



self-esteem as leadership imperative

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Researching self-esteem

During my doctoral dissertation research, which was done in the 80's as a full-time employee for one of the largest corporations in the world, I examined an interesting proposition – I attempted to discover the correlation between high self-esteem and high team performance. However, despite using the rigorous methods of the doctoral process, I found nothing.

However, I did uncover anecdotal evidence of improved behavior and performance...and I am yet today, after 20-some years of experience, convinced there is a tight correlation between high personal self-esteem and high team productivity. I still can't offer objective proof, but I would like to offer some thoughts.



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Managers are in a prime position to enhance self-esteem

Remember, this is not unconditional self-acceptance, but rather a healthy embracing of personal strengths, attitudes, desires, and acknowledgement of weaknesses, allowing us to redirect the energy we are investing in our weaknesses into our strengths.

So, how can the power of self-esteem be deployed in the workplace? There are two perspectives from which this can be done: personal, and leadership/operational.

Self-leadership from a self-esteem perspective

From a personal perspective, one can ask oneself the following five questions:

1. How do I see myself fitting with the work to be done? What is my uniqueness and fit with the work – where do I fit in the end-to-end solution?
2. Which of my strengths will I mobilize to allow me to do this work especially well, indeed, to exceed expectations?
3. Which of my weaknesses must I be especially watchful of, and what help must I obtain/accept from others?
4. What is my attitude and disposition, and how must it be strengthened, deployed and/or adjusted?
5. What irrationalities make it hard for me to do the work excellently? This includes doubts, ambitions, fears and jealousies.

Leadership in a world of self-esteem

From a leadership/operational perspective, a commitment to a high self-esteem workplace leads to a different set of questions:

1. How willing am I to give people tasks that are right at the edge of their abilities? And do I give them the resources and coaching they need to succeed?
2. Do I strive to create a team atmosphere where failure is an opportunity to "begin again with new knowledge", not a precursor to being booted out the door?
3. How willing am I to go to bat for people, to take a risk on someone?
4. At the end of major tasks, do I let people know what they have done that worked especially well, including the impact on others, and what could have worked better?
5. How often do I celebrate the good stuff, large and small?

What is the payoff?

High self-esteem correlates closely with high performance, good social skills, resilience in the face of change and challenge, high self confidence, and a feeling of personal powerfulness as opposed to personal helplessness (thinking others are in control). It is tied to the capacity to care about vision, to live for an ideal outside oneself, and the capacity for emulation, all of which have, to my mind, an obvious value in the development of team productivity.