

BUT WILL THEY LIKE ME?

By Marilyn Thiet

We have become a society obsessed with “liking” and wanting to be “liked”. On social media sites such as Facebook we post our likings to businesses, political viewpoints, and pictures of friend’s children. Some fret when their posting receives less “likes” compared to someone else’s. Popularity abounds, supposedly, for those with literally hundreds and sometimes thousands of social media “friends”. For me, the word “like” is beginning to sound like nails on a chalkboard.

Last week I had the honor of working with a talented group of people new to management roles. While discussing the transition to a leadership role and the critical actions that will lead to success, I began to talk about the importance of establishing an environment of accountability. For this particular client, the concept of accountability is not something that has historically been strong or consistent. A young woman in the workshop raised her hand and commented on her concern that her predecessor was well “liked” by the team and if she comes across too strong in holding them accountable, she is afraid they will not “like” her. Bam, there it was the nails on the chalkboard. Now don’t get me wrong, I think establishing effective business relationships is essential for all leaders. But a leader’s actions should be based upon earning the trust and respect of the team and doing what needs to be done to drive business performance and results. Not based upon our desire to be “liked” by our team. Having someone trust and respect us does not necessarily equate to having someone “like” us. I trust and respect my surgeon, but I don’t necessarily “like” her. I have trusted and respected multiple managers and colleagues in my career, but there are some that I don’t necessarily “like”. They would not be the first person I would think of calling to share a glass of wine and conversation. But that did not make them less effective or less trusted in the workplace.

Holding people accountable, making tough decisions and having difficult conversations are all critical elements of effective leadership. If done right, all can lead to building trust and respect, even if they may lead to someone temporarily “disliking us”. While I trusted and respected my parents immensely, there were more than a few times in my teenage years that their boundary setting had me momentarily “disliking them”. Thank goodness they did not let the fact that I would dislike them stop them from making the right decisions for me.

As a leader, what are the tough things that you are hesitating to do because you know it will make you unpopular? What conversation needs to be had for the sake of the business that you know may strain a relationship? What risk do you assume in continuing to put off that conversation? Make the right decisions for your business. Hold people accountable and let them know the consequences when that doesn’t happen.

Do so in a way that leads to trusting respectful relationships. I joke with those in my leadership workshops about it being lonely at the top. If you need to be “liked” leadership may not be for you, especially if it takes the place of making the right decisions for the business.