

## Are you the Boss or the Mate? From Worth a read.....

**Should leadership** develop into mate ship? Business leaders may find themselves wondering where to draw the line with regards to getting close to their staff, especially with like-minded people with whom they find themselves compatible. Questions like 'are you the boss or the buddy', 'manager or mate' are subjects not offered in Management and Leadership courses.

Over the course of your business career, it is inevitable that you will come across employees who are aligned with your values and deep-seated beliefs, people who would even fit easily into your social circle. But as the leader, should you mix workplace relationships with your personal life? That is a question I have been asking many business owners lately, and from their answers it is clear that some think it's okay and some don't. Those in favor feel they gain loyal staff while those not in favor believe that a professional distance is necessary to gain the respect needed when guiding staff to increased performance.

### Getting closer

It is tempting to form relationships beyond the scope of the job. Employees — like all of us — have other lives and their natural inclination is to share their ups and downs with people they admire and trust. It's not surprising that if the relationship between leaders and their staff at times becomes close, employees who trust and respect their manager will become more comfortable at work and sometimes more willing to enrol in the business goals of the company. Senior managers from a well-known IT company say that they like "to socialize regularly with their staff" and that developing a culture of mate ship means they can count on their staff in any situation. The staff themselves say they would "move heaven and earth" to get the job done for a mate but may not be so inclined to give their personal time to "the boss". Such employees — bound to their leader by mate ship — become self-motivated and often produce higher outputs than their colleagues. What emerges is a powerful team. Leaders with that kind of support and resource definitely have the edge.

### Professional Distance

Leaders who adopt the approach that authority must be preserved believe the professional distance gives them more scope for improved performance. Although it's accepted wisdom today that a leader needs to consult and collaborate with staff so that they feel ownership of the company's goals, collaboration need not become friendship. Leaders who believe in a level of hierarchy resist the urge to become 'one of the gang' for fear that as the friend the transition back to being the boss may prove too difficult.

If authority is maintained and workplace relationships become strained for any reason, the leader is then free to exercise 'tough love'. Employees then expect leaders to take control and look to their leaders for solutions to difficult problems. Leaders who maintain a professional distance from staff do not imagine themselves as confidants or therapists. They are there to lead, guide and coach their staff towards higher performance, and they do not believe that such a focused and dedicated role should be blended with personal friendships.

Difficult though it is in our modern collaborative business culture, such leaders are convinced that a certain distance must be preserved between them and their employees so that performance can be monitored.

### Striking a balance

Some leaders appear to find a balance by developing a certain relationship with staff, which can best be described as a 'professional friendship'. They become an approachable role model for their staff but are careful to distinguish friendship from familiarity. Optimum performance towards the business goals of the company is the focus and this becomes the 'bond' that cements the work relationships; which is best implemented in an open and harmonious work environment. So again we see the middle road offers the answer?

Ultimately someone needs to be the final decision maker, even if it's collaborative

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