

“LEADERS MUST CONNECT WITH, GET TO KNOW THEIR EMPLOYEES”



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It was time for the national sales conference of a medium sized business. This was the one time of year when their sales people from all regions would gather together to learn product updates, sharpen their sales techniques, and network with one another.

The opening evening offered a welcoming reception, where many of the corporate leaders attended and circulated among the sales force. The company had been experiencing an increase in turnover, so there were many new faces in the crowd since the last gathering.

David had been with this company for nearly seven years, and was one of the few longer-tenured professionals in the sales force. He was a strong producer, but lately had become concerned that the new quotas were unrealistic and that the bar was being raised beyond what could reasonably be expected. Others he had spoken with shared his concerns, and he had hoped that he could have the opportunity to address this with some of the key decision-makers.

Early on during the opening reception a well-dressed man without a name tag approached him. "Hi, I'm Bill, how are you doing this evening? Nice to meet you." As he shook hands with David, his eyes were roaming the room to scan the crowd. Then Bill moved on to another near-by employee. "Hi, I'm Bill. Thanks for coming. Nice to meet you."

David gravitated toward a fellow salesperson from another region who he had gotten to know over the years. "Say, Greta, there is a new guy working the room named Bill, and I think he's with corporate. Do you know who he is?"

"Yes," offered Greta. "He's our new division president. I think he's been here for about three months now. What's he like?" "Don't know," replied David. "I just got a quick glad-hand and he moved on. He didn't seem too interested in who I was, that's for sure."

Unfortunately, this scenario is not as uncommon as we would think. There are many executives who are well-educated and knowledgeable about business strategy, but are sadly lacking the interpersonal skills to be comfortable with non-executive employees. They seem to be unaware that avoidance of contact or superficial interaction with their employees can result in a reputation for being stand-offish, arrogant, or having an "ivory tower" attitude.

It is not healthy for any organization, and especially one that is experiencing high turnover of talent as this one is, to have key executives alienating their employees. While the president was by all accounts "visible" at this event, Bill's inability to build rapport with or show genuine interest in his employees probably did more harm than good.