

Connect, then lead

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When we judge leaders, we look first at two characteristics:

- How lovable they are –their warmth and trustworthiness
- How fearsome they are- their strength and competence

These two traits are important as they answer two key questions:

- What are this person's intentions towards me?
- Is this person capable of acting on these intentions?

People seen as competent but lacking in warmth often elicit envy from others. Envy is an emotion that combines respect and resentment.

People judged as warm but lacking in competence elicit pity. This is a combination of two emotions-compassion and lack of respect. Compassion moves us to help those whom we pity but lack of respect ultimately makes us neglect them.

Warmth and strength account for more than 90% of the variance in the positive and negative impressions we form about people around us.

Leaders who project strength before establishing trust run the risk of eliciting fear and along with it a host of dysfunctional behaviours. Fear can undermine cognitive potential, creativity and problem solving and cause employees to get stuck and even become disengaged.

Warmth is the conduit of influence. It facilitates trust and the communication and absorption of ideas. Warmth helps a leader connect immediately with the people around. Warmth demonstrates that the leader is prepared to hear people and understand them and can be trusted by them.

Most of us work hard to demonstrate our competence. We don't feel the need to prove we are trustworthy. But when it comes to others, we look for warmth, generosity and trustworthiness.

Putting competence first undermines leadership. To align people with the direction the leader is charting, trust is needed. Competence may ensure compliance but warmth is needed for an emotional buy in. Warmth is needed

for building trust and trust increases information sharing, openness and cooperation.

The best way for a leader to operate is to combine warmth and strength. Feelings of warmth are linked to the neuropeptides, oxytocin and arginine vasopressin. Feelings of strength are associated with the hormones, testosterone (assertiveness, risk taking) and cortisol (stress). Some of the most effective leaders have a combination of high testosterone and low cortisol. They can handle pressure without feeling stressed.

Efforts to appear warm and trustworthy should be genuine. Sounding very enthusiastic or praising people loudly can be equated with faking, especially if people feel they have not done anything in particular to earn the adulation. A better way to create warmth may be to use a lower pitch and volume as we would while comforting a friend. Narrating a personal story can also help. Acknowledging people's feelings and concerns is another way to demonstrate warmth. When we smile sincerely, the warmth becomes self-reinforcing. A smile cannot be faked. We must think of something that really takes us happy and that will bring a genuine smile.

Warmth is harder to fake but confidence is easier to talk ourselves into. Feeling in command is about connecting with ourselves. Body posture can help. Standing up straight and tall, moving deliberately and precisely to a specific spot, stillness, etc. can be useful in projecting strength.

To effectively lead others, we need to combine warmth and competence. It is important to earn the trust and appreciation of those around us. It is equally important to be in charge of situation. The two approaches can be mutually reinforcing. Being calm and confident creates the space to be warm and appreciative. Once we establish our warmth, our strength will be received well.