5 Incredible Things That Happen When You Focus On Results And People

By Travis Bradberry, Ph.D.

People often debate what makes a better leader: the no-nonsense, results-focused type or the motivational, people-focused type. New research has provided the answer—neither.

James Zenger surveyed over 60,000 employees to see which leadership characteristics made leaders “great” in the eyes of their employees. Two of the characteristics that Zenger looked at were “results-focus” and “people-focus,” and he found that neither characteristic consistently produced great leadership.

Leaders who primarily focused on results were seen as great just 14% of the time, and leaders who primarily focused on people were seen as great only 12% of the time.

However, leaders who were able to balance their approach and focus equally on results and people (which, according to a study by David Rock, is less than 1% of all leaders) were seen as great a whopping 72% of the time. In other words, results-focus and people-focus are weak predictors of great leadership on their own. It’s the potent combination of the two that consistently makes leaders great.

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."  
- John Quincy Adams

Leaders who can focus equally on results and people motivate people to be their best, without losing sight of the bigger picture. This balance enables them to achieve extraordinary results, because they do five things that few other leaders are able to accomplish.

1. **They deliver feedback flawlessly.** It takes a tactful leader to deliver feedback that is accurate and objective but also considerate and inspirational. Leaders who are balanced know how to take into account the feelings and perspectives of their employees while still delivering the message they need to hear in order to improve.

2. **They put the right team of people together to execute a plan.** Putting together a good plan of attack can require a heavy-handed focus on results. You have to foresee obstacles, find the right approach, and then make certain you have the right people to make it happen. There are a lot of good leaders out there who are capable of putting together a perfect plan. However, it takes a great leader to actually pull a motivated team of people together who are capable of executing that plan and interested in doing so. Leaders capable of blending a people-focus into their results-oriented plans select the ideal people and know their strengths and weaknesses and how these can be made to work together.

Management may have a beginning, but it certainly has no end. When blessed with a talented employee, it’s the manager’s job to keep finding areas in which they can improve to expand their skill set and further their career. The most talented employees want feedback—more so than the less talented ones—and it’s a manager’s job to keep it coming. Otherwise, people grow bored and complacent.

3. **They solve problems as a team.** Research shows that poorly structured meetings stifle creativity and hinder teams from reaching good solutions. Often this is because people either yield to the most outspoken member of the team, are afraid to share their opinions, or don’t know how to effectively critique others’ ideas. When
results-focused leaders bring a people-focused mentality to the table, they create the right environment for new ideas to thrive. These leaders are able to draw out as many good ideas from their team as possible while prudently steering a process that creates workable solutions.

4. They hire the best employees. The foundation of any good company is a great hiring system. Effective hiring leads to high levels of performance, a strong workplace culture, and a high retention rate. We’ve all seen new hires who are brilliant but a horrible fit socially. Likewise, we’ve all experienced the new hire who fits in socially and makes friends but who doesn’t produce quality work. Great leaders know how to find employees who both do their jobs effectively and are good social and cultural fits. This kind of hire builds morale and improves your bottom line.

5. They balance work and fun. There are plenty of bosses out there who know how to have fun. Unfortunately, this is often at the expense of results. And for every boss out there who has a bit too much fun, there’s one who doesn’t know how to have any fun at all. It takes a balanced leader to know how to motivate and push employees to be their best but to also have the wherewithal to slow it down at the appropriate time in order to celebrate results and have fun. This balance prevents burnout, builds a great culture, and gets results.

Bringing It All Together

Leadership, like most things in life, requires balance. You can’t succeed without focusing on your people, and they won’t succeed unless you’re focused on results.

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Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning coauthor of Emotional Intelligence 2.0 and the cofounder of TalentSmart® the world’s leading provider of emotional intelligence tests and training serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries.