

“INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP PAYS OFF”



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The autocratic management style is still alive in American business. It persists because that is how many workers were managed by their bosses, and they perpetuated that model when they themselves ascended the corporate ladder. For many, this one-dimensional "my way or the highway" approach is the only way that they know how to manage, and they staunchly defend it. We have all known managers who declare, "I'm not here to be liked, I'm here to get the job done," assuming the two aspects are mutually exclusive.

Amazingly, some businesses not only survive but seem to do well - at least financially - despite a management culture that is paternalistic ("I know what is best for you"), authoritarian ("This is the way it will be done") or exclusionary ("Your opinion doesn't count.") They send mandates down the management chain, and expect people to comply without question. Employees who challenge management or offer opposing ideas in these environments get shut down, labeled as negative trouble-makers, or find themselves being forced out of the organization.

On the surface, these companies may appear to be successful. However, valuable employees in these fear-based and toxic cultures may feel conflicted with their own personal and professional values. The better performers will eventually find their way to another employer who operates more in alignment with those values. It is estimated that 30-40% of today's workers are laying low, putting up with the indignities from management, and just waiting patiently for the right opportunity to present itself.

Conversely, open and inclusive business cultures operate with the understanding that management rarely has a full and accurate perspective as to how decisions, policies and procedures are affecting their employees. They respect the people who work for them and value the contributions and insights that they offer. They are able to contain their own ego and personal agendas for the greater good that can be accomplished with the engagement and input of others. And they know that ultimately, when you trust employees to do what they need to do and are best at, they will give their best and show loyalty tending to stay with the company despite obstacles and challenges.

Many of today's organizations find themselves in cultural transition, with a hodge-podge of clashing traditional (exclusionary) and contemporary (inclusive) leadership styles. Sometimes we see pockets of middle management who are, contrary to their senior management, courageous enough to allow their own open management style to emerge and express itself within their own departments. They tend to create these inclusive micro-cultures while serving as a "buffer" from upper management. Once the team members in these micro-cultures build up their trust with one another, they will perform at higher levels and may have a stronger unified voice in challenging upward to make positive changes.

Inclusive leadership does pay off: surveys continue to show that people chose to work for and stay with their employer based more on their loyalty to the manager they report to than the company itself. Leaders who understand this and can create a participative and inclusive working environment will likely enjoy the rewards of less turnover and greater productivity and loyalty from their staff.

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