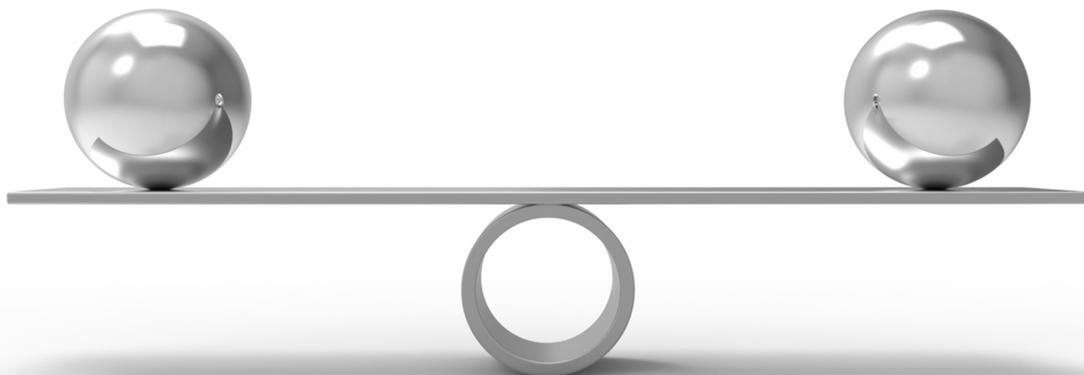# 7 HABITS OF EGALITARIAN MANAGERS

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
AN EXECUTIVE GUIDE

Linda L. Keefe

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Contents

Dedicated to my friend Jim Norman, a man of vision, insight and compassion.

"Leadership is solving problems. The day [people] stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."
–COLIN POWELL

Preface

This book is for you, managers and supervisors. It's for anyone leading people, regardless of level … executives, business owners, group guides.

It's the result of several decades of working with employees … in major corporations, national nonprofits and governmental agencies … along with small businesses and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Let me tell you how it all got started.

It was a dinner outing I would never forget. Sitting at a table with industry colleagues … communication managers from world-class, global corporations … I was part of the Xerox

team, designated as one of seven "Best Practices" companies by the *American Productivity and Quality Center.*

Our presentation had been highly applauded, so people clamored to go to dinner with us, hoping to glean more insight into the method of our success with management communications.

Sitting on my right was *Maytag;* on my left, *Federal Express.*

It was when I heard, "Oh, you're an *egalitarian*" from one of the gentlemen (in a somewhat disparaging tone), that I realized my thinking was *different.* I fumbled with justification then, but that was years ago. Now, I would say, "Of course! *Aren't you?*"

To me, being an egalitarian is "believing in the equality of all people". It's about knowing that every single person in the organization can, and *wants,* to contribute to its success.

From my experience with enterprises large and small, globally recognized or unknown, profit generating or cause-driven … being egalitarian is the *only* way to be effective. You must tap into the talent and energy of *every individual* in your organization. If you don't, you simply cannot fully execute your strategy and achieve your vision.

We have built our business, and our approach to success, on the belief that more than anything else, people want to be of *value*, to contribute. They are *hungry* for their managers to recognize this reality and respect it.

When workers do not feel valued, they become organizationally indifferent. They turn frustrated, bored and demoralized. They start coming in just for the paycheck. This means missed deadlines, poor customer service and lackluster goal achievement. Managers go

into firefighting mode … juggling a myriad of tasks.

The seven habits of egalitarian managers is the result of over 25 years of working in communications and employee engagement.

They represent the basic "must-haves" to transform complacent (or good enough) workers into individuals who are focused, flexible and willing to take action.

It won't take a lot of time. You don't have to wait for change initiatives to come from the top. You can do this.

I hope this Executive Guide will jolt you into thinking differently, talking differently, acting differently … and ultimately achieving much, much more.

To your extraordinary success,

Linda L. Keefe

Introduction

Gallup did it again. They do it every couple of years. They take a nationwide survey of the workforce, to measure how engaged it is. What's surprising is that they essentially get the same answer every time.

71% declare themselves disengaged!

Remember when *you* were first hired? Think of a job that had you in a starting position. Remember the feeling of excitement you had about being part of something bigger than yourself, of making a difference, of being a valued contributor? Remember also, how

you became disengaged over time? Maybe you even gave up trying and moved on.

> **Wilbur Finkelstein**
>
> *As I work with various clients, we frequently ask individuals, "In your opinion, how much indifference is there in your organization?"*
>
> *I did this with a junior clerk in a large public library system (600+ employees). He quickly said, "That's easy, 99%". Stunned at the number, yet recognizing the malaise, I followed with, "What makes you say that?" (I fully expecting him to declare himself as the only one who cared. He didn't do that.)*
>
> *He said, "Because of Wilbur Finkelstein. He comes to work every day, no matter what. He's punctual, often early. He doesn't leave at quitting time if he's working with a patron. He'll stay and help until the person has what they need without exception. He cares about the organization and what we do."*

The good news is that organizational indifference can be reversed. You can turn the 71% or the 99% disengaged into individuals who are focused, flexible and willing to take the initiative for the bigger whole.

You can fix this at the team level. You don't have to wait for a culture change to start at the top. *You* are the top in this situation. You create your own world.

This Executive Guide will show you what to do. It will give you the concepts for making the change and the practical steps to take. It shows you how being more of an egalitarian manager can dramatically affect your team achievements.
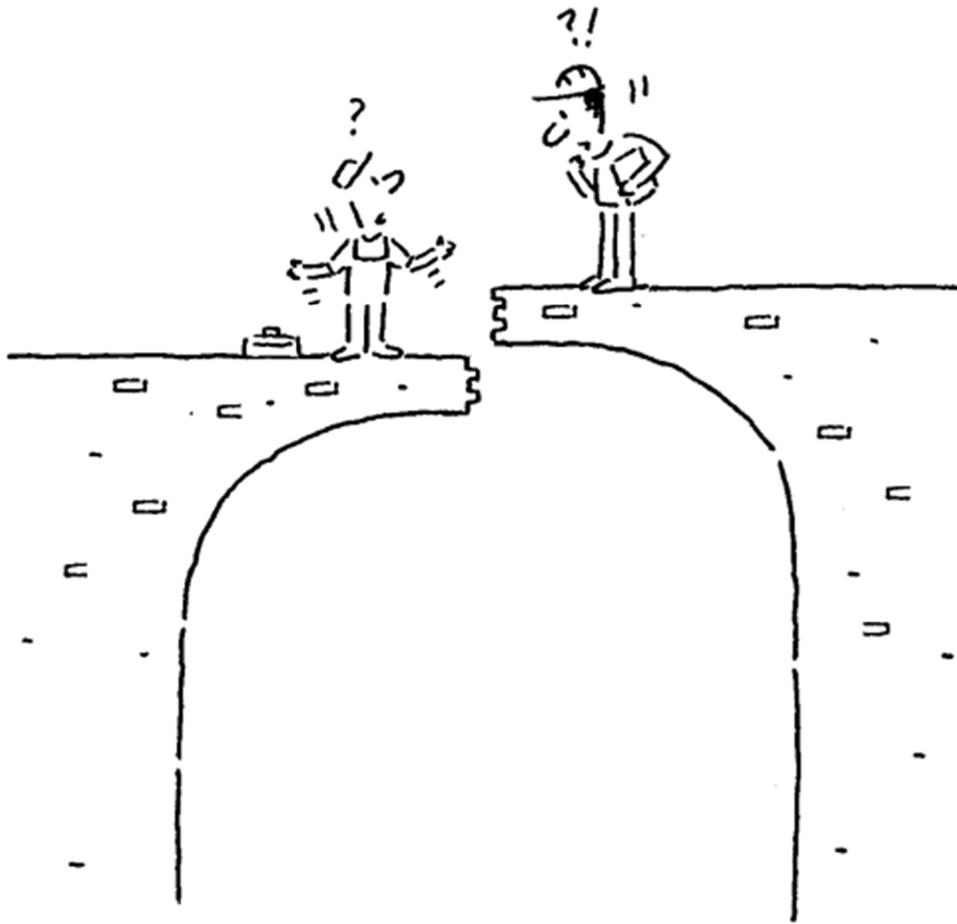
Management – Employee Gap

~ Alex Tiani, Illustrator

1. Take Off The Rose-Colored Glasses

Managers everywhere, at every level, are deluding themselves. There is no gentler way to put it.

Even those of you who have great respect for the people on your teams, who think everything is fine. You're not seeing the gap between what you believe to be true and how the workforce really feels. You aren't recognizing the organizational indifference that is staring you in the face. You're wearing rose-colored glasses.

Managers in general don't really appreciate how left-out and separate their team members feel. And more importantly, from a business perspective, they don't realize how much money and time is being wasted; how many opportunities are being lost because of this reality.

You'd rather think, "Everything is OK. I have a great team. They work hard. We do good work."

In a workshop with members of the American Society of Association Executives, I asked the group to rate the amount of employee indifference in their organization. The Executive Director of a human services organization raised her hand and said she would estimate 15%. Another woman raised her hand and said 50%. (She happened to be the HR Manager for the same institution.) … As it turned out a month later, after we conducted an organization-wide assessment, the employees considered the establishment to be 78% disengaged.

How does this happen?

This occurs partly because you want to see the best in your people. You think highly of your employees.

But you're already in the loop. You know, for the most part, what's going on … your manager keeps you informed. There's a certain comfort in that. It's a position of safety, of power to have the knowledge.

And with comfort, comes the forgetting of pain. When you're in the loop, the discomfort of not knowing goes away. It isn't instinctive to tell others, to make sure they are in the inner circle. So you quickly forget what it was like when you were at the bottom, or caught in the middle. Or perhaps you do remember; you may be experiencing this with your manager.

As a manager, you're sheltered from not being in the loop; from not knowing the strategic plan. You're no longer in the position of wanting to talk to someone and not having the opportunity of being heard. You're less paralyzed than before, because you can take action. There are some things within your control and influence.

Why do managers ignore this ever-widening gap? You work hard, there's no doubt about it. In my opinion you (and supervisors) have the most challenging job. I know you want to think the best of your people. You want to believe you are doing a good job leading your team.

You miss out! You don't hear the great ideas those people have who work with customers every day. It costs you time. It costs you money. It costs you in lost momentum and higher indifference.

What can you do?

Recognize there is a gap. Understand the inherent nature of this chasm so that you don't take it personally.

Take efforts to close it. This book will guide you. Try the techniques. Make subtle shifts required to be an egalitarian manager.

Create processes for lasting change. These don't have to be highly formalized. Just do it. Jot down a few steps. Turn them into informal policy. Let people know about them. It's bigger than a suggestion box, but smaller than an ordeal.

You *can* do this at the team level! You don't have to wait for executive leadership to issue a proclamation or start a company-wide initiative. YOU establish the environment in your team. You are responsible for the culture of your leadership.

Ask Yourself...

1. When was the last time you walked the floor, curious with questions ... being open, receptive and positive? It means getting to where the development is happening, the delivery of product... where the labor-force is working.

2. If an employee had a good idea, how would he or she get it to you? (Hint! Just "telling their manager" is not good enough.)

3. Is there a process in place that makes it possible to have ideas from the bottom-up be considered ... and if good, acted upon?

Maxine is a 28 year old Business Account Manager for a high-end cosmetics firm in a major department store. She handles the scheduling of work shifts, the training of new hires, and the tracking of product inventory.

She knows who her customer is and what her customer wants. She sees how many sales she loses because she can't provide what they need. And yet she has no control, or input, over what product is delivered to her.

She has very specific ideas of how her counter could do significantly more business ... but has no one to tell.

- *A matte palette of eye shadow for the many older women who don't want shimmer.*

- *Travel items that could be purchased instead of using the occasional give-away.*

- *Fresh items in the gift package instead of repeating the same shade of lipstick.*

The sad fact is that her passion for growing her pieces of the business goes untapped because there is no way to have a conversation with the right person.

If this were your organization, wouldn't you want to benefit from this wisdom?

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2. Look At The Janitor Differently

In theory, we all believe that everyone in an organization plays a worthwhile role or we wouldn't have hired them.

In practice, however, there is a hierarchy. The higher you are in the chain of command the more important you are. You make more money. You have more responsibility. Your ideas get taken more seriously.

You know more, right? Or do you?

Actually everybody has knowledge about something different. Each has unique experi-

ences, interactions with clients, internal customers and business colleagues in other departments.

For instance, only a remote salesperson asking for assistance from customer service to resolve an account's problem knows that interaction … the execution of the intended process.

Only the receiving dock personnel can tell you what would make the process more efficient so that the company could benefit. Only the auto detailer or dealership driver has first-hand knowledge of redundancies, time wasters, money hogs … when it comes to cleaning or delivering vehicles.

But no one asks them. There's no dependable and obvious method for people to share their ideas in a way that will ensure those thoughts are heard, considered, and acted

upon when they have merit. So people become indifferent. They keep their ideas to themselves. They just come in for a paycheck.

It costs the organization time and money not to listen.

A well-renowned grocery store chain (we'll call it George's) began offering an in-store café with soup as one of the food items. There were two choices: chicken and tomato. The servers kept asking for vegetable beef, because it was a common request from customers who wouldn't buy the existing soup choices. Management's answer was, "The chef doesn't make that type." The store employees gave up asking.

Much later, management decided to create a customer survey on food items. Surprise! They wanted vegetable beef! The good news (or the sad state) is that the chef began making vegetable beef ... because the customers wanted it; not because the employees had known for a year before what was needed.

How much time, goodwill and money was lost because the insight from the people on the front line was not valued?

Tapping into every individual's knowledge with their unique perspective not only builds engagement, but is critical for an organization achieving record growth.

What Can You Do?

Create a culture based on *mutual respect* – on the premise that everyone is created equal.

Let people know that each person has unique insight and ideas. That you value each of them … the role they play and the wisdom they can bring … regardless of position.

Be open and honest with the information you share. Be respectful by involving them.

Shift your belief system … to one of knowing that everyone is, essentially, equal.

Think inclusively. Modify the culture from "need to know" to "the more you know, the better you can do your job" perspective.

This is the only way an organization will prosper to its fullest potential.

How does this play out in every day work situations? Respectfully communicating!

Think, who else you might want to invite to a meeting? Are there more individuals who would benefit from receiving an email, a copy of a report?

Make it a point to ask for input from the quiet members of the team. Still waters run deep, you know. They may surprise you!

When your team members understand the big picture, know how they fit in, and how to have two-way communications with you, your work life becomes exponentially better. Not only will you get more done as a team, but

some responsibility will be lifted from your shoulders, you'll be putting out fewer fires and you'll be enjoying the role of leader.

Ask Yourself…

1. How do I show respect? How do I recognize the value each person brings to the table?

2. How inclusive am I when it comes to sharing information?

3. How would I rate myself in "carrying-through" on commitments I've made to employees (everything from having said "Let's talk next week." to "I'll take care of that.")?

In working with every team, at every level, at one of the Job Corps Centers, a question posed to each was to name one thing they could do, within their control, that would significantly help the organization achieve its aspirations.

Without exception each team came up with useful, insightful, doable ideas … because they knew where the opportunities were.

One example was the kitchen crew (who perceived themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy), but who readily came up with an idea. It was to offer at least one healthy recipe at each meal – instead of the usual fast food fare.

They also came up with a way to get the students involved with the idea. They knew that eating better would lead to sharper minds, less carb fogginess … which in turn would result in higher grades and better job placements.

Did it work? Overall Ranking of the center moved from 116th (out of 118, third from the bottom) to 54th. That's 62 rungs up the ladder … a 47% improvement in six months.

What could you do with the power of harnessing ideas from those who are in the trenches?