



Emails

Kon Leong
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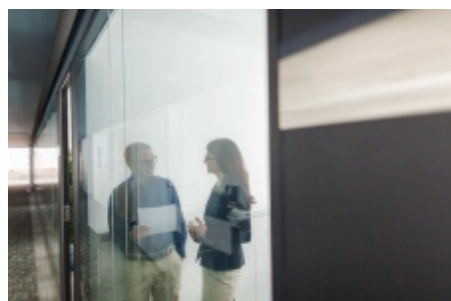


The Leadership Insiders network is an online community where the most thoughtful and influential people in business contribute answers to timely questions about careers and leadership. Today's answer to the question, "How can you play a role in advancing workplace equality?" is written by Kon Leong, CEO of ZL Tech.

There are unsung heroes in your business. They jump hurdles, solve problems, mentor, mediate, motivate, and drive your business forward—but unlike your company's attention-loving superstars, these folks operate behind the scenes. They may not fit the profile you normally look to when searching for your company's future leaders. But if you don't find and recognize them, they're not the ones losing out the most. You are.

As it stands, the employees who usually get a raise or promotion are the ones anxious to make their achievements known. Fueled by their belief that they *belong* in the elevated position, they often convince us to move them ahead. In doing so, we are perpetuating inequality, since the employees many leaders are promoting are the same employees that look, sound, and act like others higher up on the organization chart.

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Fortunately, smart business leaders are catching on that we've undervalued certain traits that are sorely needed in today's workplace: emotional intelligence, curiosity, the ability to listen and understand others' frame of reference, and eagerness to help others succeed.

Leaders must learn to identify those who accomplish great feats, but are more interested in pulling others across the finish line. Here is some advice for finding and empowering these employees, and increasing your company's diversity in the process:

Review your success criteria

You should begin this process by reviewing your company's criteria for promotions and raises. First, you want leaders who deliver results without drama. It takes some practice, but look for those who can get the job done without any



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Second, make sure the employee is a good listener. Loudmouths get attention. But those who have the most positive influence—and inspire confidence in those around

them—are those who listen best.

When I was working a previous job at a bank, I remember being impressed by a supervisor who didn't say a whole lot, but always had people coming to him for advice on tough problems. Because of that, he occupied a position of power that far exceeded his title. In the process of listening and retaining all of that information, the supervisor became possibly the most knowledgeable person in resolving complex banking systems issues at the company.

Third, identify someone who communicates effectively. A strong employee should be able to present ideas in other people's contexts, not their own. The ones who do this best are strong listeners, since they understand others' backgrounds.

One of my board advisors is particularly adept at communicating not just clearly but also succinctly, a skill that is often overlooked. He was once charged with turning around a loss-making division of over 10,000 employees. After listening to employees for a month about the issues, he realized that there were too many messages and objectives. He condensed them to a simple edict of winning two key accounts in six months, or the division would be shut down or sold. After receiving such a clear message, the employees not only achieved that objective, but the division also broke into the black that year.



Fourth, find employees whose peers naturally gravitate toward them for advice, feedback, and support. That's who you want building the future of your company. They make for much better workers than those who naturally gravitate toward telling other people what to do.

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, you also want leaders who are innately curious. Look for someone who's comfortable in not knowing an answer instantly, but also shows a willingness to find a solution. They should also know—and love—that even when one answer comes, many more questions will arise.

Read your employees' emails

Once these traits are embedded in your criteria for promotions and raises, let the search begin. Your company is probably already required to archive all of its emails. Use that in the service of identifying and awarding credit where it's due.

With the right analytics capabilities, you can extract instant insights from your company's emails. You could learn, for instance, who people go to for feedback and advice. Analyze email content for language patterns that indicate requests for help, and search for keywords such as "your help" and "your advice." You could also find out who receives the most expressions of appreciation and gratitude, or who are the experts on certain subjects.

Learn to always be on the lookout for leadership traits among your employees—no matter their race, age, or gender. Most likely, you'll find that if you do this in a fair manner, your company will become more diverse as a result. True stars should stand out regardless of how much they promote themselves. That's what workplace equality is all about.



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