

3 changes to make to be a better SME leader

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As the leader of a small and medium enterprise (SME), your responsibilities include providing your team with a sense of direction, setting an example, creating cohesiveness amongst employees and crafting a culture that supports, appreciates and nurtures people.

There is a myriad of opinions on what makes a good leader, but what many experts agree on is that 'good leaders learn and keep on learning', as there is always room for development and improvement.

Consider these three methods to improve your skills as a leader.

Be more attentive to your team members' individual needs

If you consider that in a company of 10 employees, one team member makes up 10% of the workforce, you'll gain an appreciation for how much easier it is to zone in on the unique needs of each employee in an SME as opposed to in a larger company. This presents a golden opportunity for small business leaders to find ways to optimise the working experience of their employees.

Too often business leaders try intricate ways of assessing whether employees feel happy, fairly treated and supported in their roles, or simply make assumptions. But the most effective way to find out whether an employee is happy in their job, is to ask them. You can do this anonymously via a survey or in a one-on-one check-in session where you provide a forum for free and open discussion.

You also need to consider aspects such as whether your team members have everything they need to fulfil their roles optimally. You could start by asking yourself the following questions:

- Is my workplace conducive to the needs of all individuals (this could include adequate facilities for people with disabilities like noise sensitivity or physical challenges, or a high level of cleanliness and enough space to feel comfortable, and access to spaces that allow for private conversations etc.)?
- Are there policies in place to encourage a healthy work/life balance?
- Are people who go above and beyond in their roles rewarded for doing so?
- Do you say thank you enough to the people who are helping build your business?

Communicate your vision

Upon establishing your SME, you would likely have invested time and effort into crafting your vision. And while it's important that you have a clear-cut idea of what you're working towards as an entrepreneur, getting your employees' buy-in is crucial. Your team, as a small business, are the people who make your brand what it is and what it will become, so it matters that they believe in your vision.

Take time to host a workshop, a staff discussion, a thinktank session or a coffee break meeting to share your vision as a business owner – what you'd like to achieve, how you plan to get there and how people can contribute to making that happen.

Getting your people to believe in what you're doing could make the difference between having a team that comes to work, just wanting to do their job and earn their keep or having a team that feels motivated because they feel like valued contributors to a greater, collective goal.

Turn your focus inwards

SME owners can become so preoccupied with managing their day-to-day operations and their team that they forget to invest in themselves. Sometimes the best solution to challenges that are manifesting outwardly is not to find an external solution, but to take an introspective look at how you can develop yourself.

This may mean dedicating time in your calendar to reading or empowering yourself with knowledge through a course or workshop. It could mean taking more time off to do the things you love and to nurture a positive outlook. Remember that if you neglect your own needs, you cannot really attend to the needs of the people who work for you. So, perhaps the best place to start, is with yourself.

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