

Consider the irony: We think a great deal about how we look, but we see ourselves very little, and only then as a reflection. Fact is that others see us much more than we see ourselves. More importantly, they not only watch us -- they interpret what they see.

As parents, neighbors and leaders, those in our midst interpret how we dress, what we do, how we speak with an intense scrutiny that lives just below the surface of polite human conduct. I call these messages that we emit "cues." Cues are things that others recognize and interpret as a character trait, intention, subtle message or passed judgment. We rarely think of every action as a "cue" left for others to interpret, and because of that inattention, we leave ourselves open to mis-interpretation. Cues require that we must be very self-aware.

Leaders of any organization are particularly susceptible to cues. A simple act of neglect such as leaving crumpled paper on the floor next to your trash can may be perceived by others as an indication that you are inconsiderate of the janitorial staff, egotistical, or conceded. The list of potential cues left to interpretation number in the thousands each day. As you walk the office hallway your eye contact or lack thereof tells a particular story. The way you speak to everyone or ignore a few, is processed with scrutiny. Cues can quickly ruin a leaders reputation and ultimately their productivity. Good news: cues are managed by self-awareness.

I believe that leadership in its simplest form involves endearing others to your vision and day-to-day direction. To gain that endearing relationship between leader and team, we can use our cues to build moments of endeared leadership. Those moments are difficult to notice at first. They are found in the moments of connectivity between a leader and their team. Moments of simple concern, interest, encouragement can easily be converted into a positive cue. Grabbing a coffee, lifting a box or making a copy for someone tells a story of a leader who cares about others and is not too important to do the little things. The trappings of power (negative cues) are effectively avoided or countered by these simple gestures of assistance.

By realizing that every member of your team has a desire to be cared for and a need to make a difference, you can more easily recognize those cue opportunities that endear others to your leadership. Leadership has little to do with being a boss and much more to do with creating an environment in which your actions speak louder than words. Watch your cues. Be self-aware.