



THE TWO WORDS EVERY LEADER MUST USE

They may be simple- but their power shouldn't be underestimated *By Colin Caulfield*

Being in a position of leadership can be a double-edged sword. For some, it is a burden that is placed upon them and unwillingly accepted; for others, it is a goal achieved and embraced like an old friend. Either way, when a person finds themselves in a leadership position, their team is looking at them to lead, so lead they must.

Over the last 30 years, I have observed many leadership styles, and borne witness to the various reactions that accompany each one. I have seen autocratic leaders making decisions in isolation with an inflexible expectation, democratic leaders encouraging team input, and at the other end of the leadership spectrum, laissez-faire leadership, which appears a free-for-all management style with the inevitable negative consequences.

But however a person finds themselves in a leadership position, or whatever leadership style they adopt, there are two words that all leaders must use every day.

It's not "Good morning," though very polite and definitely encouraged, and it's most certainly not "Be quiet" or "Shut up," unless you're rude and uncaring- in which case you should seek real

help! No, the two simple -yet highly effective- words you need to use are: "Thank You."

In May this year, Dacher Keltner a professor of psychology at University of California, Berkeley, published *The Power Paradox (How We Gain and Lose Influence)*. After its launch, Keltner wrote an article for *The Guardian*, in which he says: "Expressions of gratitude create strong, collaborative ties, and pave the way for greater influence. Studies find that individuals who express gratitude to others as groups are forming stronger ties within the group months later. Romantic partners who express gratitude to their partners in casual conversations were more than three times less likely to break up six months later. When experimenters

touch participants on the arm in a friendly fashion, those individuals are more likely to sign petitions and co-operate with a stranger. When teachers encourage students with a pat on the shoulder, those students are three to five times more likely to try solving hard problems. Simply being thanked for completed work led participants to be twice as likely to volunteer for more."

But if saying "Thank You" is such a simple and effective way to enforce teamwork, encourage engagement, and seek volunteers rather than hostages to achieving business goals, then why do some leaders seem to find it so difficult to say? In her blog for *HuffPost*, Diane Gottsman identified at least four reasons why saying "Thank You" may not occur:

THE LEADER FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE

Being socially anxious, which results in poor communication, or worse, no communication at all, is something that a leader has to overcome. Communication is critical to the success of the team, and personal anxiety towards displays of outward emotion need to be wrestled with and pushed aside. It's appreciated that that's easy to say, but not so easy to do for socially awkward leaders, but it's imperative to read each situation and be comfortable with your gratitude.

THE LEADER IS DISTRACTED

This is a two-way street. Leaders can often become distracted when they "step out of their helicopter and work in the weeds." Remaining holistic is essential as this will allow leaders to identify who is delivering and conversely who is not. It's also important to identify who is "overwork-

ing," either to meet business deadlines or because someone else in the team isn't carrying their weight. The leader has to identify the resourcing challenges of the business and overcome them, meanwhile thanking the individuals and team for pulling together in the meantime.

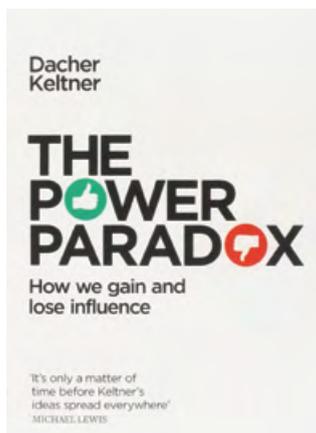
THE LEADER DOESN'T RECOGNIZE THE EFFORT

If you walk into your office each day and don't see the floors shining, the security officer uniformed who greets you with a smile or the administrator who photocopied and scanned thousands of documents to support the business, then you have fallen into a trap. Every effort should be recognized, and as a leader you should place those efforts into context. Rewarding business development executives for clinching deals, but ignoring the rest of the team is just poor leadership and a sure-fire way to break morale. The next time you see the cleaner buffing the floors you should thank them for protecting the image of the business. After all, if a prospective client walks into a filthy building, it will reflect on the business- they may think there is lack of care, a lack of process. Acknowledging the efforts of the "entire" team is critical.

THE LEADER HAS SOME UNRESOLVED CONFLICT

Hostility towards another member of the team is a business killer. Leaders need to get over any grudges and communicate their issue with their colleague so they can move on. Once the issue is aired and the matter closed, saying "Thank You" should not be a challenge.

There is a moral here, and it's uncomplicated and clear: the words "Thank You" are simple and will take you far in life. Leaders shouldn't underestimate them. ■



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