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To be Liked or not to be Liked? That is the Question!
by Tricia Baker, M.P.A., CPPA

Someone once told me that if you want to be a manager, don’t plan on being liked. As a new manager, I was a little upset at this statement, because I have a lot of friends and many more acquaintances, and I like to be around lots of different types of people. I find them interesting and fascinating. And I am not ashamed to say, I want to be liked. By all of them – even those who work for me. While as a leader and manager it is sometimes difficult to be friends with everyone, surely I can still be liked?

I believe that there is a basic human need that drives most of us to want to be liked. We feel uncomfortable and awkward when we are aware that people don’t like us, and yes, we sense it almost immediately. Indeed, Kouzes and Posner tell us that we should want to be liked.

We have all worked for someone that we really liked. Think about that person for a second. How did that person influence you? If that person is similar to the one I am thinking of, you will do almost anything for him or her, and not because you have to, but because you want to. Isn’t that a great leadership legacy?

Unfortunately, just because you want to be liked, it doesn’t follow that you will be liked. That privilege depends on how you actually treat people. However, most of the time, our intentions are reflected in our actions, and if your actions show you want to be liked, most of the time you will be. It is also true that as a manager and leader, there is a difference between being liked and being soft.

Despite what many think, I believe that leadership is personal - your followers want to know you as a real person. Try to switch that off and you lose a lot of your influence, because the fact that they see you screw things up on occasion can often make them like you more, because it makes you human and real, just like them. I had a friend once that apparently had the perfect life. One of those that was so perfect it almost made you sick, and certainly jealous. When I found out her life wasn’t so perfect after all, it made me like her more, probably because I felt like I could relate to her as a “real” person. It is no different as a leader at work.

If you are one of those who don’t care whether people like you or not, tread carefully. Don’t think that your employees don’t know that you don’t care, because they do! People almost always know what you really feel about them - it’s a basic human instinct. Think about how it makes them feel to know their leader doesn’t care about them personally.

Stop for a moment and reflect. Do your employees like you, and how does your answer to that reflect your leadership?