



Why Small Acts of Kindness to Employees Matter More Than Ever in the Covid-19 Remote Work Environment



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by **Scott Avila**

Often, corporate leaders will try to share their vision of success or the future with the phrase, “Close your eyes and picture this.” As it turns out, employees may well use a similar process when it comes to the way they view their bosses: according to [Nathan T. Washburn and Benjamin Galvin in the *Harvard Business Review*](#), employees may think of their bosses as mental images rather than individuals or people. The experienced authors argue that we draw on emails, tweets, and other information in order to paint these mental pictures. If that’s the case, what kind of image do your employees have of you? And in a year where our work relationships have for the most part shifted online, it is surely more important than ever for leaders to recognize how they are perceived and evaluated by their employees.

Washburn and Galvin identified several parameters that they believe influence how people develop and revise mental images of their bosses. First, they argue, employees tend to make snap judgements based on initial observations; let’s face it, we are all guilty of judging a book by its cover in our personal and professional lives. Second, employees ask questions about their bosses, such as whether or not he or she has high standards, cares about employees on a personal level, and so on, to refine that initial picture. Lastly, employees prefer to learn more about their bosses through anecdotes or stories, and they listen for clues that the boss is trustworthy and evidence that reinforces positive perceptions.

Based on the framework that Washburn and Galvin outlined, employees want a boss who cares for them personally and who is committed to

hard work and high-quality results, which aren't unreasonable requests. In fact, most business leaders would claim to aspire to such standards and likely believe they act in such a way, so the challenge isn't mismatched values or expectations, but the effective expression of those values from bosses to employees.

Thankfully, the authors also offered advice on how leaders can best connect with employees. Washburn and Galvin outlined four key traits—caring, high standards, vision, and humanness—that leaders can focus on highlighting in order to try to improve their standing in their employees' eyes. And they offer tangible actions, such as writing notes to employees to recognize them for hard work as a way of showing compassion, humility and humanity.

The shift to working from home forced upon us by the pandemic in 2020 makes the relationships with your employees more challenging and important than ever before. Remote working demands even more attention from leaders on recognizing and rewarding results, as well as making sure we all see each other as real humans, sharing this unprecedented experience and anxieties, as work and personal life clash in our homes.

Small acts designed to improve relationships and enhance perceptions will not go unnoticed or unappreciated, and your employees will hopefully share stories of your leadership, for now in online chats rather than by the water cooler. With sustained effort and appreciation of each employee, the mental picture that your team members paint of you can become a masterpiece.

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Contact the Author

Scott Avila | Partner

O: 213-320-5500

M: 310-753-1324

savila@paladinmgmt.com

633 W 5th St., 28th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90071

845 Third Avenue, 6th Floor NY, NY 10022