MATTMCWILLIAMS

Live with Passion. Lead with Purpose. Leave a Legacy.

3 Things a Leader Should Never Do

Leadership Never #1: A leader should never dismiss anyone's idea, feedback, or information within one hour of receiving it.

There are only two proper responses to anything a team member brings:

- o Something that sounds a lot like: "Wow, that is a great idea / Thank you for sharing that / I never saw it that way…that is great."

- o Or, "Let me think about that"

Those are the only two acceptable responses.

I was notorious for shooting down someone's idea before he or she even finished sharing it. It usually started with a downward look, a shake of the head, perhaps an eye roll, and often an interruption explaining how that would never work here. I occasionally threw in an insult to their intelligence, just to make it absolutely clear that I felt superior to them and their idea really was *that* stupid.

Leadership Never #2: A leader should never shoot down anyone's idea in public.

It's one thing to shoot down an idea in private. Doing it in public magnifies the negative impact ten-fold.

I once managed to so perfectly combine these first two "nevers" that I almost brought a friend to tears. As I wrote here, I was, sadly, great at making team members cry.
This time we were in an all-hands brainstorm about new web site features and he proposed an off the wall idea that I immediately and forcefully dismissed. The look on his face and others was a turning point for me.

The years of alienating my team and bottlenecking all feedback finally hit me in the face. That moment made me realize I had to stop doing that or risk alienating my team beyond repair.

I later apologized to my friend and began a course of changing my behavior.

Along the way, I also learned a third thing that a leader should never do.

Leadership Never #3: A leader should never sugarcoat negative feedback.

As I began to stop dismissing ideas so quickly and stopped doing it in public, I began to slip into another leadership "never." I soon found myself sugarcoating everything and spending too much time on *every* idea presented to me.

Just because I was no longer dismissing ideas quickly or publicly didn't mean that every idea was actually a good one. And it didn't mean that "Mr. Nice Guy" couldn't deliver negative feedback.

Team members still needed to think their ideas through before rushing into my office to share them. I still had to hold them accountable.

As was often the case in my early days as a reluctant, scared, and clearly unqualified leader, I discovered that after three years of belittling others and thinking I was the smartest person in the room, the information flow from the team had stopped.

We paid the price for it, but we overcame it. I overcame it. And I am better for it today.

Oh and that idea my friend shared that I shot down so quickly in front of the entire team…it ended up being one of the better ideas anyone ever had in our company.