

Leadership IQ Article:

Shirking (aka "I love you, but everyone else hates you")

by Mark Murphy, CEO of Leadership IQ

Shirking is one of the most destructive conversations a manager can have with employees. **What is shirking?** It's a conversation in which a manager is SUPPOSED to give some constructive feedback to an employee (you know, something like "your performance is falling short in these areas, let's discuss how to improve it, etc."). But instead, what the manager says is "Listen, I think you're doing great, but you know how our executives are, and **THEY** think you really need to improve."

Shirking is just that; it's avoiding responsibility for delivering tough feedback and instead dumping responsibility onto somebody else (like upper management, or your boss, or the boss of another area). In its briefest form it becomes "***I love you, but everyone else hates you.***"

Any time we let someone else be the 'heavy' for telling an employee they need to improve ("in my eyes you're great, but for some reason Pat thinks you do subpar work"), that's shirking.

Shirking is partly damaging because it hurts the particular employee who missed out on some important feedback, but it really causes harm because it undermines your entire leadership team. It shows a divided leadership team, it throws fellow leaders under the bus, and it utterly destroys alignment. How can we all be pulling in the same strategic direction when we don't share the same standards and expectations?

Leaders aren't just allowed to give feedback; they're obligated to give feedback. And more than that, they're obligated to own that feedback. Leaders are coaches with a fresh perspective; it's their job to shed light on issues that employees may have missed. But when we engage in Shirking, we avoid that critical part of our job.

I know, it's a lot more fun to be everyone's friend. And so Shirking seems like a good idea (this way, we can deliver the tough feedback without getting the employee mad at us for delivering it). But it never works out that way.

An important determinant of whether the employee will actually listen to critical feedback is how much credibility they assign to the person delivering the feedback. If they truly respect the brains, performance and courage of their boss, they'll accept his/her feedback. If they don't, they won't. And unfortunately, Shirking basically tells employees "I didn't have the guts to take ownership of this feedback, so there's really no reason to respect me."

So test yourself. The next time you give someone feedback, ask yourself "Am I taking ownership of this feedback? Or am I passing the buck and making it sound like the feedback is really coming from somebody else?"

Shirking is unnecessary, it's horribly damaging, and remember, if you shirk and blame somebody else for the tough feedback you're giving, it's only a matter of time before they do it back to you.

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