

5 Common Myths About Respect in the Workplace

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Life is full of many things—good and bad; exciting and boring; simple and complicated; myth and fact. And much more! Last month marked the one year anniversary of the EKTIMIS online newsletter, a publication focused exclusively on topics and issues around respect. And what better way to mark this milestone than to discuss the issue of myths—specifically five common myths about respect in the workplace.

But first, as I always like to do to ensure a common understanding, let's establish the definition—of a myth. As used in this article, a myth refers to a false notion or belief.

The interesting fact about myths is that most (myths) are taken to be true by many people. This then begs the question, "If a myth is a false notion, why is it thought to be true by many?" The logical response obviously is that if the people who believe a popular myth to be factual thought otherwise, then they would not think of it as a myth to begin with! Only individuals who believe a myth to be false realize that the underlying notion is indeed a myth. Alright, enough of that.

A Myth
A false notion or belief.

So what are five common myths about respect that you would find floating around a workplace. This topic is as important as it is interesting. In fact, I address some of these myths in my forthcoming book, *The Top Ten Laws of Respect in the Workplace - A Professional Guide*.

Myth One – Respect is all about power. This is a strongly held belief by many in the workplace and it is absolutely false. It is easy to see why this myth would prevail in today's society. A workplace is characterized by an organization structure and, hence, by positions of varying authority. The higher up the organization hierarchy, the fewer the number of positions and the higher the degree of authority. "Respect for authority" is something many parents teach their kids, and this lesson is a major factor when cultivating habits and a lifestyle of respect. However, in the workplace, respect for authority does not mean that respect is all about power.

In many organizations some of the most respected employees do not assume positions of significant authority. Many highly respected employees are often found in staff-level, supervisor-level, and middle management-level roles and positions. Many other factors, other than a position of authority—or position of power, contribute to respect. I explore and present these factors in *Respect: Gaining It and Sustaining It*. It is one thing to hold a position of power or authority. And this begs the more important questions, "What have you done with it?" and "How have you conducted yourself while serving in the position?"

Myth Two – Respect is important, but not that big a deal. In the workplace respect is certainly very important; and it is a very big deal. But why? In a work environment where you have many individuals from varying backgrounds, of varying age, from varying ethnicity, with varying skills and expertise, and much more, respect for fellow employees is the "glue" that holds the workplace culture together—in other words, respect

keeps the workplace culture functional. Remove respect from a workplace environment and you would observe the birth of a dysfunctional workplace culture.

Myth Three – A diverse workforce means a respectful workforce. Today many organizations, especially large entities, have discovered the value and benefit of a diverse workforce, in light of the increasingly diverse society that prevails in many parts of the western world. Many of these organizations are also discovering the challenges of a diverse workforce. Some of these challenges stem from the cultural diversity, ethnic diversity, gender diversity, and nationality diversity—to name a few—that come with a diverse workforce. By virtue of these many challenges, a diverse workforce does not always translate to a respectful workforce. Unless a workplace culture incorporates respect as a key component of its underlying belief system, and respect is espoused and continuously demonstrated at every level of an organization, a diverse workforce will only (falsely) project an image of a respectful workforce and nothing more.

Myth Four – My boss is the only person I need to respect. This notion is somewhat popular in organizations that operate in silos. Many individuals believe that their boss is the only person worthy of their respect because their boss determines, to a large measure, the quality of their work life and the nature of their career advancement. But the reality is that respect needs to flow vertically and horizontally in a work environment. This implies that you ought to exhibit respect for employees above (superiors), below (subordinates) and horizontal (peers/colleagues) to you. The driver behind this rationale is quite simple—a workplace is an environment that exists to serve customers. If you understand this fundamental principle, then it becomes clear why respect for every employee that you work with, regardless of position, is vital for productivity and ultimate benefit of customers—the final source of revenue for a company.

Myth Five – I should respect my boss only if I am treated well. This notion is more a psychological myth than a practical one. While many employee-boss relationships are quite healthy, many are equally unhealthy. The underlying cause of an unhealthy employee-boss relationship can obviously vary, depending on a variety of factors. It is easy to see why this particular myth would exist—everyone expects to be treated well, even by a superior. While it is possible for your boss to lose your respect by virtue of his or her actions and deeds, it does not alleviate your obligation to continue to respect him or her by virtue of his or her position of authority. This type of (positional) respect differs from (earned) respect, a concept I thoroughly explain in *Respect: Gaining It and Sustaining It*. In time you may well discover that your appropriate response to the poor behavior or poor judgment by your boss may serve as a catalyst for (his or her) positive transformation.

Hopefully these five myths do not represent notions that you believe. If any of them does, it is clearly time to dispel the myth. Do you agree?

About the Author



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