THE BEAUTY IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

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HOW TO RECOVER FROM LEADERSHIP MISTAKES

By MARK MOSES
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We all make mistakes. If we don’t, we’re not taking enough risks. Executives with big responsibilities sometimes make big mistakes. It comes with the territory. But I’ve often watched leaders struggle to recover from a mistake made that probably didn’t have to be as personal or professionally damaging to them as it was. They simply didn’t respond well enough, and it cost them more than it should have.

Here are five steps to move forward and learn from leadership mistakes:

STEP 1: COMMUNICATE QUICKLY

You don’t have to tell the world, but those who need to know should hear it from you and not from anyone else. Let the offended parties know and the people who will have to answer for the mistake. This can’t be done too soon. Surprises like this never turn out well, but with advance knowledge, many times further damage can be averted.

STEP 2: OWN IT

Don’t make excuses. Don’t pretend it didn’t happen. Don’t blame others. Don’t say, “I’m sorry,” but then try to wrap the other person into your story. Ask for forgiveness, if necessary, but own it now. You made a mistake. Be a leader. Own the mistake and be willing to accept the consequences. You’ll be far more respected and stand a better chance of bridging support in the recovery process.

STEP 3: STOP THE LOSS

Do whatever you can to stop further damage from occurring.

STEP 4: FIGURE OUT WHAT’S NEXT

Help the team recover. Find solutions. Don’t leave the clean-up to anyone else.

As you lead into the mistake – or even better – lead through the recovery. Help bring people together, seek wisdom, and help steer energy back to a more positive position.

STEP 5: LEARN FROM IT

The best thing you can do is to grow from mistakes – all of them. They can shape us as people and leaders – either positively or negatively. The good news is that we get to decide which one.

In the process of recovery, sometimes keeping a journal is helpful. Start with the question, “What can I learn from this that will help me make better decisions in the future?”

Mark is the founding partner of CEO Coaching International where he and his team coach entrepreneurs and companies on “Best Practices” in determining where they want to go, how to get there, how to grow their leadership team and put accountability systems in place to ensure that it happens. To engage with him, e-mail us at editor@leaderonomics.com.

What leadership mistakes have you made? How did you respond? What did you learn? Share with us by e-mailing to editor@leaderonomics.com.

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THE GREATEST CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

By JON GORDON
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THEORY OF THE BUSINESS

The problem was clear. Measuring patient satisfaction will not make nurses more energised, positive and attentive. Patient satisfaction will go up when nurse satisfaction goes up.

IT’S ALL INTERCONNECTED

I have found that organisations that deliver the best service also have the best culture where employees are valued, listened to and cared for, and in turn, these employees value, care for and serve their customers.

For example, a number of my banking, retail and restaurant clients have significantly improved revenue and service by focusing on and measuring employee engagement. You can literally track their growth and improve performance with their improvement in engagement.

And companies such as Southwest Airlines have built their success on the foundation of an employee-first culture.

Of course, we need to train our employees to do all the things that make for a great customer experience. There are great books on the essentials of creating a great customer experience.

Most of all, remember that if you model great service, your people will share it.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

So, if you want your team to serve, serve them. If you want your people to care, care about them. If you want your employees to be their best, give them your best.

If you take care of your people, they will take care of your customers.

The industry has changed, and your customers want something different. Your sales team plays a critical role in helping your customers gain clarity and diagnose their problems.

Can your sales team engage and influence your customers? Do they know what your customers really want? Is it their job to simply make a sale, or to create and deliver real value?

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Leaderonomics
The Science of Building Leaders
By DAVE ULRICH
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In very few years there are public critiques about the field of human resources (HR): Why We Hate HR: It’s Time to Split HR, and It’s Time to “Blow-Up” HR. Let me offer an alternative approach. Some prophets see what is wrong, tell the people they are damned and are going to hell. Others see what is wrong and give them a pathway to heaven. I want to offer a positive view of HR’s value by discussing HR’s POT (not the normal “pit” or “pit,” but Perspective, Outcomes, and Transformation).

**PERSPECTIVE**

HR does not start HR. In leading companies, HR shapes business value because HR starts with the business. The scorecard of good HR is the business scorecard. HR investments help deliver product innovation, geographic expansion, and customer intimacy growth strategies. But beyond strategic HR where business strategy is a mirror in which HR reflects business goals, strategy can be a window so that HR work is being connected to external customers and to investor confidence (called HR outside-in).

Customers are increasingly involved with staffing (sourcing and interviewing candidates), training (designing, attending, and teaching), performance management (doing 720 more than 360), and leadership (leadership brand). Investor confidence increases when they monitor quality of leadership through a leadership capital index assessing individual leaders and human capital systems.

Often those critiquing HR are like those who wonder why the 20-year-old telephone, computer, or television does not deliver against modern standards. The dated strawman of HR as an administrator of benefits or policy police is out of date. With a HR outside-in perspective, HR starts and delivers customer and investor value.

**OUTCOMES**

HR is not just about talent. For 20 years, HR has been focused on talent (called labour force, workforce, employees, staff, and people). The war for talent has been the dominant metaphor for HR as fuelled by the McKinsey study, War for Talent.

Complex performance appraisals are replaced with informal conversations which ensure accountability. Technology-enabled hiring, training, and compensations help deliver the administrative work of HR so that more attention can be focused on strategic HR.

HR competencies ensure that HR professionals have the unique skills to deliver business results and demonstrate personal credibility. HR analytics have helped make HR investments that have business impact.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

After decades of research, we know how to invest in HR governance, practices, competencies, and analytics, so that HR shapes talent, leadership, and organisational outcomes, which in turn build customer and investor value.
Be a true success, must possess people skills. The key to successful relationships lies in our ability to take the perspective of another.

1. THINK OF OTHERS

When we are in the presence of others, it is natural for us to think about what they would like or do. We are hardly conscious of the fact that we are usually concerned with ourselves. When we are around others, we seek to understand them. Sometimes we feel comfortable around others so we can quickly refocus ourselves on their body language is indicated. This helps us to gauge how we can most successfully show up in the interaction.

2. HAVE STRONG EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND EMPATHY

Perspective-taking relies on our ability to engage with others, but also upon our capacity to regulate our own emotions. To be effective with others, we must be aware of what might trigger us so we can quickly release ourselves from what is happening with the other. When it comes to empathy, the point is not as much to see things as if they seem unavailable or busy, we may decide to use the best approach to proceed. All of this subtle information allows us to use many parts of our personality to create positive and effective relationships.

3. INTERPRETING WORDS

Most people speak indistinctly, which makes us miss important parts of a conversation.

4. UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER PERSON’S PERSPECTIVE

Perspective-taking requires us to adapt to the built-in automatic system that is our own brain, which is hard-wired to interpret information that is filtered through our own perspective.

5. RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

Perspective-taking respects the maturity to gain knowledge and is respectful of another person’s personal beliefs. When we are discerning what another person has done or said, we need to avoid using evaluative language.

6. GET TO KNOW YOURSELF

It is important to understand the different emotions and thoughts we experience.

7. BUILD TRUST

Trust is the key to successful relationships.

8. THINK TRANSPARENCY

Transparency is the key to understanding others.

9. CONCLUSION

By understanding the other person’s perspective, we can improve our relationships and achieve success.
By HEATHER R. YOUNGER
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“The toughest thing about the power of trust is that it’s very difficult to build and very easy to destroy. The essence of trust building is to emphasise the similarities between you and the customer.”
—Thomas J. Watson

BUILDING relationships with customers once they have put their faith and trust in you is a complicated process. In the end, customers have many choices when purchasing products and services. Remember, they chose you for a reason. Your product or service offerings may be great, but in the end, the customer had a good feeling about buying from you. Below are a few things that you really need to avoid in order to maintain that trust with your customers:

1. FAILURE TO SET EXPECTATIONS

There is nothing more damaging to a relationship than both parties thinking that the other is going to do something one way rather than another and in each instance, they may be wrong. Let’s put ourselves in the customer’s shoes for a moment. They bought into your marketing message on your website or advertisement. They were intrigued by your salesperson’s pitch. They got really excited once you showed them a demo of what your product can do. Then, they bought the whole kit and caboodle. Now what? The customer thinks that everything up to this point would be exactly how the rest of the relationship would be. Unfortunately, they would be wrong in many cases.

Most organisations fail to create a process that ensures that clear expectations are set for what the business relationship would look like going forward. Recently, a client of mine complained to me that the customers perceive the company as a commodity, and don’t seem to understand what it takes to deliver a great service based upon the parameters under which the customer operates. My client feels like the company could deliver a much better service if more of a mutual understanding of each other’s pain points could be understood. I asked whether the client had a customer scorecard and whether the company set expectations up front. They had quarterly business reviews with the customers. The answer is in the negative. This is one of the first things I decided to help client with as I knew that it is a crucial for both parties in a business relationship to co-create mutual expectations.

Customers want you to meet or exceed their expectations. This is not possible unless you know what those expectations are. Write them down. Track your progress toward those expectations. Let the customer know how you have performed. Finally, and a very important point, let them know what they can do to help you perform even better! Put those types of processes in place and you will be that much closer to maintaining that strong relationship you worked so hard to build.

2. OVER-PROMISING AND RARELY DELIVERING

“Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is our character. Over-promise and rarely delivering ruins your reputation like a shadow. The tree is your character. Over-promising and rarely delivering ruins your character.”

I have worked in a customer-facing leadership role for most of my career, and I can say that over-promiseing and rarely delivering can get any organisation in deep trouble very quickly. This is true whether you are in healthcare, financial services, staffing, management consulting, etc. I can think of no more relevant example of this than in the software industry. There are an infinite number of requests that a customer might make to an organisation around software upgrades or fixes.

I have heard exchanges with customers about what an organisation plans to do to fix the amount of times a site is down and then proceed to fall short on those promises. I have heard promises to customers about shorter than normal timelines to add particular upgrades in order to “sell” or “keep” the customer. They fell short here too. Bottom line is that every time this type of over-promise and rarely delivering is possible. They will love you for it!

3. IGNORING INEVITABLE CONVERSATIONS

Initiating a conversation with a customer whom we know may not be happy with our products or services can be one of the most difficult things to do. Standing tall while doing it is crucial. I recall having a team member who dreaded entering into emotionally-charged conversations so much that she would just pass those calls over to me to handle them. Do I love to talk to angry customers? Absolutely not, but I do see these conversations as an opportunity to listen, empathise and try to show that I care.

We show our value and our heart when we face the difficult times with our customers. It is in the low times that our relationships are strengthened for the long haul.

Don’t dread or ignore those inevitable conversations with customers when your organisation falls short on delivering upon expectations. Have courage. Show them that you are prepared to do what it takes to back up your brand promises no matter what! It is in these times when true mutual respect and understanding is born.

4. PUTTING YOUR NEEDS ABOVE THEIRS

People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” —Theodore Roosevelt

This quote holds true when building relationships with customers. Customers are people. They can see right through any insincerity, and they know when you are putting your needs above theirs. They know if you are covering your own backside. Show them you care by letting them know what is on the line for your organisation and what you are prepared to do to keep their business. Let them see that they are not just a number, or a revenue line on a profit and loss statement. Sure, they pay your bills, but let them know that your relationship with them is about more than that. If it is not about more than that, I can assure you that very few customers will remain loyal to organisations that are not loyal to them.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Building relationships with customers starts with them trusting your brand through a whole series of interactions. The faith they place in you to deliver on your brand promises should not be taken for granted. Avoiding some of the mistakes I outlined here will really help you maintain their faith and maybe even get you referrals along the way!
NE of the conditions for major positive changes in any organisation or individual is for everyone involved to face the truth and take an honest assessment of where he or she is now. To do that, it’s crucial to have an honest conversation to take stock of the current reality before moving forward. It’s not easy. They are often very uncomfortable. But big conversations matter.

WHAT IS IT?
A big conversation is a conversation where the stakes are high, emotions run strong, and opinions differ. Breakthroughs and transformations hinge on it. Leaders can play an active role to facilitate big conversations, both on individual and group settings. But here’s the tricky part. Leaders may become cautious to avoid honest, straight talks in order to prevent the organisation’s or individual’s defensive routines. This applies not just to big organisations but to small teams of any kind, including families.

LEADING BIG CONVERSATION
How can you make it safe for big conversations to happen, so that people are willing to discuss the “undiscussable”?

1) Common end goal
Set the tone. Let it be known that this conversation needs to happen as stakes are high. Focus on the common objective that everyone is striving for. Be very clear on the purpose, intentions and goals. Discuss the “whats” and more importantly, the “whys.”

2) Grant permission
This is the basic ground rule. Create a safe forum that permits people to speak the truth, making it known that no one needs to be offensive or defensive about anything. Let it be okay for everyone to be their real self.

3) Take ownership
Make sure that everyone involved in the conversation has something personally at stake in the goal. Everyone has to take responsibility for what he or she says. Don’t pretend they really are and everyone is okay with that. They feel empowered by new possibilities that they previously didn’t see. They see a clear path to move forward and are now ready to jump into action.

4) Don’t pretend
Let people say things as they really are. Don’t pretend things are fine when they really aren’t. Don’t smoothen any rough edges (not yet) as they are useful information to deal with the challenges.

5) Bigger picture
This is an invitation for everyone to play a bigger game and see the greater cause, the bigger picture. Context matters. It’s not just about you or me.

6) Discuss the “hows”
Don’t just state the “whats” and the “whys.” But discuss the “hows”—specifically how the team thinks and interacts.

7) Ready to act
Make sure people leave the conversation feeling ready to take action. That will inevitably happen if they leave the conversation in three ways:
- They feel inspired by a new-found freedom to express and be who they really are and everyone is okay with that.
- They feel empowered by new possibilities that they previously didn’t see.
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COACHING QUESTIONS
1) Is there a big conversation that needs to happen in your organisation/team?
2) What will happen if it doesn’t take place and things remain the way they are?
3) How can you lead such conversations and lead your people to greater heights now?

I didn’t say it will be easy. It’ll be worth it. Don’t play safe, take a little risk. Make it happen. Let me know how it goes...

7 STEPS IN LEADING BIG CONVERSATIONS

The Reason Why We May Be Susceptible to Avoiding Big Conversations Is That We Have Been Conditioned to Converse in Ways Rooted in Certain Social or/and Cultural Virtues.

HOW TO?
By LEE HWAI TAH
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The Self: Ideal, Ought and Actual

To begin with, we have to decide what it means to “be yourself.” In psychology, self-discrepancy theory describes the relationship between our three selves: the “ideal” self is who we aspire to be; the “ought” self is how we understand what others think we should be; and then there’s our “actual” self—the self whose attainments, behaviours and development is regularly at odds with what we and others might otherwise expect.

In spiritual practice, we go deeper still. What is our “true” self? While psychology looks at the actual self in terms of conventional reality (e.g. the choices we make, behaviours we espouse, how we navigate our world), from a spiritual perspective, this isn’t our “actual” self at all. Rather, it’s one that’s constructed through conditioning and shaped over time by our upbringing, environments, circumstances, and other key influences that have worked to mould the person we are today.

Our true self, from a spiritual perspective, is what lies beneath all that conditioning and it’s our job to chip away at the superficial qualities and traits that combine to define who we are. But this involves a lifetime’s commitment consisting of years of contemplation, prayer, meditation, reflection, and time spent in solitude.

If you’ve reached this point without feeling mentally exhausted, please let me know your secret. No doubt you’ll now have realised why “be yourself” is simplistic and unhelpful advice, mainly because most of us have no idea who we are exactly.

To Be or Not to Be Yourself

Recently, Adam Grant—a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania—wrote an op-ed piece for The New York Times, giving his views on why “be yourself” is terrible advice. He talked about how, in truth, no one wants to see our authentic self—rather, people want us to be sincere and to live up to what we say.

Professor Grant’s piece received some responses, including one writer who wrote, “My true self is kind. I am all about ease, joy, happiness and fun.” While I don’t doubt this is how she perceives or strives for herself to be, I wonder whether it’s an accurate assessment. I doubt any of us would describe ourselves as being awful and all about hardship, despair, sadness and boredom.

Nevertheless, the discussion on being true to ourselves and what that actually means is an important one to have, as it helps us to refine our understanding of human nature and how we can work to further develop its positive traits and chip away at the negative aspects.

Sincerity: The Secret to Success

But, sticking with conventional reality for now, what is the best way to build relationships, establish rapport and successfully engage others?

In his article, Professor Grant writes, “Decades ago, the literary critic Lionel Trilling gave us an answer that sounds very old-fashioned to our authentic ears: sincerity. Instead of searching for our inner selves and then making a concerted effort to express them, literary critic, Lionel Trilling urged us to start with our outer selves. Pay attention to how we present ourselves to others, and then strive to be the people we claim to be. Rather than changing from the inside out, you bring the outside in.”

Think for a moment how you engage with people. If you have a partner, how do you interact with them? Is it different to how you engage with co-workers? Are your interactions with co-workers different to how you connect with your parents? What about interacting with children or pets?

We tend to adapt ourselves depending on the situation and who we’re addressing. For example, I might tell my wife about the tough day I’ve had and ask her to put the kettle on. But it’s highly unlikely—however tough my day’s been—that I’d conduct myself in the same way were I in the presence of The Queen or, say, Peter Dinklage.

With this in mind, we might then say that the better advice is to “be your best self in a manner appropriate to the situation.” This doesn’t necessarily mean adopting a false reality, but rather to recognise that, just as we dress appropriately for different occasions, we are required to act appropriately depending on the people we encounter.

Nor does it mean that, in being our best selves, we are less respectful to some people over others. The reason I can ask my wife, and not the Queen, to put the kettle on while we each talk about our day is due to the difference in terms of familiarity, rapport and comfort; the degrees of which dictate the level and the substance of interaction. All relationships have this in common.

Bringing It All Together

In being our best selves, appropriate to each situation, we are enabled to build solid relationships and strengthen connections. It also helps us to grow and develop further in a way that “being yourself” prohibits, as it implies an inability or unwillingness to adapt whenever it’s called upon for us to do so.

By conducting ourselves with sincerity, we get our heads around how we can best navigate our world as we see that communication and connections are less about ourselves and more about serving others so that we might benefit them and in turn learn more about who we are.
Coordinating Out of the Comfort Zone

By Ethan Ganesh
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After one year and four camps’ worth of experience as a facilitator, I was offered the unique opportunity to coordinate my very own DIODE Youth Leadership Camp. It was one of those offers that screamed for me to seize it! It was also one of those offers that scared me.

All my life, taking leadership roles has been a great challenge. In every camp, I had learnt to take up greater roles gradually. To me, this was more like taking a leap: exhilarating and downright frightening!

On one hand, my gut told me I had so much to learn and experience. On the other hand, my heart told me that I had never done anything like this before and I should flee. Funny how two important organs can disagree with one another so much.

According to a search result on Google, a person’s comfort zone is a place or situation where one feels safe or at ease and is without stress. In every camp, we emphasise that outside the comfort zone is where the magic happens. Having said that so many times, my gut rejoicing and heart queuing!

Ignoring the other two organs and existing my brain, I did my best to logically assess my challenges. After a while, all I could see ahead was: Ethan you have to take charge now. Isn’t that great (heavy sarcasm)?

Nevertheless, the choice was made. It was time to inch my way out of the comfort zone.

Committing to it

It was very tempting to avoid the whole thing, sit back and wait for someone to help me make it work. It would be the path of least resistance, something easier for me to move along. However, I knew that this would just be me slipping back to my safe space.

I genuinely wanted to challenge myself. I knew that if I could put my back into it, it would take me to new heights of my leadership journey. I needed to commit to it as strongly as I could and stick to it. I went to all my past campers, facilitators and colleagues. I made sure I told them that I wanted to run this camp, it was a passion, and that I would do the very best I could!

As I uttered those words, it made my responsibilities feel more real. I felt more anchored in this new role and more determined to do it. It helped me feel a strong sense of accountability towards giving it my all.

As a coordinator

My responsibilities ranged from organising the logistics of trainers and facilitators, to running my own sessions and even to the general management of the whole camp. I, at the age of 19, would have to guide and mentor the facilitators through their entire camp journey. I was to be Odin, the All-Father of camp, but of course more smiley and friendly.

Going back to the frightening idea of having to take charge, for the first time I would be the one to call the shots. This meant that every decision made would impact my campers and facilitators directly. Uncle Ben’s words from Spiderman had never made more sense: “With great power comes great responsibility.”

It’s a quote used very often, and for good reason. I was empowered to run this camp, and I was responsible for its success. It was time to push beyond and start working.

The camp experience

The biggest challenge I faced before camp was the massive uncertainty.

When you’re out of your comfort zone, nothing is as clear. In these scenarios, for me at least, the fear of failure looms. It was new ground for me.

In order to get past this, I had to constantly remind myself and be reminded that failure is only failure if you do not learn from it. I got my mindset ready, i.e. prepared for lots of learning!

I was faced with challenges I could not have foreseen. Quite literally, I’m a planner, so when sudden changes happen, being adaptable doesn’t come naturally to me.

The very first day of camp, for example, we faced a sudden challenge. The campers’ bus was late due to traffic and a number of delays. This reduced the time for my opening session, forcing me to change half my plans. It forced me to be flexible and change my routine according to the situation, throwing me further out of my zone of comfort.

Had it not been for my outstanding facilitators, I don’t think I could’ve adjusted. As the days went by, I let myself learn, grow and adapt to the hurdles I faced and grew to love my role.

My comfort zone expanded and I felt my confidence growing.

Feelings after camp

I looked back at camp today. It’s been about a month since, but the world looks different. I had just had the most challenging and beautiful six days of my life. I stepped out and faced all I had feared.

Taking leadership roles have been a great challenge. Coordinating out of my comfort zone was like crossing my own borders and jumping off a cliff. It’s still too early to say, but after the journey, I feel even more prepared to take the next step and inch out once more.

I learnt that I truly enjoy leading. The role of being a guide, mentor and friend turned out to be a blend of all the things I find interesting. As for having to be the one calling all the shots, I noticed that decision-making like this would happen throughout life anyways. While it’s still not my favourite thing, at least now I have a sense of acceptance towards it.

A simple sum up

When venturing out of the comfort zone and into the wild:

1. Commit to it, be prepared to give your all
2. Learn that failure is failing to learn
3. Be ready to adapt, stuff happens

Just like fishing, it takes effort to reel in life’s “big ones” and make a meal out of challenges. Stepping out is never easy, but when you do, the world becomes a bigger place.

Our comfort zone is our safe place. However easy-going it may be to remain there, we only live once and life begins at the end of that comfort zone.

Ethan is a die-hard believer in transcending comfort zones. Ever since his DIODE Camps journey began, challenges have become learning opportunities. Get involved with DIODE camps by e-mailing diode@leaderonomics.com.
Hugh Jackman Hailed ME A CAB: The Power of Lasting Impressions

By Jeff Haden

OW you treat every person you meet matters. Some people realise that. Others don’t.

Two stories. I was standing by myself between sessions at a major user conference in New York. I’m really shy but through extensive practice have mastered the ancient social art of standing alone while seeming confident and secure.

A very pleasant young lady strolled briskly over. “I’m Janice. You’re Jeff?” she asked.

I admitted I was. “Great!” she said. “Do you have a second? Bill Lumbergh would like to meet you.” Bill (as Office Space fans realise, not his real name) was the chief executive officer of the company holding the conference.

“Cool,” I thought. I didn’t think Bill even knew I existed and was flattered he wanted to meet me.

Janice ushered me into a small conference room. Bill sat at the end of the table, shuffling and signing papers. “Bill,” Janice said, “Here’s Jeff.”

“Hi Bill,” I said, walking forward to shake hands. Without looking up he waved his left hand towards a chair and said, “Be right with you.”

As I angled towards the chair, I glanced at Janice. She did the half-smile, gentle-shoulder-shrug non-verbal gesture that says, “I’m sorry, he’s really busy but don’t take it personally because deep down inside he’s a good guy.”

So I sat. Time passed. I considered the universe and my place within it.

Finally, he looked up. “We are glad you came to our humble little gathering,” he said.

“It’s my pleasure,” I said. “This is a great event. I’m sure you’re very proud.”

We made small talk for a few minutes (Did you know the scuba diving in Beqa Lagoon is awesome? I didn’t.) while I waited for him to get to the point. He had that distracted air of someone who wants to be anywhere else, doing anything else. I realised there might not be a point.

To see if I was right I shifted forward in my seat and said, “Well, I’m sure you’re really busy…”

“Thanks for understanding,” he immediately said, half-standing to shake my hand. “Have a great time!”

Unfortunately, I didn’t have a great time, at least not as great as I had been.

I wasn’t bothered by the fact he didn’t seem interested in talking to me; after all, who am I? I was bothered by the fact he asked to talk to me… and then was distracted and disinterested and glad to get rid of me.

When Jeff Met Hugh

“As the owner, you are your company” may be a cliché but it is no less true. After that I saw the conference—and his company and its products—in a different, less positive light.

Superficial on my part? Maybe, but I couldn’t help it. Two days later I was cutting through Central Park on my way to meet a friend at his restaurant. As I exited the park I stopped for a second to decide whether I had time to walk the rest of the way or should take a cab. A voice behind me said, “Lost?”

As I turned I said, “I don’t think so…” and stopped. Holy crap. Wolverine. Standing right in front of me.

The Wolverine starring Hugh Jackman

He smiled, tilted his head, and raised his eyebrows in a non-verbal, “Need any help?”

I told him I was deciding whether to get a cab. He asked where I was from (my southern accent gave me away), what business brought me to New York (my bag providing a clue), and whether my family was along for the trip (he noticed my wedding ring).

I didn’t even get a chance to squeeze in a, “Hey, loved you in…” compliment. He could not have been nicer.

Then he said, “Oh wait, I’m going to make you late. Where are you going?”

I told him. “Oh, that place is great!” he said. “Let’s get you a taxi.” He took a couple steps out onto Central Park West, raised his hand (sans claws, disappointingly) and flagged a cab. He opened the car door, shook my hand, said, “Great talking to you,” shut the door, and waved as I drove away.

In three minutes, Hugh Jackman turned me into a fan for life. But he didn’t sell me. He didn’t schmooze me. He just gave me his full attention. He acted as if for those three minutes I was the most important person in the world—even though he didn’t know me and has certainly forgotten me.

Jackman: The Real X-Men

Just like a CEO or business owner, as an entertainer Jackman is his “company” and even though I’m sure it wasn’t his intention—I now see his “products” in a different, more positive light.

Superficial on my part? Maybe, but I can’t help it.

Granted you may not be Wolverine, but you are—if you choose to be—a star. To your vendors, your suppliers, to other employees, to people in your community who look up to you… you can be a star.

All you have to do is act as if every person you speak to is the most important person in the world and they will instinctively think better of you.

But don’t fake it. Don’t be false or manipulative. Don’t try to be someone you’re not. Be genuine, be sincere, be yourself—just make sure you are the best version of yourself you can possibly be.

Shining the spotlight on the other person always reflects well on you.