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ENTREPRENEURS (ENTREPRENEURS) 1/05/2015 @ 1:37PM | 3,555 views

Forgiveness: The Least Understood Leadership Trait In The Workplace

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We scanned through the employee forms online and discovered an inordinately high number of forms described as “employee development resources” that actually do very little in the way of helping an employee to develop.

In fact, they may deplete the vitality and productivity out of people who must endure receiving them.

No wonder employees are hesitant to make a long-term commitment to their employers. Here is a sample of some of the forms for you to decide:

- **New-hire form** with standard 90-day probationary clause (*a company can end your employment for no particular reason during your first three months on the job*)
- A variety of quick-fit **disciplinary forms** to document every shortcoming (*surprised that no one has created an app for this yet*)
- **Monthly evaluation appraisals** (*ensures proper documentation so companies are protected from legal liability if termination of employment is a consideration*)
- **Corrective career counseling forms** (*remains in your employee file in case anyone forgets you came in late one day two years ago*)
- **360-degree feedback review forms** (*peers anonymously share everything they don't like about you*)
- **Exit form** (*includes the ironic question: “Why are you leaving?” Note to companies: employees have checked out long before the final exit interview*)

The forms erode a person's confidence and rarely bring out the best in them; instead, they place on the main stage under searing lights of peers and leaders, every misstep we have ever made at work.

It is clear why employees continue to transition in and out of jobs hoping for something better at the next place only to become further deflated upon discovering the same form/processes exist there also.

Today, people think for themselves, especially in the entrepreneurial arena. Less really is more when it comes to building extraordinary organizations. Give people a dream that they can wrap their head and heart around, get out of the way, and let them run!



Forgiveness isn't a focus for many businesses, but it creates a healthy corporate culture.

Searching for Understanding and Forgiveness in the World of Work

We searched for a form called "forgiveness" and didn't find anything remotely close. Forgiveness isn't actually a form but a practice. Forgiveness is rarely discussed or formally woven into a company's corporate culture.

Retention and forgiveness are things we do really well at our company, Fishbowl (<http://www.fishbowlinventory.com>), and we have never relied on the archaic forms listed above. We have sales reps who have been here for a decade, support techs who have been here 8+ years, and 25-year-olds who state flat-out that they never intend to leave Fishbowl.

How Forgiveness Builds Great Companies

Within the fabric of our culture is the innate ability to forgive. It cascades through everything we do and is recognized by those who work with us and first-time visitors. Everyone in the company is respected equally. It's an even playing field. No one person is better than another.

We believe one of the reasons our people stay at our company is that they know that when they make mistakes, we will help them overcome and learn new skills to avoid making the same mistake again.

Here are the questions that we asked while researching the principles of forgiveness:

- Could eliminating the forms/ancient processes that highlight everything a person does wrong actually help people become better at what they do?
- Do we consistently teach the principle of forgiveness in the workplace?
- Do we expect forgiveness from others at work?
- Can we practice forgiveness every day so that over time it becomes a habit?

Our response is an unwavering yes!

Forgiveness 101 – Boot Camp for Beginners

There are few modern-day role models to teach us the value and power of forgiveness in the workplace. Abraham Lincoln's philosophy on forgiveness remains unmatched. In his second inaugural address delivered just before his death, he spoke about the need for mutual forgiveness from the North and South. He was criticized for recommending benevolent treatment for the Southern rebels and was often reminded that the Confederates were the enemy, and should be destroyed. Lincoln wisely responded, "I destroy my enemies when I make them my friends."

Lincoln believed that we should never treat a human being in a way that makes them feel inferior. It begins with how we treat ourselves. When we respect ourselves, we can also extend respect to others. When we make amends and forgive ourselves, we naturally develop compassion and empathy towards others, which we believe is one of the most important components of leadership.

Forgiving Ourselves

"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong," said Mahatma Gandhi. Forgiving ourselves is a tough road. Can we expect people to forgive us after we forgive ourselves? We believe the answer is yes. It might not come quickly, but believing forgiveness is possible and working in a way that demonstrates you are making amends and trying each day to do better is a good beginning.

Forgiving Others

Forgiveness restores hope and productivity in the workplace. Not forgiving creates separation. When we judge others, we must also look at ourselves and be honest about what we haven't been able to forgive in ourselves. This must occur first to become an effective forgiver.

The cost of not forgiving within an organization is significant. Fear becomes a driving factor, and once we become fearful, you know what happens next: all the forms listed above start showing up.

Sometimes forgiveness is withheld because we think it means we are accepting or condoning a behavior. This is self-serving and judgmental. Issues that could easily be resolved become personal and create unnecessary conflict in the workplace.

Devastating Impact of Not Forgiving in the Workplace

Civil discord, though not as bloody as during Lincoln's time, still exists today in a variety of "forms." It is an unhealthy and archaic desire to want to punish people. Can you imagine how workplaces could be transformed if forgiveness was the first posture we took and it eventually became part of our everyday disposition?

Hiding behind the shield of not offering understanding and forgiveness, people hurt themselves and others. Gandhi also said, "An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind." The saying, "an eye for an eye," was transformed into "love your enemies."

"The man who can't make a mistake can't make anything," said Lincoln. He made forgiveness a high priority and worked to create a compassionate nation. Through forgiveness and embracing differences, he healed a nation and helped it move past its mistakes and egregious wrongs.

We also question the staggering cost of time and resources required to record and maintain all these forms within the organization. We recommend eliminating the above mentioned forms and their related processes, and using the resources for financial incentives for employees.

"How can we quickly remove obstacles which prevent growth of people as well as the business? Forgiveness is one of the ways. People can read through the BS, make it real and real change will happen," recommends seasoned People Development Executive, Ben Peterson, CEO [BambooHR](http://www.bamboohr.com) (<http://www.bamboohr.com/blog/5-ways-build-team>).

Creating Energized and Inspired Places of Work

What would Lincoln say about forms and processes today? We think he already said it, "No matter how much cats fight, there always seems to be plenty of kittens." Think of all the experiences in life and work that we miss

when we withhold forgiveness. Forgiveness carries with it compassion, humility, and gratitude, which are good things for creating positive outcomes.

Additional reporting for this article provided by [Mary Michelle Scott](http://www.fishbowlinventory.com/vip/) (<http://www.fishbowlinventory.com/vip/>), Fishbowl President. For additional resources: www.fishbowlinventory.com/vip (www.fishbowlinventory.com/vip)

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