

Everyone Is Essential: Guest Author Bob Cooper

❌ Some organizations will use the terms essential and non-essential workers as a way to distinguish between who needs to be on site in the event of an emergency, and who does not. I do understand the purpose of this distinction, however, **it's very important that businesses not give the impression that some employees are more important or valuable than others.**

Have you ever thought about the importance of the Bank Teller's role? Is this individual given the requisite respect they deserve? I once overheard a bank manager say the following – “She's only a teller, you can't expect her to know better.” Think about the responsibility of this role. The Teller helps to build the customer experience and is responsible for very important transactions. I don't know about you, but I want the Tellers in my bank to be satisfied and maintain a good focus on their work.

How do you view each and every member of your team? Do you respect everyone as an important member of the team? How does each person on your team impact the internal and external customer experience?

Your employees are your most important asset, and you need to serve them. If you expect them to deliver exceptional service to others, you need to serve them first.

The following are a few suggestions to **demonstrate** that you view **every** member of your team as **essential**:

1) Show Respect at all Times – Never make the same mistake that the Bank Manager made by saying “She's only a Teller, or clerk, or aide, or any other position. Sometimes the best ideas come from your front-line staff. They have dreams and aspirations and want to know that you value them for their

contributions. They have feelings and want to know that you value them as professionals.

2) Engage their Hearts and Minds – Give every member of your team the opportunity to become involved in all aspects of the business. Show your staff how their work is integrated with other members of the team and is critical to the organization's success. Find out what motivates team members, and wherever possible, allow them to become involved in initiatives that ignite their passion. They should become engaged in offering ideas to build the business and drive strategy.

3) Say Thank You – Show your gratitude for individual efforts by expressing sincere thanks for a job well done. The key is your sincerity. If your thank you is half-hearted, don't be shocked when one of your best performers leaves the organization because they don't feel appreciated. You can't fake sincerity.

4) Care About Them – Have you ever experienced a personal problem only to find your boss is only concerned with the project you are working on? I have heard bosses say – “Leave your personal issues at home.” Oh really? What if a staff member has a loved one who is very ill? Should this not matter? I have witnessed throughout my career many top performers change jobs because they felt their boss was totally insensitive to their personal concerns. When people come to work, they bring their whole selves to the office. Of course they need to perform their duties responsibly. As a leader, part of your job is to help staff keep their head in the game. You need to show empathy and assist the employee to effectively deal with their issues.

5) Bring Them Coffee – In my book “Heart and Soul in the Boardroom” I discuss a former boss named Warren. Although I have not seen Warren in over 25 years, I remember him as if it was yesterday. Warren would say – “Bob, can I bring you a cup

of coffee back from the cafeteria?” He would make the same offer to every member of the team. Warren treated every member of the team with respect. What about the boss who asks his or her assistant to bring back a cup of coffee and never offers to do the same? What’s the message? This individual believes that others are there to serve them – WRONG! You are there to serve others. In turn, they will reciprocate and go the extra yard to help you win.

6) Care About Their Careers – Take the time to listen and understand your employee’s goals. Make every effort to help them to achieve their goals. The key here is to show the effort and desire to assist them to reach their full potential.

Great leaders treat every member of the team as essential. They realize that the receptionist or janitor make a huge impact on the customer experience. I will never forget what a former boss named Harry said many years ago during a meeting. Harry said – **“Remember, the janitor may be at the bottom of our organization’s hierarchy, but is the CEO to his family.”** I can still hear Harry’s voice. He was so right. Every human being deserves to be respected.

If you treat every member of your team as essential, and truly care about them, they will perform beyond your expectations. We must make sure the financial compensation is fair and competitive, but the differentiating factor is that staff know you care, and see them as essential to the organization’s success.

For a complete listing of our services, please visit us at www.rlcooperassoc.com or call (845) 639-1741.

*RL Cooper Associates’ book **“Heart and Soul in the Boardroom”** outlines suggestions for leaders to develop highly respectful and ethical work cultures and is available in the **Manage My Practice Store**. For additional information about their*

services, please visit www.rlcooperassoc.com.



My Take on Bob Sutton's "12 Things Good Bosses Believe"

Robert Sutton is one of my favorite thinkers. Anyone who would write a book entitled *The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't* is okay with me. Bob is Professor of Management Science and Engineering at Stanford University and he writes honestly about management on his blog "Work Matters." Here are his *12 Things Good Bosses Believe* and my comments.



Image via Wikipedia

1. I have a flawed and incomplete understanding of what it feels like to work for me (Robert Sutton discusses #1 in more detail here.)

Yep. Give an anonymous satisfaction survey to your employees if you think you know what they are thinking. As managers, we create our own little world based on what we think employees need and want and what we are doing in response to our perceptions of them. It's a beautiful world we create. It can be a rude wake-up call when we find we don't really understand what our employees think about us, our decisions or our management style.

2. My success and that of my people depends largely on being the master of obvious and mundane things, not on magical, obscure, or breakthrough ideas or methods.

My mentor taught me "Take care of people's paychecks and their vacation time – get it perfectly right or fix it quickly, and you'll be fine." Anyone who has ever done payroll or staff scheduling can tell you that these "mundane" tasks are two of the most complex and frustrating, yet critical jobs in management.

3. Having ambitious and well-defined goals is important, but it is useless to think about them much. My job is to focus on the small wins that enable my people to make a little progress every day.

Your staff want to know that the group is moving forward, but ultimately they don't relate the big projects to their day-to-day job. What they want (just as you and I do) is to have the small irritations, the glitches, and the bugs to be fixed. They want to be able to stop wasting their time doing workarounds because the manager won't take the time to fix something.

4. One of the most important, and most difficult, parts of my job is to strike the delicate balance between being too assertive and not assertive enough.

One of my Mary Pat-isms is to say that the only time I tell people exactly what to do without getting their input is when the building is on fire. This is a bit of an exaggeration, but I do think employees get tired of me asking "What do you think?" when all they want is for me to tell them what to do. If I tell them what to do though, how do I know that their input might not produce a better answer? I also want them to think about solving the problem themselves or getting input from others.

5. My job is to serve as a human shield, to protect my people

from external intrusions, distractions, and idiocy of every stripe "" and to avoid imposing my own idiocy on them as well.

I interpret this as my effort to make it safe in the organization to make mistakes and to be human. The tricky part is walking the line between making it so safe that people feel that mistakes don't matter, and making it safe enough to stand the pressure of healthcare every single day. I tell the staff that my job is to free them to do their job.

6. I strive to be confident enough to convince people that I am in charge, but humble enough to realize that I am often going to be wrong.

An employee once told me that she really likes a boss who says "I don't know the answer, so let's see if we can find the answer together."

7. I aim to fight as if I am right, and listen as if I am wrong "" and to teach my people to do the same thing.

I would amend #7 to say that I tend to rely on my experience to guide my decisions, but I often want to hear what others' thoughts are to make sure the best solution is achieved.

8. One of the best tests of my leadership and my organization is "what happens after people make a mistake?"

See #5.

9. Innovation is crucial to every team and organization. So my job is to encourage my people to generate and test all kinds of new ideas. But it is also my job to help them kill off all the bad ideas we generate, and most of the good ideas, too.

Innovation is crucial in delivering healthcare. One of my favorite techniques is to see how problems are solved in other fields and try to apply them to healthcare. Teaching others to seek inspiration and to be comfortable with test-driving

solutions is critical to giving a practice the competitive edge.

10. Bad is stronger than good. It is more important to eliminate the negative than to accentuate the positive.

I agree. I hate it, but it's true.

11. How I do things is as important as what I do.

Or maybe more important. How I speak to staff, how I speak to patients, how I demonstrate compassion, how I deal with frustration, how I relate to someone who is going through something tragic, how I talk about my boss, how I _____
(fill in your answer here.)

12. Because I wield power over others, I am at great risk of acting like an insensitive jerk and not realizing it.

Being a manager carries with it an almost bone-crushing responsibility for doing the right thing for the organization AND the right thing for the employee. Trying to achieve a win/win in as many situations as possible is a noble calling, but one that can wear you down to a nub, which is when most of us may be accused of acting like insensitive jerks. Acknowledging this state (apologizing is good) and taking a time out is the right thing to do.

If you describe what you want in a boss, and you're not describing you...think about it.