



Think of the three people in your life that you are closest with.

How are your relationships with them similar?

How are they different?

When it comes to the relationships you have with your staff there are natural and necessary differences with the relationships in your personal life, but there are also important similarities.

To be an effective team leader it's essential that you know who your staff are and you understand what they care about, not just as it pertains to work, but also outside of it.

As you get to know your staff and understand who they are, these are four areas for you to consider and four questions for you to ask over and over again.

The first one is what do they care about?

Why are they in this field?

Why do they work at your organization?

In most cases part of that answer is going to be directly related to the work they're doing.

They love kids.

They're motivated to support first generation families to go to college.

They don't want to sit behind a desk all day.

They really like the fast-paced team environment.

It's also likely that there are a lot of reasons outside of their direct work responsibilities.

Things like pay, the commute, the hours, the location.

How can you support your staff for all the reasons that they are working with you?

Also what do they care about outside of their work?

When it comes to staff's personal lives, you're going to have some stuff that they really don't feel comfortable telling you a whole lot, and you're going to have staff on the far other end of the extreme that probably tell you a little bit too much about their personal lives.

This is one of those balancing acts where you want to maintain boundaries and also



respond to what your staff needs.

Even for those staff that don't get really personal with you, it is still helpful to show that you understand that they are human beings outside of their work with you. Learning things like the shows that they watch, the books that they read, the sports teams they follow can really help round them out as people and show that you are wanting to build an authentic relationship with them as human beings not just employees.

Second, what are their strengths? Most of the time people are aware of what they're good at and they enjoy doing it. Make sure that you are continually having conversations and paying attention to where they really shine so that you can continue to put them in positions to shine, which then gives you lots of opportunities to recognize them and give them praise.

When you're providing professional growth opportunities, don't neglect the areas where they already shine. Help them shine brighter.

Yes, it's helpful to invest in areas where people are lacking or they need to grow but when people really enjoy something and they're really good at it, they tend to want to continue getting even better. Make sure you're continuing to provide those opportunities as well.

Third, what are their goals?

What are their goals at their current position in terms of skills they're trying to gain or outcomes they're trying to reach?

Are they trying to move up?

Are they trying to move on?

What are their goals in the field?

Do they want to be in direct service, or do they want to explore other areas?

Or maybe they're thinking of getting out of the field altogether.

To best support them, it's helpful to build that relationship so they can be honest with you about what their goals are.

Also, what are their goals outside of work? Are they trying to run a 5k or grow tomatoes in their vegetable garden or get a black belt in their martial art or whatever.

Again knowing what they're working on outside of work too can help build that relationship.

The last one like all of these is loaded.



How do they work?

That encompasses a lot. How do they communicate? Do they like to work independently or collaboratively? If they share an office space do they listen to really loud music or do they need quiet?

It's important to have these conversations over and over again and communicate about how they're working environment is because everyone is going to thrive under different circumstances. And of course, what do they need from you?

You're going to have some staff that need you more than others where they're going to need more time from you than others. They're going to want more support and coaching and checking in and feedback and advice.

You're going to have other staff who don't want you bothering them at all, right, so finding some type of happy medium for each of the staff to meet their needs and making sure they're meeting their expectations as well.

You're not there just to separately support individual staff. You're also there to create a team culture and lead a team.

Even if people are really competent at what they do and they don't necessarily need a lot of guidance from you, it doesn't mean that you have no time with them or no relationship with them at all. You want to make sure that you are connecting with each and every one of your staff, but again, their needs are going to be different.

Some might need more from you in terms of helping them grow. Some might need more from you in terms of feedback. Some might want you to deepen the connections and relationships they have because they're ready to move on to the next thing.

Continue to have those conversations about what they need and make sure that you're meeting those needs as they are meeting their expectations.

How do you get to know your staff?

Of course getting to know anybody takes time and you can't rush it. Trust especially takes time. Your staff need to know for sure that they can trust you and it's not going to happen right away. Give them that space and time and show them again and again that you can be trusted.

When you're hiring and when you hire and when you're orienting, make sure you're asking these questions about what they care about what their goals are and how they work best. Then observe.

When we're asked questions like that directly, sometimes we just don't know the answer.



Sometimes we think we know the answer but what we say and what we do is totally different. Other times we give the answer we think we're supposed to give.

Yes, listen and pay attention to how people ask how people answer when you ask them directly, but also take it into consideration with what you're observing. If there's a disconnect, that's a great opportunity for a conversation.

'You had told me you wanted to do X, but then I noticed you're doing why so what's going on there?'

Finally, we tend to gravitate a lot to these sorts of exercises and assessments: *What's your work love language? What color are you? What swamp animal are you?*

There is value to be had. I don't mean to mock it. There is value to be had in doing these types of exercises and assessments. I don't want to dissuade you from doing them. I also want to caution you from putting too much stock in these types of exercises and assessments.

They can only capture a little bit of the complex being that you are and also sometimes people tend to latch onto the results in a sort of fixed mindset way.

'Well, you know, I'm purple so that means sorry or you know, I'm a koala and koalas do it this way.'

Use them, experiment with them, find ones that you enjoy and that provide some value but also take the results into consideration with the conversations and observations you're having and as you are working very hard to get to know your staff as individuals and meeting their individual needs making sure you are being equal and equitable and fair which can be a tough balance because everybody has those different needs.

You also want to make sure that you're not playing favorites or providing things to some that you're not providing to others in a way that would be seen as being playing favorites or being discriminatory.

So something for you to think about is, where do you need to understand your staff better?