



Balancing Empathy, Active Listening, and Boundaries: The Ultimate Formula for a Kind Leader

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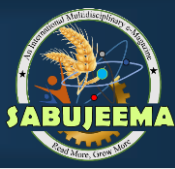
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Introduction

While the word 'leadership' is often associated with authority and discipline, today's leaders need to possess so much more. Today's leaders have to lead with empathy, listen actively, and set boundaries. When there is a balance between all these qualities, then the manager will turn into an inspiring leader who will be able to help build loyalty, creativity, and productivity. This article looks at some of the key characteristics of kind leadership and its pitfalls if neglected. It explains why empathy, active listening, and well-defined boundaries are considered crucial. If anything, kindness in leadership builds trust, fosters creativity, and makes people work together (Cloud, 2013). A kind leader will meet the emotional and psychological needs of their team members, help them grow, and will make sure each and every one of them feels believed in and motivated (Fattah *et al.*, 2021).

According to Ryan (2021), business leaders who are kind and compassionate tend to raise better performances. Indeed, if combined with other leadership qualities such as decisiveness and vision, then kindness can allow leaders the opportunity to connect with their teams at a deeper level. It is this that often leads to higher employee engagement, reduced turnover, and increased loyalty within an organization. Yet, the reality is that it is an art to strike the perfect balance of leadership kindness. Knowing the formula of the kind leader using four categories, based on different combinations of empathy, active listening, and boundaries. These combinations will define what sort of leader one will be:

1. Burnout Leader, 2. Misunderstood Leader, 3. Detached Leader, & 4. Kind Leader



Using each category allows us to understand not only how the presence or absence of certain traits is going to influence our leadership style and how well we can use it but also what kind of attributes a good leader should possess.

Burnout Leader: Empathy + Active Listening -Boundaries.

A burnout leader is the one who listens actively to his team, shows empathy, and does not set boundaries. This kind of leader may have a good heart, being very approachable, but it may introduce major problems in personal and professional ways.

Consequences of Not Having Boundaries

Risk of Emotional Overload: The lack of boundaries set by the leader may be overwhelming because of the emotional needs of the team.

Too Much Empathy and Listening: Extreme empathy and the ability to listen can cause leaders to try to solve every problem and overcome every challenge faced by employees.

Development of Burnout: Continuous emotional participation in the processes can lead to the appearance of burnout, expressed in weariness, irritability, and a decrease in efficiency.

Unable to Say No: Burnout leaders have a weak tendency to say no, which eventually results in taking more and more workload.

Impact on Leadership: Burnout lessens a leader's capability and effectiveness; thus, they fail to lead accordingly

Decision Making Issue: A burned-out leader can't clearly decide on anything, which will surely have negative impacts on the productivity and morale of the teams.

Solutions for Burnout Leaders

Setting emotional boundaries: The major tasks a leader should undertake include taking care of oneself-something that entails understanding well that he or she will not solve all the issues. He may seek help from a colleague or a mentor.

Time Management: Burnout can be prevented by prioritizing activities and managing time to the minute. The leaders can plan frequent breaks and are able to schedule in time for personal well-being.

2. The Misunderstood Leader: Boundaries + Empathy - Active Listening

A leader who lays down clear boundaries, leads with empathy, but does not listen actively. They are empathetic leaders who really care about the team members; however, this leader is inattentive toward



feedback and communication, hence causing misunderstandings.

Consequences of Lacking Active Listening

Active listening in this respect involves not only hearing but making sense of what worries, thoughts, and feelings another fellow tries to convey. Failure to listen on the part of the leader alienates him from his people. Frustration and suspicion would then follow, with miscommunication a common factor daily between supervisor and managed.

The misunderstood leaders actually often feel like they know what is right for the team. However, this lack of listening causes them to miss some valuable inputs. It makes them feel invisible or unimportant. That triggers a sort of disengagement which in due course leads to morale loss and finally, turnover.

How to Fix Being a Misunderstood Leader?

Open channels of communication:

Letting the team members express their concerns and ideas secures the notion of transparency.

Reflective listening: This is a form of listening wherein whatever the speaker says is paraphrased so that there is better clarity on both ends.

Asking for Feedback: A tendency to seek regular feedback from the team flips it over that a leader is open to listening and changing.

3. Active Listening + Boundaries - Empathy = The Detached Leader

The detached leader may hear actively, keep boundaries, yet not show empathy. As a leader, other leaders may give the sense of a listener and organized; however, this inability to emotionally connect with their team makes them detached and cold.

Consequences of a Leader Lacking Empathy

Empathy is about being able to understand and share feelings of others. Leaders who show less empathy may appear distant or inattentive, although they may be very good at listening and setting limits with other people (Khan, 2021). In such scenarios, this tends to make it hard for any team to connect with such leaders, turning them into managers who fail in creating an enabling environment for their employees; the results are low job satisfaction, low performance, and weak teamwork.

Solutions to Detached Leaders: 1)

Emotional Competence Development: By developing emotional intelligence, the leaders become more empathetic; they understand their emotions and those of



others and deal and manage them (Ryback, 2012).

2) Active Empathy: putting oneself in other people's shoes and trying to consider the perspectives, challenges, and emotions that they face.

3) Public relationship building: Those who make the time to be one on one with their team on a regular basis develop far clearer insights into their people and relationships that are much sounder (Beebe, 2011).

4. The Kind Leader: Empathy + Active Listening + Boundaries

A kind leader is one who has all these three elements in place: empathy, active listening, and boundaries. He has an underneath current of compassion balanced with discipline, which keeps him empathetic and commanding, respectful and approachable, clear about expectations.

Advantages of Being Kind as a Leader

Exercising self-awareness: Managers are able to reflect on their leadership style from time to time and notice those areas that need adjustment.

Seek feedback: Inquire from the team members since this will actually help in understanding how the leader's actions were perceived and may bring forth an area for growth.

Set clear expectations: Nice leaders still have clearly set boundaries with regards to expectations of behaviour, performance, and communications. This sets a structured environment where team members know what is expected of them.

Vulnerability: A kind leader never fears showing this particular trait in them. It is a mistake one commits, and upon realization, asking for help when the need actually arises makes for openness and honesty.

Leadership Boundaries

Boundaries are crucial for effective leadership, providing discipline and structure while preventing burnout and emotional entanglement. Although empathy and active listening are essential for building strong relationships, boundaries define a leader's responsibilities and protect their mental and emotional well-being. They establish a clear environment for the team, outlining behaviour, communication, and performance expectations, which helps maintain a productive and balanced work dynamic (Cloud, 2013).

Active Listening: The Foundation of Effective Communication: One of the major skills each leader should possess is active listening, as it gives way to appropriate communication for the understanding of the leaders themselves. To



actively listen, one needs to give all attention to the speaker, avoid distraction, and respond effectively. It demands that the leader be in a position where he is current in the conversation-not just hearing the words spoken, but even understanding the emotions and intentions behind those words.

Benefits of Active Listening: Actually, active listening lays the base to build up the relationship of trust, respect, and mutual understanding between leaders and their teams. When team members perceive a leader as an active listener, they feel valued and appreciated. Consequently, selfishly open communication takes place, and the leader elicits valuable knowledge from his or her team.

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