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## **ARTICLE** **LEADERSHIP**

# Why Do So Many Managers Forget They're Human Beings?

*by Rasmus Hougaard, Jacqueline Carter and Vince  
Brewerton*

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# Why Do So Many Managers Forget They're Human Beings?

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In our assessments, surveys, and interviews of over a thousand leaders, many comments stood out, but one in particular was especially powerful and thought-provoking. “Leadership today,” Javier Pladevall, CEO of Volkswagen Audi Retail in Spain, told us, “is about unlearning management and relearning being human.”

What Javier means is, the power of leadership lies in our abilities to form personal and meaningful bonds with the people whom we lead. This is truer now than ever, as millennials are becoming the majority population in most companies. Millennials are not satisfied with only a paycheck, bonus, and benefits. They want meaning, happiness, and connectedness, too.

The problem is about [70% of leaders](#) rate themselves as inspiring and motivating – much in the same way as we all rate ourselves as great drivers. But this stands in stark contrast to how employees perceive their leaders. A [survey](#) published by Forbes found that 65% of employees would forego a pay raise if it meant seeing their leader fired, and a 2016 Gallup engagement [survey](#) found that 82% of employees see their leaders as fundamentally uninspiring. In our opinion, these two things are directly related.

There is a vast upside to human leadership. As [data](#) from McKinsey & Company shows, when employees are intrinsically motivated, they are 32% more committed and 46% more satisfied with their job and perform 16% better.

As human beings, we are all driven by basic needs for meaning, happiness, human connectedness, and a desire to contribute positively to others. And leaders that truly understands these needs, and lead in a way that enables these intrinsic motivations, have the keys to enable strong loyalty, engagement and performance. As leaders, we must be humans before managers.

Our research showed that a global movement is taking place in the C-suites of thousands of progressive organizations like Accenture, Marriott, Starbucks, Microsoft, and LinkedIn. The leaders of these organizations ask themselves “How can we create more human leadership and people-centered cultures where employees and leaders are more fulfilled and more fully engaged?”

Based on our work in creating more human leaders, here are a few tips:

### **Be personal**

Bob Chapman, CEO of Barry Wehmiller, a global manufacturing company, and author of [Everybody Matters](#), has gone to great lengths to instill truly human leadership within the company. For all decisions being made, that has impact on employees, he asks himself: If my child or parent or good friend worked here, would they appreciate this decision? In this way he makes any managerial decision a personal question. He moves it from a tactical domain to an emotional domain, to make sure he is not blindsided by his status and power. Try the same when making decisions affecting your people. Put yourself in their shoes and imagine they are family members or friends.

### **Be self-aware**

Leadership pioneer Peter Drucker said, “You cannot manage other people unless you manage yourself first.” In a recent [article](#), we shared how one CEO greatly enhanced the engagement and performance of the teams of the bank he leads, by becoming more self-aware. The story exemplifies how leadership starts with understanding and leading yourself. When you understand yourself, you

are better able to understand and empathize with the people you lead, and in turn lead for their intrinsic motivation. Good leadership starts with self-awareness, and self-awareness can be greatly enhanced through the [practice of mindfulness](#).

### **Be selfless**

Dominic Barton, global managing director of McKinsey & Company, says that selflessness is the foundation of good leadership. Leadership is not about you, but about the people and the organization you lead. With selflessness, you take yourself out of the equation and consider the long-term benefits of others. Selflessness does not mean you become a doormat for others and refuse to stand up for yourself. Selflessness comes out of self-confidence and self-care. Here is a simple way of checking whether you are selfless in your leadership: When you make decisions, check your motivation; are you doing it for personal gain, or for the benefits of others?

### **Be compassionate**

Compassion is the intention to bring happiness to others. If you have ever had a leader that was compassionate, you will know what it feels like. The person has your back. The person has your interest in mind. And, as a result, you feel safe, trusted, loyal, and committed. When it comes to leadership, nothing beats compassion. It is a universal language that is understood by anyone, anywhere. If you want to bring more compassion into your leadership, make a habit of asking one simple question whenever you engage with anyone: How can I help this person have a better day?

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**Rasmus Hougaard** is the founder and managing director of [Potential Project](#), a global leadership and organizational development firm serving Microsoft, Accenture, Cisco and hundreds of other organizations. He is publishing his second book [The Mind of the Leader – How to Lead Yourself, Your People and Your Organization for Extraordinary Results](#) with HBR Press in March 2018.

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