

Leadership: it's the brass tacks that count



By [Catherine Milward-Bridges](#)

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Carducci. Chanel. Prada. If only a positive leadership image stopped at good dress sense. The impression that employees hold of their leaders is as critical as the messages that they deliver.

Employees will support leaders when it matters most, if they are visible, engaging, and seen to actively endorse the communication and human resources functions in their business.

The evolved employee seeks more in a job than an adequate pay cheque; they also need:

- job satisfaction that stems from feeling that they're adding *real* value
- regular, effective communication and dialogue that is credibly supported by leadership
- insight into the business' culture, strategic direction and where/how they fit into the big picture.

What leaders say does matter

If leaders build a legacy of carefully considered messages, backed by action, the random ill-spoken word may be met with grace, and even an unexpected display of loyalty, from employees and peers alike.

Unaware that he was already on air, news anchor A.J. Clemente recently made a name for himself for all the wrong reasons. Battling first day jitters, Clemente was recorded swearing on CBS News, as he became flustered whilst preparing to read the bulletin. He was first suspended by the station, but then fired after his clip went viral. His fortunes *did* turn, though, when the public started campaigning for his reinstatement.

True as it may be, the old adage, "It's tough at the top" can be mitigated if leaders are also seen to be doers. Employees value leaders who take 'integrity' and 'respect' from hot-air status, to action words.

Cracking the whip

A leaked internal memorandum recently exposed what appears to be an autocratic leadership style at Yahoo! when it announced that working from home would come to a grinding halt, effective June 2013. Authorised by chief executive Marissa Mayer, an excerpt from the memo read, "Some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussion, meeting new people, and impromptu team meetings. Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home."

Had Mayer arrived at her decision through a more democratic process, this move - though controversial - may have evoked more understanding.

When leading unilaterally, using fear and aggression as tools to command submission, leaders are often seen to be operating from an insecure place. Therefore, rather look your people in the eye and engage with them authentically. You may just get more than you bargained for, in a good way.

A sizeable conclusion

A recent study by academics at the Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina in the U.S.A., found that the bigger a chief executive's signature, the more likely he/she is to be a narcissist.

It also found that bosses sporting big signatures tend to attract higher pay, but they were in fact more likely to hurt their companies' bottom line in the long run.

So, when it comes to employees' perception of a leader's image, it's the brass tacks and not superficial matters like apparel or signature size that count.

Do you practise what you preach? Do you 'walk the floor' occasionally (where applicable) to connect with your workforce? Can you be trusted?

ABOUT CATHERINE MILWARD-BRIDGES

Catherine Milward-Bridges is a passionate communication specialist and founder of simplyput.co.za. Catherine guides her clients in taking their engagement efforts from good to great; and helps them optimise social media with strategic know-how.

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