

Best Practices

What's respect got to do with it?

OVERVIEW

Why devote an issue of *Best Practices* to respect? Because we see how much difference respect, and the lack of it, make in the work place.

Our own small work place is long on respect and short on formality. This climate makes it easy to produce a lot of work with a minimum of frustration, stress, and inefficiency.

Clients tell us about how important respect is to them. We hear stories like these:

Sharon, new to a work group and its first African-American member, makes a good suggestion during a strategy session. After a moment, the meeting continues as if nothing had happened. Later a group insider repeats or builds on Sharon's suggestion, and the group immediately takes it up as an important and useful idea.

When this happens repeatedly, Sharon becomes angry and feels less committed to work.

Shane directs her assistant Joe to undertake a specific project. When Joe completes the work on time, Shane ignores it for an extended time. Eventually Shane says, "I've had a new idea. Now I would like you to do a different project." Joe says his work is never acknowledged and seldom used. He has no enthusiasm for new projects, and hates to come to work.

A team expects a lot of Sam, a young person new to the world of work. When Sam produces a high quality product, the team offers appreciation and encouragement. Sam is excited about taking on bigger projects, making a difference at work.

Each of us can make a difference in the climate of respect at our work place. In this issue of *Best Practices*, we will suggest reasons and ways to do it.

respect *tr. v.*

The state of being regarded with honor or esteem.

Willingness to show consideration or appreciation.



Roberts & Kay, Inc. presents *Best Practices*, a publication highlighting progressive strategies that will serve both private and public sector organizations in the next decades.

BENEFITS

Why Does Respect Matter At Work?

Respect improves results without adding substantial costs. Ken, a new high school principal, wanted the teachers in the school to use new instructional methods in their classrooms. They seemed hesitant. He met with teachers in several small groups to ask what was going on for them. He learned that in the past teachers had to check with the principal before trying any innovation. The teachers said they lacked time to talk with each other, to learn what really works. They said the training they had received was too little to equip them for the extent of

change Ken expected. He listened respectfully, and worked with patience and persistence toward the changes the teachers identified. After several months, most of the teachers began to work in new ways, and reported improved morale.

Respect takes only one person's change of mind. Hal Rosenbluth, owner of Rosenbluth, Inc., a global travel management firm, says respect for employees and their human needs powered his company's 7,500 percent growth in revenue in the 15 years prior to 1989. The company grew from "the largest and strongest travel

agency in the Philadelphia area" to one that employs "2,600 people...in over 400 offices in 36 states, Europe, and the Orient."

Rosenbluth, then a junior family member in an 82 year old company, initiated the changes in the small corner of the company over which he had authority. The results spoke for themselves, and spread to the rest of the company.

Rosenbluth, Inc. pays acute attention to hiring and training. Each Rosenbluth employee spends the first two days on the job at the company's headquarters. There they learn the company's philosophy of "service from the heart." The two days culminate in the company's top officers serving tea to the new employees, and listening to their ideas and questions. In these important ways, the company demonstrates respect for its people.

Personally Speaking

I respected many teachers in the Wayne County and Monticello schools, but Ruth Thompson was the living embodiment of the word. She was semi-retired, teaching French half days when I encountered her. She had taught my father more than 30 years earlier. She knew more than I did about French and about life. All that was perfectly clear. I aspired to be as knowledgeable as she, and as commanding.

In periods of stability, the old know more than the young, and respect comes naturally. In periods of chaotic change, the young learn things of value from each other, and lose respect for their elders.

These days, our children teach each other computer skills, and, if we're lucky, they share their learning with us. We old folks feel keenly the inadequacy of our advice to the young on problems like the threat of AIDS in personal relationships or the reality of gun violence in classrooms.

Blame it on change. Eric Hoffer said, "In times of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves in a world that no longer exists." In homes, schools, and work places, this is a good time to listen to the young, respect them, and learn from their experiences. We can respect the young as learners and learn along with them, without losing our self respect.

-- Rona Roberts



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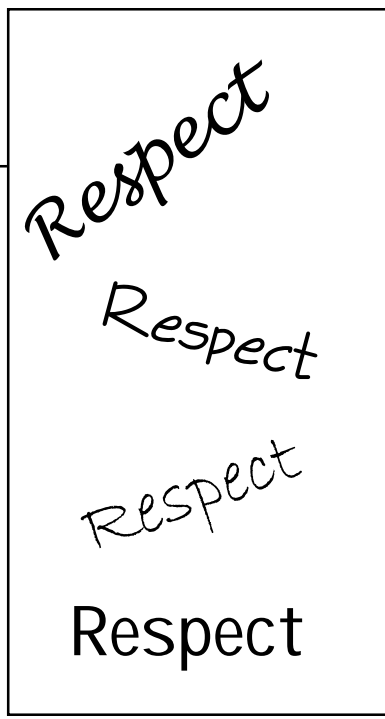
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Comments and letters welcome.

Giving respect to others increases self-respect. The city manager of a medium sized city instituted a well run and well managed constituent relations program. After employees were trained and supported in making decisions on their own in order to meet constituent needs, their own morale increased.

Respect adds value and satisfaction to the workplace. You don't need anyone's permission to bring respect to your workplace.



Dissecting Disrespect

What makes people feel disrespected at work? Here is a list of some of the ways workers get the message that they are expendable, and not respected.

- ❖ Workers cannot get the top decision makers to listen to them. The boss listens only to close allies.
- ❖ Performance standards are vague, arbitrary, and quick to change. Performance evaluations are vague, arbitrary, and infrequent.
- ❖ Superiors assign work to subordinates, then prevent them from completing it.
- ❖ Workers have no idea how their work ties into the organization's "big picture."
- ❖ Supervisors presume workers have no life outside work -- no family to care for, no community obligations.
- ❖ Training and retraining are minimal or do not exist.
- ❖ Official information is scant -- no regular staff meetings, no newsletter, no easy access to the ideas of top people.

“They treat us like we’re disposable, a number... My self-respect is more important than my job.”

-- *American Airlines employees, explaining their decision to strike in 1993*

IN PRACTICE

Respect in practice

We notice how Federal Express never makes a customer feel stupid. We went to the Lexington headquarters recently with an overseas package. Wrong box, wrong form, incomplete address. We left 20 minutes later, in a much better mood than when we arrived. The desk agent solved every problem. This is not the first time we have been dazzled by this company that treats its customers respectfully, whether they deserve it or not.



Laverne Zabielski created The Working Class Kitchen so emerging women writers will have a place to read their work, and additional reasons to write it. Laverne respects the life experience of women, which she feels is dangerously missing from mainstream literature. Laverne works with single mothers, women

Resources

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J. J. Cogan, "Reflections on Respect." *Social Education*, September, 1990.

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