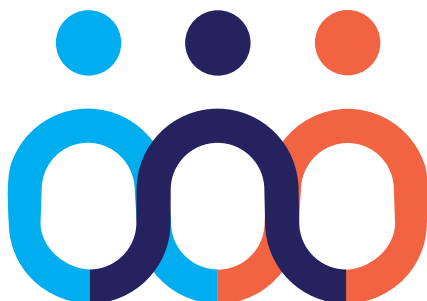


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— DR. LEONARD H. FRIEDMAN, Professor of Health Policy
& Management at the George Washington University



Compassionate **LEADERSHIP**



16 SIMPLE WAYS

to engage and inspire
your team at work

PAUL AXTELL



To:

From:



Compassionate **LEADERSHIP**



16 SIMPLE WAYS
to engage and inspire
your team at work

PAUL AXTELL



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**I'm writing this book for every supervisor,
project leader, or manager who wants
to be wonderful to work for, who wants
to create an environment where people
can be themselves, at their best.**

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Preface

**And suddenly you know: It's time
to start something new and trust
the magic of beginnings.**

—MEISTER ECKHART, GERMAN PHILOSOPHER

I remember the first time I interviewed to become a supervisor. I flew from Seattle to interview for a job in New Jersey. After two days of learning about the job with the factory manager, Dave, we ended up in the hotel bar at about 11 p.m. I had already decided that this job and the notion of leaving Seattle for New Jersey weren't what I wanted. But then Dave said, "Paul, the truth is that you will have better opportunities than

this one, but I need you, and the people in this factory need you. I hope you will give us a chance.”

Most of us are drawn to people who are willing to be honest and vulnerable with us. We also want to contribute—to make a difference. I accepted, and I loved working for Dave.

Dave was sincere, authentic, and caring. He was also no-nonsense. I never worried about telling him the truth, probably because he always told me the truth.

There is an old saying: *People don't quit their job; they quit their boss.* If they can't physically leave, they check out mentally. It's just too difficult to keep working at your full potential for someone you don't respect or who doesn't seem to be on your side.

All of us, when we first think about becoming a supervisor, dream about being really wonderful. Then for many of us, that dream slips away or gets pushed into the background. Being a supervisor is tough. Let's just acknowledge that fact and get back to work on turning our dreams into reality.

Preface

It all begins with intention. The best people to work for are the ones who *want* to be great with people. Intention comes before skill building. Simply keep your intention alive and let it guide you. If you bring your intention to be a remarkable supervisor—along with a willingness to try and fail and try again—this book will show you how to make it happen.

**Let us all be the leaders
we wish we had.**

—SIMON SINEK, *LEADERS EAT LAST*



▪ INTRODUCTION ▪

Lead with Compassion— The Perspective of Caring

**We have to choose to slow down, to
actually see the time and space we
are in...to truly see people and accept
them in their priceless moments.**

—JODI HILLS, ARTIST AND WRITER

We can never know what people are dealing with in their private lives. People are often on the edge of some struggle. Life can be full of anxiety and stress and loneliness. According to a 2006 study by Duke University, people have fewer friends these days, and many people have no one with whom to talk when they need a confidant.

We, as leaders, should not expect to replace family and friends, but we can help fill the void. Work can be a place of comfort if supervisors lead with compassion.

People Need to Know You Care

I like the term *wholeheartedness*. It means you hold everyone in high regard, you see the best in people, and you recognize that everyone wants to be seen and treated as being unique and relevant.

You understand that people are complex and that their lives are complicated. You never presume to know how it is for anyone else, yet you want to get to know the people who work for you.

Caring means having people's backs, giving them the benefit of the doubt, and taking blame out of the equation.

You can be compassionate and still expect a lot from people—sometimes more than they see themselves as capable of doing. Being demanding and

caring are not mutually exclusive; they complement each other.

My first supervisor, Kurt, was kind and easygoing. He had this mindset that if he hired you, he was responsible for you for the next twenty years, and he interacted with everyone from that point of view.

I'd been working for Kurt for about five weeks when he came in one late Friday afternoon and said, "Paul, I've been in fifteen meetings with you so far, and you haven't spoken yet. That's unacceptable. So starting Monday, if you don't speak twice during a meeting, at the end of the day, I will fire you. Have a nice weekend."

Then the following Monday morning, he said, "You know that what I said holds; you are on probation. You are the key engineer in most of these meetings, and if you don't speak, you've added no value. So start speaking, or I will let you go."

I rose to his expectations, and I took four lessons away from the experience. The first was obvious and

immediate: if you don't speak in a meeting, you don't add value. The other lessons occurred over time:

- Supervisors who care will tell you the truth, trusting that you can handle it.
- We all have weaknesses that can be overcome.
- Being nice in the short term isn't kind in the long term.

We all take lessons away from our teachers, coaches, and supervisors. The best leave us with more ability and capacity than when we first met them.

This book presents a range of tools that support you in becoming a supervisor who leads with compassion. In some ways, compassion is simple—it is caring. It's a trait we all have access to; we just need to pull it out of the background and into the foreground where it can shape our interactions with others.

You are reading this book, so your journey has already begun. Highlight the ideas and sentences that

resonate with you. Look for things you can begin doing today. Each chapter ends with a suggestion about what you might put into practice. Here is the first.

The Compassionate Move

With respect to caring, what do you already know how to do that could make a difference to people working for you? Take a minute and write down five things you can do. Start there.

**A human moment occurs anytime
two or more people are together,
paying attention to one another.**

—EDWARD M. HALLOWELL, AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIST



▪ COMPASSIONATE PRINCIPLE 1 ▪

Perspectives Change Everything, So Choose Empowering Ones

When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.

—WAYNE DYER, AMERICAN AUTHOR

I think it's possible to be good at whatever you choose—in fact, beyond good. You and I may not be freaky good, like Katherine Johnson, the gifted mathematician depicted in the movie *Hidden Figures*, whose calculations of orbital mechanics for NASA were critical to the success of the first and subsequent U.S. crewed spaceflights. We might not excel like Tiger Woods, winner of fifteen major golf championships, who put in thousands of hours of deliberate golf practice starting

at age four. Still, we can improve every day and reach levels of performance and accomplishment beyond what we think we can. We simply decide that something matters, then put in the time to practice and improve.

A minor league baseball coach was asked what determines whether players get to the major leagues. He said that some players are naturally better, and they will make it to the majors based on their talent alone. For everyone else, it's not talent that sets you apart. It's these three traits: attitude, work ethic, and preparation. These are traits you can rely on in all matters of your life.

My favorite example of what you can achieve with the right attitude came from a Canadian veterinarian while discussing the idea of being remarkable. Ken offered this story:

One of my long-term clients asked me to come out to her ranch and put her favorite pony to sleep. She wanted to spend twenty minutes with her pony, then leave before I euthanized it. As

she walked away, she turned and asked if I would also see to burying the pony. I said yes, even though I wasn't sure how I would get it done.

Later, as I stood in the field, I saw a church steeple in the distance and thought: church, cemetery, gravedigger. When I drove into the churchyard, an older gentleman stood next to a small backhoe. I explained my situation and asked if he would help. His response was telling: "I would be honored."

Two hours later, I told him the hole was deep enough. He replied, "Ken, you know your job. I know mine. This hole is not yet ready for her pony." He then spent another twenty minutes making sure the sides were perfect. He added hay to the bottom, then said, "Now it is ready."

Wow. Here is someone who has a remarkable attitude about his work—I would be honored—and whose actions match that approach to life.

Your attitude matters. Everything you say and do as a supervisor will be far more effective if your heart and mind are in the right place.

The first task is to create a collection of perspectives to remind you of who you want to be going forward. For example, when Cindy, my wife, and I travel, we try to follow this mantra: *If there is an experience in front of you, have it.* This perspective helps us step beyond our comfort zone and encourages us to walk down alleys to neighborhoods and cafés and bars we would otherwise have missed. This same perspective might be a useful guide as you read this book and start putting into practice the principles that may be outside your comfort zone.

Or consider this perspective from Mindy Hall, author of *Intentional Leadership: I want it to matter that we met.* Imagine how this might change the way you handle yourself in meetings, at coffee with colleagues, or during informal hallway conversations. Most of us pay little attention to how we interact with each other in the moment. Hall's perspective changes that.

Here are some perspectives to consider as a supervisor:

- I care, and people know I care about them.
- I'm going to be genuine.
- I don't have to have all the answers.
- I will always do the right thing.

Throughout the book, you'll also find perspectives to help with specific situations, like these:

- It is a gift when people complain.
- If I care, I'll have problems.

If I had to pick just one perspective to embrace, it would be this: *Treat everything in life as though it matters*. This doesn't mean that everything in life matters to the same degree. What this perspective means is that whatever you choose to spend your time on, you're all in.

The Compassionate Move

You are probably already results oriented. That's why you got the job—you know how to produce. For the next two weeks, choose a perspective that is relationship oriented.

Try one of these:

- ▶ I want it to matter that we talked.
- ▶ I've got your back.

Then keep track of what you notice as a result.

Remember then that there is only one important time, and that time is now. The most important one is always the one you are with. And the most important thing is to do good for the one who is standing at your side... This is why we are here.

—JON J. MUTH, *THE THREE QUESTIONS*

→ I'M ON YOUR SIDE.

Imagine how work might be if you knew that everyone had your back—that they looked out for you and your reputation. You knew that if people had issues with you, they would come straight to you and not participate in gossip or undermining conversations with others.

More than your own success, you can earn credibility faster by supporting the success of the person sitting right next to you. Just think about the leverage you have when nine people on a ten-person team are worried more about one another's success than their own.

Now, imagine that everyone who works for you knows that you and their colleagues are on their side.



About the Author



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Paul Axtell provides consulting and personal and group effectiveness training to corporations, universities, and nonprofit organizations. With an engineering degree from South Dakota School of

Mines and an MBA from Washington University in St. Louis, Paul's early career was spent in manufacturing, engineering, and management.

For the last twenty years, Paul has been devoted to designing and leading programs that enhance individual and group performance, whether for line workers and admin staff at a manufacturing plant or

regional managers and CEOs in global corporations. His decades of insights led to a succinct collection of fifteen strategies in *Being Remarkable*, the small but powerful centerpiece of the Being Remarkable series training program.

Paul's second edition of *10 Powerful Things to Say to Your Kids: Creating the Relationship You Want with the Most Important People in Your Life* applies these concepts to the special relationship between parents and children of all ages. Named Best Parenting Book by several award programs, it has been translated into Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, French, and Spanish and is now available in audiobook format.

The award-winning *Meetings Matter: 8 Powerful Strategies for Remarkable Conversations* offers a deep dive into improving meeting competence and is the foundation for *Make Meetings Matter* and *Make Virtual Meetings Matter*.

Paul lives with his wife, Cindy, in Phoenix.

Become the *leader* everyone wants to work for.



People want to work for someone they respect, someone who is on their side. And when employees feel seen, heard, and valued by their supervisors, employee engagement improves, productivity increases, and the entire organization benefits. In *Compassionate Leadership*, Paul Axtell reveals sixteen simple steps you can start taking right now to become a manager who leads with compassion.



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