

“The Respect Effect is a timely reminder that we need to put respect into action and incorporate it into our social fabric.”

—DANIEL H. PINK, author of *To Sell is Human* and *Drive*

USING THE SCIENCE OF
NEUROLEADERSHIP

TO INSPIRE

A MORE LOYAL AND
PRODUCTIVE WORKPLACE

THE RESPECT EFFECT

PAUL MESHANKO

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CHAPTER 1 **A Transformational Power**

W

hile there have been many proud moments in my career, one of the most memorable was a three-month period in 1987. I was in the second quarter of a two-term internship with the Bendix Heavy Vehicle division of AlliedSignal Corporation. I was fortunate to report to a man named Larry Taylor, who remains one of the best managers I can ever remember having. What made Larry special as a manager was that he never treated me as anything other than a fully competent associate, even though I was still a college student. His management style was to probe the outer edges of my intelligence, problem-solving skills, and creativity on a continual basis.

One particular assignment still makes me smile every time I think back to it. One day, Larry said that he had an important project for me. The company was considering an acquisition, and he wanted me to prepare a full strategic analysis of the companies being considered. More importantly, he asked that I come back to him with a recommendation once my analysis was complete. I remember feeling both excited and frightened. For a kid still in college, this was the kind of project that would require me to pull from every business discipline I had been exposed to up until that point.

The project took almost two months to complete. In the end, I presented a full analysis of three potential acquisition targets, including their financial strength, market position, reputation within

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our industry, and range of products and services. While all three companies were attractive candidates, there was one that stood out to me as clearly being the best target. My analysis and recommendations, including multiple graphs and charts, took the form of a 60-page report with my name squarely on the cover page. I still remember walking into Larry's office, handing it to him, and proudly saying, "Here you go." At that time, it represented not only a meaningful departure from term papers and case studies, but it was also the best work I was capable of producing.

Later that afternoon, my desk phone rang, and Larry asked me to come to his office. He said, "I have reviewed your report and recommendation, and it is excellent. It's so good that I have already sent it to Dave and would like you to present it to him in person tomorrow." Dave was Larry's boss and responsible for all aftermarket strategy and marketing for our group.

This level of recognition for my work, and its implied confidence in me, was somewhat unexpected. What an impact it had. The euphoria and motivation it instilled in me lasted for years. It set the stage for me to accept the company's offer to work for it as a full-time employee once I graduated from college even though I had two offers at slightly higher starting salaries.

As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others.

Bill Gates, Cofounder and Chairman of Microsoft

Looking back through the 25-year lens of my experiences, it's only now that I fully appreciate the complex and powerful forces put into play that year. More than anything, Larry primed my emotional pump by treating me in a manner that made me feel smart, capable, and important. He also helped me feel like I was part of the

team and see how my contributions played an integral part in the long-term strategic and financial success of the business. While he probably didn't realize it at the time, his intentional and consistent demonstration of respect for me as a person and young professional helped set in motion the productive and rewarding trajectory for the first 10 years of my professional career. Because of his communication of confidence in me, I developed a powerful emotional tie to both my boss and the company. Whether it's a project, acquisition, or purchase of equipment, either mentally or physically businesses map their return on investment (ROI). In this case, the investment was in me, and the return was the maximum engagement of my skills for the betterment of the company. What can a company do to maximize the return on investment it's made in its employees? A good starting place is to make respect an integral part of the company's corporate culture.

CHAPTER 2 **Connected Through Evolution**

One of the most illuminating perspectives on human interaction that I've read recently was in Daniel Goleman's book, *Primal Leadership*.¹ Goleman refers to human beings as "open loop systems." From an evolutionary perspective, our species is more connected to each other than most people realize. Over the course of millions of years, our ancestors developed highly specialized brain circuitry that constantly monitored other people when we were in their presence. In psychology, there's a concept called *theory of mind* which refers to the ability to identify mental states (beliefs, desires, intentions, perspectives, etc.) in ourselves and others, and to realize that the two states are often different. Grasping this basic difference in orientations was a remarkable and uniquely human adaptation. In a world of limited resources, it was the equivalent of developing our own personal threat detection systems.

The emotional brain responds to an event more quickly than the thinking brain.

Daniel Goleman, Author, Psychologist and Science Journalist

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From an evolutionary perspective, this makes complete sense. The ability to predict accurately the peaceful or hostile intentions of new people or animals literally promoted the longevity of our species. What is fascinating about this circuitry is that it's forever in the "on" mode. What this means is that we're always monitoring other people around us, and they're doing the same. Our conclusions about the intentions of others have a profound effect on how the rest of our brain functions. Informed by inputs from our five senses, our brains perform a delicate and instinctual dance every day in the name of self-preservation.

Armed with this complex warning system, the human brain is the world's most sophisticated survival computer ever developed. Whenever our senses pick up cues that could indicate that we are or could be in the presence of danger, ancient neural pathways become activated to get us out of harm's way as quickly and effectively as possible. This is the realm of fight or flight. So powerful are these impulses that they literally commandeer the brain and order all other nonessential thinking functions to go dormant. This means that all our higher-order brain capabilities, such as problem solving, reasoning, evaluating alternatives, planning, socializing, and empathizing, are subordinated to protecting ourselves in the presence of perceived threats. This includes more than just physical threats; it also includes threats to our emotional well-being, social status, financial security, and future opportunities.

Conversely, when we interpret cues from others to mean that we are safe in their midst, our higher-level thought processes go back online, and we return to a normal level of thinking and intellectual/operational output. This "all systems safe" mode of brain function is hopefully where most of us spend the majority of our waking hours getting things done for our employers, our families, and ourselves.

From a workplace perspective, there is a mode that's more beneficial and desirable than "all systems safe." It is the mode in which we function when we perceive ourselves to be free from danger and in the presence of those who appreciate us, value what we contribute, and deem our best effort as being essential to the overall success of the group. It is also the mode in which we are constructively

challenged, given opportunities and resources to be successful, and can share in the rewards of our collaboration with others. When we operate in this type of rich, stimulating, and emotionally nourishing environment, our brains are more productive than normal. They release powerful neurotransmitters that stimulate our creativity and our desire to work collaboratively; they also allow us to find deep personal satisfaction in our work. This is the *respect effect*.

The Neurology of Human Interaction

Human evolution and biology play significant roles in determining how we interact and behave around each other. Our brains are wired for speed and efficiency and powered almost exclusively by glucose, which is the form of sugar our bodies metabolize from carbohydrates. Because we have limited supplies of glucose available throughout the day, one of our natural, and often unacknowledged biases is to stay in environments that are familiar and use neural pathways that are already well-developed. When we're surrounded by people who are like us (or at least very familiar to us), we expend less glucose (energy) to understand their actions and predict their intentions. This preference for familiarity, predictability, and safety is likely one of the underlying factors that drove our ancestors to form tribes.

When we're around people for whom we have no first-hand reference points, our brains immediately try to match what we can perceive about them (visually, audibly, and through our sense of smell) to patterns that already exist. According to authors Marsh, Mendoza-Denton, and Smith:

Neuroscience has shown that people can identify another person's apparent race, gender, and age in a matter of milliseconds. In this blink of an eye, a complex network of stereotypes, emotional prejudices, and behavioral impulses activates.²

These mental shortcuts allow us to quickly evaluate people and our relative safety around them. There is strong evidence that they also permit the brain to consume less of the body's precious supply of glucose. When we have no existing reference points for a person, event, or situation, the brain must work harder and burn considerably more energy to program new neuronal reference points and synaptic pathways. Think of it as the difference between driving down a highway versus having to build that highway in the first place. Once our "highways" are built, we are comfortable staying on them as much as possible. To a degree, this analogy helps underscore the power and persistence of stereotypes to influence our perceptions and initial interaction behaviors with others.

What Is Respect?

The word *respect* has its origins in the Latin noun *respectus*, which translates literally to: the act of looking back, and the Latin verb, *respicere*, which means to look back. Today, the actual word, as it pertains to people, has evolved to be defined by Merriam-Webster the following ways:

Respect: noun - 1) the act of giving particular attention: consideration, 2) high or special regard: esteem, 3) the quality of being esteemed.

Respect: verb - 1a) to consider worthy of high regard: esteem, 1b) to refrain from interfering with, 2) to have reference to: concern.

Respect is a word with enormous scope that has gradually morphed to mean different things since its first use in the fourteenth century. What makes the word so important is that, when experienced, it triggers powerful, positive emotions that not only feel good but change our behaviors. Of critical significance is that these emotional responses seem to be universal. While the actions and decisions

that trigger the feeling of being respected will vary from person to person and culture to culture, the core emotion is experienced identically in all human beings. Respect *feels* the same, no matter your age, race, gender, religion, or level of intelligence or ability. Similarly, the neurological responses to being treated with respect appear to be universal. We will explore these later.

A Forward-Looking Definition

I suggest the following as a reference point for further exploring respect as a cultural component:

Respect is an active process of nonjudgmentally engaging people from all backgrounds. It is practiced to increase our awareness and effectiveness and demonstrated in a manner that esteems both us and those with whom we interact.

One implication of this definition is that it doesn't permit complacency or a status quo level of social comfort. The genuine pursuit of respect requires effort, takes time, and will likely feel awkward occasionally as we push ourselves to engage people from whom we have historically kept our distance. Neurologically, the more different from us others appear, the more energy our brains have to expend to categorize and make sense of the differences. Part of this mental effort is spent creating new neural pattern circuits. Another part is spent turning down the volume of our inner voices that want to use shortcuts to process the differences.

When defining respect, the inclusion of esteem also deserves discussion. Whether or not our interactions with others have been successful in conveying respect will depend on the emotional state of others after interacting with us. If our efforts have succeeded, the desired result is for those we interact with to feel valued in some way, as colleagues, coworkers, friends, neighbors, or simply as

people. When we make ourselves partially responsible for the emotional well-being of those around us, it enhances our own sense of esteem. Think of it as the “pay it forward” effect.

What this definition does *not* mean is that all our conversations with others will be pleasant and that difficult situations can’t be discussed. It’s quite the opposite. This definition of respect actually requires that we engage in candid conversations with individuals with whom we have problems. If employees who report to us are not performing at the required level, it is critical that we share this information with them. In order to maintain or build esteem in a person whose performance is inadequate, it is important that we separate the person from the performance. We can give candid feedback about their performance, while letting the individual know that we value him as a person and want him to succeed. Even more impactful is making it clear that our intent is to do whatever we can to help them become successful. From the perspective of the people receiving feedback, they are more willing to hear critical feedback about their performance provided they feel cared about as a person and that someone is committed to helping them meet their requirements.

Respect Is Not Tolerance

Imagine that your spouse, partner, or significant other came home from work one Friday afternoon and, with a smile on his or her, enthusiastically declared that he loved his job because his boss and coworkers *tolerated* him. We would probably look at him as if he had a screw loose because the feeling of being tolerated and his expression of joy didn’t match! Most people don’t associate the feeling of being tolerated with overt happiness, smiles, and energy. That’s not to say that tolerance is bad; it’s simply a mediocre standard given the alternatives. Think of it as receiving a rating of “average” on your performance review. It’s not an unsatisfactory, but it doesn’t put your

workplace performance at a level that can lead to a personal and/or monetary reward.

Whenever we interact with others, either at work or in our private lives, there is a broad range of possible behaviors that we can demonstrate (see Figure 2.1). Tolerating others is a neutral position. It is not positive or negative in its impact and requires little energy to initiate and sustain. This is why people typically perceive themselves as being tolerant. When surveyed, most people indicate that they are more tolerant than those around them (the “better than

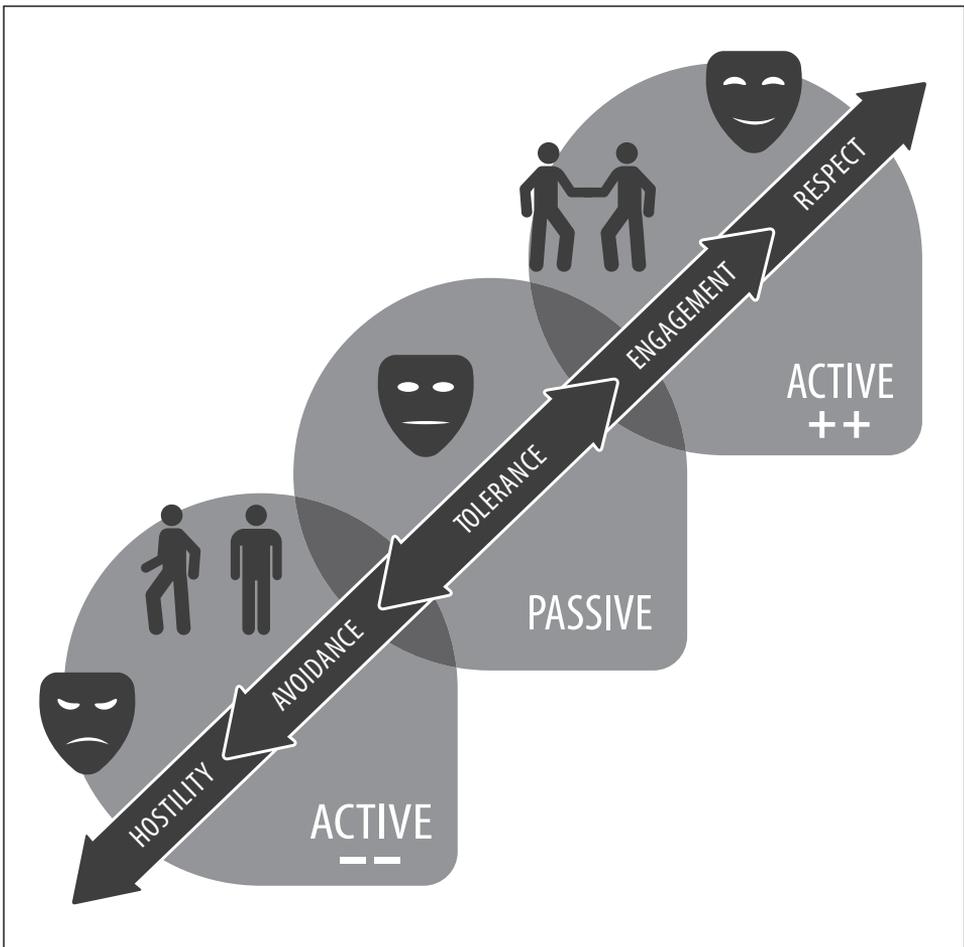


Figure 2.1 The road to respect

average” effect). We would find it difficult to refute these internal and usually unspoken, beliefs because the demonstration of tolerance has few behaviors or actions associated with it. The possible exception is when we are around others who we perceive to be annoying; then tolerance requires effort.

The Island of Misfit Toys

If you’ve ever eaten at a Hard Rock Cafe, one of the first things that made an impression on you was the outstanding collection of rock and roll memorabilia gracing the walls. The next thing you noticed is the equally memorable collection of stage-ready staffers employed by Hard Rock to provide you with a remarkable dining experience. Tattoos, body piercings, Mohawks or spiked hair in all colors with clothes to match can create an almost uneasy feeling for first-time Hard Rock patrons. My first visit in 2009 (Baltimore, Maryland) was this way. That is, until I was greeted with a huge smile, amazingly friendly attitude, and a simple welcome, “Hi, my name is Gordon, and I’ll be your server today. Have you ever eaten at a Hard Rock before?” As I sat in our booth with my wife and young kids, I cautiously said, “No, this is our first time.” Gordon beamed. “Cool! You’re going to love it here. By the way, only my parents call me Gordon. You can call me Sly!” With that, my apprehensions vanished.

According to Jim Knight, Sr., director of training and development for Hard Rock International, the previously described and authentic greeting is what sets the tone for an amazing guest experience. It’s also part of the Hard Rock’s unique formula for success in the restaurant industry that each year sees a higher-than-average failure rate for new entrants. It is part of the same formula that propelled the company to legendary patron status and solid financial performance since Americans Peter Morton and Isaac Tigrett opened the first restaurant in London, England in 1971.

The Hard Rock guest experience starts with the hiring process for its distinctive staff. Knight has a direct hand in training the majority of management personnel within the organization. “We’re kind of like the Island of Misfit Toys from the television Christmas special,” he grinned during a recent interview in Orlando, Florida. “We look to hire employees who, because of their individuality, might not fit in with more traditional restaurants.”

He went on to say, “There’s something special about the chemistry between our staffers because they’re all kind of outsiders in some way or another. The Hard Rock guest experience is a direct result of this ‘we’re all freaks’ chemistry. It kind of results in a flavor of teamwork and commitment that, quite honestly, I’ve never seen matched in other hospitality-related organizations.”

The spike-haired and energetic Knight modestly tried to minimize his own influence. When pressed, he acknowledged his hands-on style of training and development content for Hard Rock managers. The element that appears to be most important is an emphasis on creating a “rock star” experience for customers and employees. This approach is obviously a winner because the chain boasts patron evaluations that are best-in-class, and a staff turnover that is half the industry average. To an outsider looking in, the connection seems obvious.

Knight has been part of the Hard Rock team for over 20 years. What keeps him there? It’s more than the Rolex watch—each employee, no matter what their position, gets one after 10 years. It’s more than the ability to travel the world and knowing he’s personally making a difference. Reflecting on the company’s underlying approach, *Do well by doing well*, he said, “This place is kind of in my DNA. I love what I do, love the people I do it with and love the guests we all do it for.” On the wall directly behind Knight’s head is one of the several short sayings for which the Hard Rock Cafe is so famous:—*Love all—Serve all*.

Once we move away from the relatively passive mode of simply tolerating others, we start exerting energy, typically mental and occasionally physical. We start *behaving* around others in relation to our perceptions of what their presence signifies. Those behaviors are predicated on our stored knowledge, including the stereotypes that we have about them or people like them. Here's where our evolutionary instincts enter into the equation. Our first genetically imprinted directive is to remain safe. People feel safest when they are around others who are like them. The problem is that given the vast range of dissimilarities among people, we perceive most people as different from us. A colleague suggested to me years ago that many of us unintentionally alienate ourselves from others merely by our self-perceived sense of "terminal uniqueness."

When we perceive that we are interacting with unfamiliar people who have unknown or suspect motives, the natural emotion that surfaces is suspicion (or, minimally, caution). The behavioral manifestation of suspicion is avoidance. The same response can be expected when we are in the presence of people for whom we have stereotyped information that suggests unpredictable or hostile intentions. Over the course of our evolution, this "play it safe" response kept our ancestors out of harm's way and increased our chances of long-term survival. In situations in which the presence of unfamiliar people suggests impending conflict or danger, our level of physical and mental energy usage goes up beyond avoidance. We prepare ourselves to initiate or protect ourselves from hostility.

Life today is very different from the world in which our prehistoric ancestors fought for survival. While there are occasional situations in which we perceive physical danger, potentially dangerous people are more likely to threaten us with psychological, emotional, or social harm. That's why the term *hostility* needs to be defined broadly:

Hostile behavior is an intentional activity that harms another person in any way, including physically,

emotionally, socially, financially, professionally, or by reputation. Hostility can also be demonstrated by behaviors that intentionally impede others in meeting their predetermined goals.

For those employed in workplaces where hostile behaviors are openly tolerated or even encouraged, there is little doubt to the damage inflicted on productivity. Energy spent perpetrating or deflecting hostility is energy that can't be spent doing the work individuals were hired to do.

Hostile behaviors are at the polar opposite end of the spectrum from behaviors associated with respect. The question is what will send our behavior in a different direction, away from avoidance and hostility and toward *engagement*. The answer is remarkably simple. While initially not easy, selectively rewiring our brains to respond to differences with *curiosity* instead of suspicion is the most direct path. When practiced, cultivating an attitude of curiosity about the differences between ourselves and others leads to an entirely different set of behaviors and actions. When we're curious about something or someone, rather than avoiding them, we should engage them to explore the differences. It is this active demonstration of curiosity that leads us to explore the unique individuality that differentiates us from others. It is also the path that leads us to discover similarities that may not be visible on the surface and ultimately, to respect.

The benefits of curiosity notwithstanding, it would be naïve to think that there was never a place for suspicion in our world. Not every situation or person is safe to be around. To walk alone at night in a part of town that has a statistically higher incidence of physical crime would be foolhardy. Similarly, letting your guard down around a person who treated you with hostility in the past would be unwise. No species would survive if it completely ignored known threats to its safety and well-being.

An attitude of curiosity starts with the intention to exit our familiar orbit and subordinate our more primal fear of the unknown.

But there has to be a value proposition for doing so; a future benefit linked to learning more about others or we won't exert the effort required to refocus our attention. A degree of mindfulness is also helpful; being observant when our minds initially tell us to be careful and being able to push back gently with reason and ask ourselves, "What is the danger?"

As we learn to turn down the volume of our own "noise," we become more aware of stories about other people and their imagined intentions. This is part of our explanatory style, our ability to explain to ourselves why we experience a particular event, either positive or negative. Uncovering and owning our current stories, even the unpleasant ones, allow us to begin to test them through reason and a fresh outlook. Do our apprehensions and suspicions make sense logically, or are they simply leftover artifacts from inherited stereotypes and past experiences that are too old to be relied upon accurately to predict the future?

If you have some respect for people as they are, you can be more effective in helping them to become better than they are.

John W. Gardner, Educator, Public Official and Political Reformer

While more tangible benefits typically come later, curiosity leads to a process of discovery that is intrinsically enjoyable and valuable. When we mutually make the time to get to know others at levels beyond what the senses can detect, there is a covalidation that takes place for all parties. Some cultures have a specific vocabulary to describe this process. In Bantu (African), it's sometimes referred to as *Ubuntu* (pronounced oo-BUUN-too), "I am what I am because of who we all are." *Namaste* (pronounced NAH-məs-tay) from India translates to, "The spirit in me respects the spirit in you." When we

acknowledge and validate each other, we become connected and a part of something bigger. This discovery process, taking varying degrees of effort, leads us to the doorstep of respect.

Making a Difference with Mutual Respect

In the summer of 2010, Medical Mutual of Ohio launched Mutual Respect, an initiative that would build on the company's already strong employee satisfaction ratings and turn them into an active force to improve areas including customer service, employee commitment, and trust. According to Tom Greene, vice president of human resources in a personal interview with Legacy Business Cultures staffers, "The goal of any program of this type should be to create an environment that, over time, will continue to foster retention, improve employee continuity, and make for a better customer experience. All of those characteristics help differentiate Medical Mutual in the marketplace."

Support for the idea came straight from the top. The board of directors of Medical Mutual recognized that their people were their company's greatest competitive advantage. Patty Hartmann, manager of corporate learning and development, noted that both the board and senior leadership wanted to leverage the company's diversity, not as a passive way to recognize people's differences, but to use them actively to make Medical Mutual stronger. "We knew we had a culture that understood diversity and supported differences," said Hartmann in a personal interview. "But we wanted to turn that into a competitive asset that helped us succeed in the market. It's the next step in continuing to build an inclusive culture."

Medical Mutual officially launched Mutual Respect by first surveying all 2,700 of its employees in Ohio, Indiana, South Carolina, and Georgia to establish internal benchmark data on perceptions of respectfulness in the culture. In a personal interview, Sandy Opacich, director of

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human resources stated, “We have been doing employee satisfaction surveys for several years, but with Legacy on board, we were able to interweave questions developed specifically to ascertain the level of respect within.” The initial survey response rate was 70 percent, which was substantial. The results showed that, while Medical Mutual was already perceived as a respectful work environment, there was room for improvement in some key areas.

Acting on data and insights gained from the survey process, Medical Mutual quickly followed up with a customized training curriculum designed to position respect as a platform for better understanding of the broader concept of diversity and how to leverage it for culture change. Medical Mutual’s training partner was quick to point out that an authentic culture of respect goes beyond the traditional (diversity) focus on awareness of differences. While this may be a good starting point, authentic respect requires the active commitment of all managers and employees to treat one another in ways that build esteem and communicate value.

Initially, a half-day workshop was delivered to all leaders and managers, including the chief executive officer. Following the management workshops, each manager was required to work with his or her team members to facilitate the creation of a code of cooperation. These “living guidelines” typically included 8–12 behaviorally specific statements detailing how employees who work together agreed to engage with and treat each other. What sets Mutual Respect apart from past diversity efforts, according to Medical Mutual’s Tom Greene, is that, The results of the survey and the manager-level training include a clear link to organization-wide efforts to foster a culture of respect.”

With management already having completed the program, Medical Mutual is now offering over 30 sessions of the Mutual Respect workshop to all employees on a voluntary basis. Their business partner has certified internal staff members to facilitate the workshop, and Hartmann says it has been very well attended. “So far, all sessions

have been full, most with waiting lists," she says. "We re-surveyed our employees in third-quarter 2011 and, judging by the results, we do see a definite connection between perceptions of respect and other metrics like retention, which have a measurable impact on our company."