issues resulting from miscommunication and poor relationship development that had haunted this team of 25 employees.

It’s not unusual to see passionate, committed, and highly talented employees feel unappreciated, irritated, and fearful of being their authentically innovative, intelligent, and hard-working selves. Preconceived notions, lack of compassion, and poor communication are the typical reasons workplace distractions persist, health problems surge, and productivity falls.

Are these the core causes of confusion and frustration in the workplace? Is it possible to have people from different backgrounds, experiences, and skill sets effectively work together and genuinely like and value one another?

In this chapter, we provide answers to these complex questions. We also help you develop into a leader who knows how to break through barriers and build effective relationships and confidence in others.

Building Effective Working Relationships

According to law enforcement, it's not uncommon for witnesses of a crime to express completely different stories about what happened and why they believe it happened. Is one lying and the other telling the truth? Does one person have more to gain by telling his version over another? Is malicious intent at play?

Conflict is the result of different versions of a shared experience. The innumerable amount of court hearings confirm this as fact. Is this definition of conflict applicable in the workplace as well?

Have you ever had a disagreement with a coworker or supervisor? Despite both of you being in the same place, at the same time, doing the same thing, your opinions of a given experience may be different. Is that what causes conflict? Of course it is.

Building effective working relationships requires your attention in three key areas:

- * Understanding yourself
- * Listening and responding to others
- * Utilizing a strategy to sustain your mental and emotional well-being amid chaos

In this section, we ask you to reflect a bit on the current state of your relationships within your workplace. Then, we provide some strategies for improving your relationship with your employees, your company's leaders, and your peers. (*Note:* We aren't starting with understanding yourself because earlier chapters provide you with information and exercises that help you discover a lot about yourself. Refer to Chapters 11, 12, and 14 if you first need to spend some time learning to understand yourself.)

<Remember>

Building positive relationships in the workplace simply means listening and being authentically kind and supportive.

Reflecting on your current work

relationships

Before every workshop I (coauthor S. Renee) share with participants my intentions. My number one intention is always to get them to stop — to stop doing, thinking, strategizing, researching, moving — to simply stop. To shut down the noise. As I stand in front of the room, I observe people as they struggle to settle themselves into this unfamiliar state called *silence*.

Setting the expectation to “stop” assures that if I connect, engage, and present interesting content, I have a chance at beating my competition — family, friends, projects, community service, conflicts, unmet needs, and anything else that is going on in the hearts and minds of participants.

This directive isn’t a miscellaneous tactic to feed my ego; it’s a space creator for participants to take time to reflect on themselves and their relationships with others. It helps them to honestly assess where they are and unite with the unexamined place they want to be.

<Exercise>

If you’re willing to pause and reflect on your work relationships, start by completing this exercise. Because people’s perceptions of you are based on how your behavior impacts their lives, make a list of the people whose lives you impact on the job. Think about what you say, how you say it, and what you do. Put yourself in their position and, as you say their name aloud, objectively answer the following question based on how you treat them: How do I make you feel?

You never know exactly how you’re making a person feel unless you ask them; however, this exercise, which increases your consciousness of others, will put you in the right ball park.

<Tip>

You know how you make people feel based on how they respond to you. If you have problems assessing your impact, work backwards. Think about how the person acts when she’s around you. If she’s normally talkative but unusually quiet around you, that may indicate that she feels uncomfortable and lacks trust.

Improving relationships for leaders

Regardless of what organization hires me, without fail, I (coauthor S. Renee) hear employees blurt one of the three following statements during a workshop:

“I don’t have to like them to work with them.”

“I don’t care if they don’t like me.”

“I have to make a living somewhere.”

Unwilling at first to identify exactly whom he’s referring to, the revelation comes later in the workshop, when it becomes evident there are ongoing misunderstandings between leadership and employees and among co-workers. Leaders are responsible for the confusion, but often prefer to ignore it. Leadership must set clear expectations for everyone to adhere to, and create a safe, fair, transparent culture to foster trusting relationships between leadership and staff and among co-workers.

Has anyone ever directed any of these statements at you or shared them with you? If so, what you were hearing was an employee who was fed-up with the difficulties and barriers that had been created and that were prohibiting him from doing his job.

As you were listening to the person making one or more of these statements, how did you feel? Did you intuitively know that the person was asking for help, encouragement, and direction? Were you unsure as to how to help?

In order to improve morale and increase productivity, you need to dig further to get to the root cause of the person’s concerns. To better understand the challenges that person may be facing, you need to get him to tell you more. Check out Table 19-1 for some suggested responses to these common statements to help you get to the root of the problem.

Table 19-1 Coaching That Gets to the Core

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Coaching Response</i>
I don’t have to like them to work with them.	Let me see if I understand what you’re saying. You don’t feel that it’s necessary to like the people with whom you spend eight or more hours a day — is that correct? Why do you feel that way? Why don’t you like your coworkers? What can I do to help?
I don’t care if they don’t like me.	You said, “I don’t care if they don’t like me,” correct? Does that mean you believe that you don’t need people to help you do your job? Do you realize that people help people they like? Because people promote people, what I hear you saying is that you don’t care if you never grow beyond where you are right now. Is that what you’re saying?

<p>I have to make a living somewhere.</p>	<p>What I hear is that you only work here for the money. Is there something else you would prefer to be doing? Is there somewhere else you would prefer to work? What would make you happy?</p>
<p><Warning></p> <p>Have you ever had your concern met with: “Don’t take it personally; it’s just business.” Why would anyone say that to his most valuable resource? What he’s saying is “How you feel isn’t more important to me than making a profit.” People impact an organization’s bottom line. Do you think that inspires greater commitment in employees?</p> <p>Responding to an employee’s concern with “Don’t take it personally” dismisses his feelings and opinions, sending the message that he doesn’t matter. It’s paramount that you understand that people come from different cultures and experience life differently. Being a leader calls you to a higher level of thoughtful consideration of others and their workplace experiences.</p> <p>When you listen and take the time to probe further, you’ll be surprised by the responses you get. Most people aren’t unhappy with what they do; they’re unhappy with how they’re being treated. Unsupportive organizational cultures and unproductive operational systems are what make employees say, “What’s the use?”</p> <p><Remember></p> <p>Employee satisfaction is at the core of every successful organization. The role of a good leader is to provide resources and developmental opportunities to employees so they can effectively do the job that is expected of them. By doing so you increase productivity, advance executive leadership’s agenda, and grow the business.</p> <p>Here are additional things you can do to help build positive relationships with employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Model the behavior you want. Set the goal for yourself that your employees will be able to look to you because you’ll model the behavior you want to see in them. Never put yourself above your employees. Create opportunities for them to succeed and recognize them for doing so. Most importantly, show them that you care. * Use your listening skills more often than your directional skills. Always remember who’s doing the job. Your employees are on the front lines witnessing and taking notes on all the bottlenecks and faulty operational issues. <i>Listen!</i> And understand what is being said to you so that you can help them and the organization be more successful. 	

- * **Set clear expectations.** Never take for granted that people know what to do. People need to be clear on what's expected of them. Ambiguous instructions create poor results, leaving people feeling like failures. This outcome lowers self-esteem, productivity, and job satisfaction. Your decisive directions help to build trusting relationships with your employees and better results.
- * **Provide the necessary tools to do the job.** In accordance with the resources available, the job should get done with the least amount of effort. Give your staff the tools to be effective at completing assigned tasks. Remember, a series of successes builds confidence.
- * **Be transparent.** Don't withhold information like you have a big secret. Change and the lack of information put people on edge.
- * **Look for future leaders.** Seek direction from your workforce and reward people for great ideas. When you seek to find and develop leaders, people will look for ways to be the "chosen one."
- * **Let others express themselves.** People are humans, not robots. They inevitably bring personal issues to the workplace. Give them time to express themselves. If you listen, they'll know that you care. It will also help you decide if further help is needed. Sometimes by hearing themselves talk, they'll release themselves from the bondage of the situation, which will result in more productive employees. If you don't listen, a coworker will. Then you'll have two unproductive employees.
- * **Find out what your employees really want.** Everyone is looking for something to satisfy her internal yearning. When I (coauthor S. Renee) ask workshop participants the question, "What do you want?" I get a blank stare, silence fills the room, and then they say, "I don't know." I respond, "You know what you want. Sometimes we are afraid of appearing selfish to leadership and your co-workers because so much emphasis is put on the word, 'team.'" Instead of acknowledging our individual needs, we bury our true feelings and pretend they don't exist. Unmet needs are also at the core of our frustration in the workplace." When leadership creates a safe place for employees to express themselves, they're willing share. As the leader, you may want to share your desires first to illustrate that it's okay for employees to have their own desires. By knowing and responding to your employees' core needs, you can improve their morale and your relationships with them. .

<Tip>

For most people, a core desire is an internal yearning to be recognized in a specific way for the value they bring to the organization. Money is a means of making a living and creating a lifestyle; recognition confirms a meaningful existence.

- * **Engage every employee.** Some employees are overlooked because they're shy or lack confidence. Within themselves they're thinking, "Everyone else sounds intelligent but me." They could be holding the

best idea yet. Stop overlooking them by asking, “What do you think?” You may be surprised by what you hear.

- * **Give employees the authority to do their jobs.** If you do your job properly by providing the necessary resources, development, and information to your employees, they’ll be able to do their jobs correctly.
- * **Don’t act like the “big boss.”** People won’t talk to a boss who intimidates them, but they will talk *about* that boss. Don’t sit in your office all day taking care of paperwork: Be among the people and for the people. You don’t want to separate yourself from the people who provide vital information and opportunities to connect, engage, and grow your business.
- * **Embrace change.** Doing the same thing the same way every day stagnates innovation and employees’ desire to develop their intellectual property. Find creative new ways of doing old things to get the results you want. Some organizations — the military, for example — change management every two to three years to ensure that ideas, systems, and people stay fresh and on top of their game.

Screaming for help

While giving a presentation, I (coauthor S. Renee) advanced to the next slide. It read: “Don’t worry more about the mess you are in than the mess that you are.” Out of my peripheral vision, I noticed a hand fly up, while these words decisively flowed out of a participant’s mouth: “I don’t agree with that!”

Walking over to where she was sitting, I looked her in the eyes and gently said, “Okay, can you tell me why?”

She said, “There are certain circumstances you don’t have control over. They have nothing to do with you.”

Intrigued by her response, but unsure of what she was really saying, I probed for clarity. “Can you give me an example?”

I won’t dare to attempt to quote her extensive answer here, but she talked about her ex-husband’s irresponsible behaviors and undiagnosed depression. She credited herself for supporting him despite his inability to value her support. She shared her struggles with health issues. In closing, she confidently declared that she hadn’t created any of it.

Before speaking I weighed the following: the business environment we were in and the “I’m-the-victim” stance she was proudly taking.

Not wanting to go too deep in front of her colleagues, but hoping to give her a hand out of the ditch of despair, I asked with great care, “How long did you know your husband before you married him?”

“Five years,” she responded.

“You didn’t see any signs of these behaviors in five years of dating?” I asked.

“No,” she said and diverted the attention to her husband and his ability to fool not only her, but his family and her family, and then she again started talking about her health issues.

In the coaching process, my first priority is to always maintain respect and preserve the integrity of the coach/client experience, so I excused myself from her personal space and turned to address the group.

This quick coaching exchange revealed to upper leadership why one of their middle-management leaders wasn't able to take responsibility for her actions. These are the kinds of life issues that employees have a difficult time understanding, processing, and overcoming. You don't see them during the interviewing process and you can't understand them during performance reviews, yet they show up in employees' leadership style, and work performance, and during interactions with you, co-workers, and their staff. Pain shows up in different ways. In the workplace you often hear words such as “defensive,” “bully,” and “odd behavior.” Providing this employee with counseling or a coach could help turn her life and work performance around. Leadership will never know what she needs if they don't ask the right questions—which will leave everyone frustrated within the organization.

Improving relationships with leadership for employees

Seeing a member of leadership walking toward you in the hallway can cause your heart to flutter. Being assigned to work on a special project with a member of leadership can trigger sleepless nights. Your expectation of their expectation of you can create doubt, fear, and ultimately silly mistakes.

Interacting successfully with leaders requires some simple but intentional decisions:

- * **Look them in the eyes and give a firm handshake.** These gestures demonstrate confidence and show that you have nothing to hide.
- * **Listen and let them lead the conversation.** Don't say anything unless you have something to say. Resist the urge to start talking and jump into nervous chatter. Instead, let them tell you what they're thinking.
- * **Meet them at their level.** Don't be arrogant, but don't act like you're reaching up, either. Stand in your power and let them see your brilliance.
- * **Find out whether something is particularly important to them.** Don't forget that leaders have needs too. By asking, you may discover a way to help and increase your exposure. Listen and ask questions when necessary.

<Remember>

- * **Remember that you were invited.** You were invited to the table. This means that someone has vouched for you or has been watching you for a while. Impressed by what you do and how you do it, that person

extended you the opportunity. Don't ever forget this: You were invited for one reason only — you have something they want.

There are times when everyone at the table isn't happy that you're there. If you feel unwelcomed or unduly challenged by someone in leadership, read the section, *Enduring the Difficult Boss Without Sacrificing Yourself*, later in this chapter.

Connecting with coworkers

You likely spend more of your waking hours in the workplace than in your home. In fact, you probably spend more hours with coworkers than you do with your spouse or other loved ones.

Because you spend so much time at work, we recommend that you preserve your sanity by deciding to genuinely get to know and get along with your coworkers. If you deal with many difficult people and situations in the workplace, you may believe that developing good working relationships is impossible, but it's not.

Building positive relationships in the workplace needs to be treated like anything else you consider worth doing — you have to make a decision that it's important to you and be open and willing to do the work to create the outcome you want.

Following is a list of suggestions you can use to build workplace relationships:

- * **Live the golden rule.** “Treat others the way you want to be treated” is the only rule you need to follow to build successful relationships. We bet you've heard that before. It's a simple principle, yet difficult to follow. Think about how you treat others. What can you do to make them feel the way you want to feel when you interact with others?

<Remember>

You can't understand someone else's pain until you stop thinking with your head and feel what that person is saying with your heart.

- * **Define what you'll get.** Whatever you do, you expect something in return; otherwise, you're not motivated to do it. Admittedly, interacting with people can take a lot of energy. Despite its challenges, it's hugely rewarding. When you know what you get out of helping people, you're less likely to get discouraged when more is required of you than you expected.
- * **Seek to understand people.** People have unique and varied needs. Some of these needs are simpler to see and understand than others. Meet the people you seek to understand where they are, and you'll discover more of who you are.

- * **Trust that you and your coworkers want the same thing.** It can be difficult to see that you and a coworker want the same thing when you go about getting it in different ways. Communication can eliminate the confusion and create unity by allowing coworkers to know each other's intentions.

<Exercise>

Everyone has core desires, which are driven by core needs. Most people are unaware of the messages they send to others. You can uncover what people want by attentively watching how they react and respond in various situations and by closely listening to what they say. Here are some questions to engage your coworkers in conversation that will help you to better understand them. Watch their reactions as they express how they feel about each question. You're listening for the emotion that drives the words.

- * Did you think you would be doing what you're doing right now when you were young? What did you think you would be doing?
- * Do you ever wish you were doing something different? What would you be doing?
- * What do you like about this work?
- * If you could be doing anything you want, what would you be doing?
- * What satisfaction would you get from doing that?

<Warning>

Never use private thoughts, feelings, or experiences that a person has shared with you against that person. And don't ever share them with someone who can, which means don't ever share them at all.

Establishing a Plan for Change

If you want to change your workplace experience, you have to be willing to change your behavior. It's easier to point the finger at someone else and blame them for the state that you're in, but nothing new will happen without your permission and participation.

You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to be willing to walk through new doors and know that by changing you're going to create a better experience for yourself and others. Some people thrive on change, while others struggle to understand the need to change. Stuck in the middle are those who would like to change but don't know how. Resistance to change is driven by fear, uncertainty, and lack of faith in oneself.

Change requires the following from you:

- * **Faith:** You believe that you can handle whatever awaits you on the other side of change.
- * **Courage:** You take the chance of doing something different because you know that if you fall, you'll have the strength and ability to get back up.
- * **Confidence:** You know that you're capable of doing anything.
- * **Personal accountability:** You're willing to take the heat, hindrance, and hype of every choice you make.

Are you still wondering, "But what do I need to *do* to change?" Follow the five steps that follow:

1. **Decide what you want to change.**
2. **Uncover why the change is important to you.**
3. **Identify what you'll gain and lose as a result of changing.**
4. **Take small, consistent steps toward change.**
5. **Measure your growth.**

Changing relationship dynamics will require you to dig deeper within yourself to find your "kind" spot. This isn't easy especially if you believe someone has mistreated you and you've had a contentious relationship.

<Remember>

You're trying to get what you want, and they're trying to get what they want. You're not on opposite sides; you're on the same side, but in different positions, trying to get recognized for your individual contributions.

Here are some things for you to keep in mind so that you can grow even if the other person remains the same—for now.

- * **Ego destroys.** Your ego will stop you from getting what you want. Don't focus on them: focus on yourself and stop trying to figure out who's winning.
- * **Right is relative.** Who's right? You both are. Decisions are made based on personal value systems. The "right answer" is relative to the person who is making the decision. Once you understand that, you won't spend energy getting upset about things that you can't control and have little to do with you.
- * **Don't expect miracles.** People don't change because you decide to change. Make the decision to be kind because it's what you define as the right thing to do. If the person never changes, that's okay, because you didn't change for them—you changed for you.
- * **Don't give them what they give you.** You may not get the response that you expect at first, but keep showing kindness towards others. I (co-

author) S. Renee was presenting a workshop on branding for educators. To support my point about consistency, one of the participants, who worked at a school for troubled teens, shared the story in *Prove Yourself*.

Prove yourself

“Every day I would stand outside, wait for the buses to arrive, and greet every student with a warm smile and ‘Good Morning’” the assistant principal shared.

“I would do this day after day, but there was one student who would look me straight in the eyes and when I said, ‘Good morning,’ she would roll her eyes and turn her face.”

“Months passed, and one morning, she looked at me and gave me half a smile. A few more months passed, and she smiled back and said, ‘Good morning.’”

“One morning, I pulled her to the side and asked, ‘Why did it take you nearly half the school year to give me a smile and say, ‘Good morning?’” She said, “I just wanted to see if you really cared.”

Staying focused on your target

Like in the example *Prove Yourself*, whoever you decide to be it has to be because you care and you want to help create a different culture at work. People and situations can get on your nerves, causing chaos and drawing you into gobbledygook. Let distractions come, but don’t get swindled into the mess.

Here are some specific things you can do to stay on target to improve your workplace experience and your relationships

- * **Stay positive.** Memorize or post your favorite scriptures, quotes, or quips around your office.
- * **Set an intention.** When I (co-author S. Renee) present at corporations, I explain the difference between intentions and goals. A goal has tasks attached to it. An intention is a deliberate thought to create something in particular. You have enough work to do: let your subconscious work for you by setting an intention every day for what you want to create.
- * Commit to taking the high road in every situation — become an ego-free zone.
- * Listen to music that motivates and inspires you.
- * Let silence be your power.

Socializing with coworkers after hours

You’re a team player, and you want leadership to know it. This goal requires your attendance at fundraisers, golf tournaments, and holiday parties. Networking with leadership and your coworkers after hours is necessary to advancing your career.

Most people know the following rules, but ignore them. If you want to advance in your career, avoid these danger zones:

- * Don't smoke, use foul language, or drink too much. Two drinks are more than enough; one is preferable.
- * Don't join a gossip session. If you walk into one, keep moving.
- * Don't talk about sex or have an affair with anyone your work with.
- * Don't go too dramatic or sexy with your wardrobe.
- * Don't join a clique — get to know different people from different departments within the company. You never know where your next opportunity may be.
- * Behave like the company's leaders are always watching — because they are.

Enduring the Difficult Boss Without Sacrificing Yourself

“No doubt I was dealing with issues that had nothing to do with you.”

That sentence was pulled from an email sent to me (coauthor S. Renee) by my supervisor 11 years after I was unfairly fired from my position as director of public relations.

She had bullied me for a year — humiliated me in front of my staff, described me as a prima donna, and told me I couldn't write. After seeking relief from human resources and the president of the organization, I was fired.

I have no doubt that the pressure and challenges she imposed on me to become a better writer contributed to my ability to write three popular books and co-write this one. However, as a result of constantly being degraded and embarrassed, I was diagnosed with depression and my self-esteem hit rock bottom. I spent years rebuilding my confidence and my life after that incident.

Some people are difficult to work for because of high expectations. Others are impossible to work for due to their issues. You have to be able to look at your situation objectively to know the difference.

<Tip>

To help you make that distinction, answer the following questions:

- * Does the person make disparaging comments about you?
- * Have you ever been physically attacked or threatened?
- * Do other people in leadership compliment you on your work, while your supervisor often criticizes it?

- * Does the person make demeaning remarks made about you or your work in front of others?
- * Does the person withhold pertinent information you need to do your job?
- * Does the person use intimidation tactics to discourage you from offering your opinion?

If you answered yes to any of these questions and you feel shut down and out of the workplace experience, you're working for a difficult person. Unfortunately, if this type of treatment is permitted in the company culture, there's nothing you can do.

<Warning>

If you work for someone who is fearful, insecure, and wrestling to grasp her own brilliance, she'll do anything to dim yours. We advise that you find another place to shine.

Communicating effectively with a boss who's difficult to work for

Some leaders have high expectations and hold their employees to standards that force them to expand their capacity for learning and success. Because these bosses are focused more on completing tasks, they forget that people need to feel appreciated and valued.

If you work for someone who lacks social skills but otherwise provides what you need to be a success, here are some communication strategies to help you survive the taskmaster:

- * **Have a focused agenda.** When communicating with your supervisor, have a well-laid-out plan to avoid going off on time-wasting tangents.
- * **Get clear direction.** Missing assigned targets only irritates task-oriented people, and they can be impatient listeners. To avoid mistakes, confirm what you hear the person say he requires of you. Consider following up with a written email confirmation for future reference.
- * **Take the emotion out of it.** This is difficult for warm-and-fuzzy people, but to work successfully with someone who isn't, you have to step out of yourself and value what he brings to the table. This type of person is often firm, but fair. Being fair means he won't play favorites. Perform well, and it'll work in your favor.
- * **Offer a solution.** Leadership means having the ability to think through complex challenges and provide a workable solution that builds the confidence of the team. As a member of the team, you can position yourself well by offering ideas that help move the agenda forward. Don't get discouraged when you share ideas and they aren't acted upon right

way. It takes time for people to hear, see, and understand what you're saying. Or it just may not be the best idea at the time.

- * **Consider the pressures your leader is under.** Take into account that some leaders transfer pressure they're getting from their leadership to you. Although this isn't the best way to inspire great work, it's not unusual due to the complex and competitive marketplace.

Addressing disrespectful treatment

No one deserves to be mistreated by anyone under any circumstances. Mistreatment includes directly or indirectly demoralizing you privately or publicly. Some people refer to it as "politics." Good politics are necessary diplomacy to move an agenda forward. It's not lying, shaming, or dehumanizing you — that's bad behavior.

You have the right to stand up for yourself. The best way to address being mistreated is relative to who you're communicating with. Here are some suggestions for you to consider:

- * **Connect on a human level.** Say, "I thought you viewed my work performance as . . . but I must have been mistaken. Could you help me to see it from your point of view?"
- * **Be transparent and honest.** Leadership doesn't appreciate you whining about the amount of work you've been assigned or making an unreasonable number of mistakes. Leaders do appreciate you standing in your power and addressing any feelings of disrespectful mistreatment when presented in a focused, professional, non-accusatory way.
- * **Decide whether it's best to communicate with human resources.** Poor treatment of employees is often a supported culture. If this is the case, human resources may not be a viable option.