

Appreciation

You can't see clearly until you appreciate fully. **Good leaders look for people's potential: they don't focus on people's flaws.** If you focus on people's flaws and miss their potential, your relationship will eventually break down.

Appreciation is not tolerance. If you tolerate, or more accurately, endure a person, you dismiss their value and their ability to contribute. In order to appreciate, or even recognize, a person's value, you must make an intentional effort to see the very best in that person. Appreciate, in this context, doesn't mean thanking someone, although that is unquestionably very important. In this context, appreciate means recognizing and understanding people's value and the contributions that they can make.

Following these three guidelines will help you appreciate people more.

1. Accept people the way they are.

Dave Ronne is the director of the Creative Arts team at Crossroads. He is responsible for leading, encouraging, and organizing a numerous musicians, as well as other artists. The expected results of Dave's team, and, ultimately of his leadership, is nothing less than an extraordinary experience every week, 52 times a year. That is obviously no small job. Sometimes it's like herding cats - it's difficult at least and sometimes seems impossible. But Dave, as a good leader, knows that when he wants an artist to perform like an artist, he can't force them to behave like an engineer. He looks for the creative genius in each person and takes a pill to get over the rest. Seriously, though, people love to be part of a team like that. When people know that you support, love, and accept them just the way they are, they'll gradually invite you to help them stretch and grow to become all they can be.

Accepting people the way people are is difficult for most leaders. That's typically because they want to help people grow, improve, and realize their full potential. This is one of the positive, and hopefully productive, tensions of leadership that will always exist because leaders are also under pressure to get things done. However, before you and I, as leaders, can grow people and get things done, we first need to connect with people by accepting them as they are. If we don't, we'll be forced to do everything ourselves, because we won't be developing other leaders.

2. Become a student of human nature.

What makes driven people driven? What causes carefree people to be carefree? Why are highly productive people highly productive? Leaders study these kinds of questions carefully. Not only in offices with their colleagues, but also when those leaders are interacting with the people they lead and getting involved in their lives. Becoming a student of human nature is never intended to be a clinical study. It's about real people and real life. Knowing what makes people tick is part of what makes you a good leader.

A solid grasp of human nature helps you quickly understand what makes people do what they do and resist what they don't want to do. You lead better when you understand that hurting people hurt people, insecure people need attention and reassuring, healthy people want to help people, and nobody, I mean nobody, who tells the truth likes fruit cake. When you understand that everyone wants to be on a winning team, make their life count, and love and be loved, you can interpret what they say and do more clearly. It is invaluable for a leader to know that people lash out when they are under pressure or backed into a corner, and when the response is greater than the issue at hand, the response is about something other than what is obvious. Pages could be written on these things. In fact, it would be a great learning experience for you to write down as many other "facts of human nature" as you can think of.

So, how do you gain wisdom about human nature? You don't need a PhD in psychology to be a good leader. A few simple things, if practiced consistently will provide all you need in this area to lead well.

- Pay attention to people
- Keep your focus off yourself
- Ask meaningful questions
- Learn to read between the lines
- Genuinely care

3. Approaching "difficult" people.

Approaching difficult people is counter-intuitive. It's like putting your hand on hot stove, pulling it off, and putting it right back on it again. It just doesn't make sense. But if you really want to appreciate people more, you must learn to appreciate difficult people too.

It's easy to love and accept your friends, fans, and followers. The real test is to accept those who test you.

If someone is difficult to get along with, ask yourself why. What needs do they have? What pain do they feel? What pressure is overwhelming them? If you take the risk of getting close enough to take the thorn out of the lion's paw, you often discover a magnificent creature full of power and grace.

Keep in mind that different isn't wrong.

The bottom line: to appreciating people more, look for the best in them. It's the choice every good leader makes. My hope for you is that you make it your daily choice to look for the best in everyone you lead.

"This article is adapted from Dr. Dan Reiland's free monthly e-newsletter available at www.INJOY.com."