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# Believe in People

## BEST PRACTICES

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I have learned a lot over the course of my career and continue to be presented with new lessons every day. I've written important code, been part of high-profile project teams, led efforts to deliver big programs, built products from the ground up, and helped run established companies. All of those experiences have allowed me to continue to grow as an individual contributor, team member, manager, and leader.

By far, the most influential and important lessons have come from working for and managing people. As technology workers, we have become used to the idea that we feed a computer a set of instructions and it responds in a particular manner - time after time after time. People aren't like that though. They have complexities in personality, emotion, and temperament. A response one day can drastically shift the next due to factors most likely outside of the interaction you are having. It is because of this that we must abandon the binary approach in our daily interactions to be successful.

In my first management role, long ago, I made it exactly 2 workdays before learning this painful lesson. I was taking over a product development team and would be leading them through a complicated roadmap of fixes, enhancements, and regulatory updates. This team was well established and many of them had been on board since the inception of this platform. They worked well together, were extremely talented, and were a very tight knit group.

I was young, energetic and had just obtained my Project Management Professional (PMP) certifications. I had a ton of ideas on how to make the group run smoother, how to prioritize the work, structure the team, and modify their processes to deliver better.

Unfortunately, I spent about 35 seconds understanding their current state. I didn't ask: "Why do you do this process this way?" Instead, I focused on "you have to change the process to do it this new way". I spent no time learning about my new

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teammates and instead I came in like a drill sergeant barking orders at them.

They revolted. Instead of coming in neutral and beginning to build trust, I immediately damaged relationships before they ever even got off the ground. I was lucky to have a good mentor in that role that I frequently lamented to about the situation. He watched what was happening and didn't step on me, but rather let me have enough rope to hang myself (which I did). He finally gave me one of the best pieces of advice I have ever received: “You have two eyes, two ears, and one mouth. Maybe you should look and listen twice as much as you talk”. A hard thing to hear, but one of the most valuable things I've learned.

While I never really got out of the hole I dug with this particular team, I certainly changed my approach and have continued to evolve it. I fully embrace the idea of surrounding yourself with people that are smarter than you and listening to them. I try to be transparent with my teams and look for clues that they are stressed or frustrated. I remain vulnerable in front of my teams, hopefully sending the message that we're all just human and as such, we need to account for the non-binary ways in which we operate in this world - having some patience and grace for those around us.

We hire great people; we need to not only let them be great but find ways in which to prop them up and give them the opportunities to become even better. Lastly, I think it's incredibly important to be reflective. Analyze tough situations that are charged with emotion and try to understand why that emotion is there. Use these reflections to modify your own behavior, not to try and change others. Once you start down this path, you'll quickly see that your interactions will improve and your teams will start performing better.

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