

Jeff Weiner on Compassionate Management

10 February 2014 Lunch event at the Computer History Museum, Menlo Park (Wisdom 2.0 event)



**“We are not just building companies,
we are building humanity”**

*Jeff Weiner, CEO LinkedIn and champion of
compassionate management,
in conversation with Soren Gordhamer.*

Many people are stuck working for the boss from hell!

To open the conversation Wisdom 2.0 Founder Soren Gordhamer said he looked up the 2013 annual Gallup Poll of the **State of the American Workplace**. 70% of those surveyed hate their jobs ... or are completely disengaged. When they asked why ... many of the people surveyed complained of **“Bosses from Hell”**.

So many people are dissatisfied with their work life.

Compassionate management very much pertains to this situation of dissatisfaction among so many people ... how did Jeff come to champion this area? I mean what seminars what can you take to learn this stuff?

The book that changed everything

JW responds: This subject is so important He feels that we should teach compassion in every primary school. There was a moment in his life when things changed: At the age of 30 a friend gave him **the book the “Art of Happiness”** - wisdom from the Dalai Lama collated by Howard Cutler. Very influential book for him for the last 13 years. The book sits on his night stand and it reminds him of some very important first principles.

Compassion is one of those principles. Now he knows how to practice it consciously. Until the age of 30 he could not have made the distinction between Compassion and Empathy.... most people can't. His learning about compassion made a profound impact on him at the time:

Compassion is an objective form of empathy, where you have space between what you are feeling and what the other is feeling. There's more distance so you don't actually feel what the other is feeling hence you have more ability to do something to actually alleviate suffering of that person.

Projecting your worldview onto others is unrealistic

Fast forward a few years and he is in a senior executive position and he spoke of having the bad habit of **projecting his world view onto others** That's human nature. We are very much driven from our own perspective and expect people to do things the way *we do* things. He recalled knowing data about something and being frustrated with someone if they did not know exactly what he knew. He says those **unrealistic expectations of others** actually contribute to the dissatisfaction of employees which Soren referred to in the Gallup Poll. A far more productive way to relate to people is to understand that they have a different capacity or ability to you. Coach them to improve or recognise that it is not their strength. **Better to learn how to play to people's actual strengths** - ask, are they in the right roles? Perhaps there is a different role that they should be in?

Jeff Weiner:

“Nine years ago I would have rolled my eyes at culture and values. ... Today I would argue that culture and values are our most competitive advantage... it unifies all of us to a shared objective and ensures that we are all pulling in the same direction. ...

For us at LinkedIn, culture is the collective personality of our organisation. It's not only who we are, it's who we aspire to be. That aspirational component gives the organisation permission to dream a little bit.

My advice would be to get serious about your culture and values.”

Jokes we express at other people's expense backfire on us!

He talked of pulling aside an executive to point out that their communication about a colleague not only undermined that person but it reflected badly on them too, in the way that their own colleagues perceived them for this behaviour. He recommended that the next time they felt frustrated with someone, instead of saying it to them they should instead try saying that into a mirror.... say it to themselves. That executive came back to him some time later to thank him for the insight and feedback. In that moment Jeff also had the realisation that he was guilty of that behaviour sometimes too. He resolved to make a permanent difference to his behaviour in relating to others.

Compassionate management is about walking in the shoes the other

He said his expecting people to do the things that he did was a lack of experience and maturity on his part. He recommends that you **put yourself in their shoes**... that is the way to manage compassionately. It's much more mature. In the moment when someone does something to frustrate you and you start to feel negative emotionspause, **be a spectator to your own thoughts**. Ask: *Why are they behaving like that?* It's not a blame game. Think about where does their anger come from? Maybe they are not angry at you but about something that happened a long time ago. If we have a knee jerk response we get angry too. Not helpful. Need to look at that emotion.

Understanding WHY somebody does something 'off' is an opportunity for growth

He received an email recently that made him angry. So he said *"I am want to better understand why you vented like that to me"* why were they pissed off and expressing that to him. So he not only dealt with the situation, he also dealt with the feelings and how that person expressed themselves. He had to get to root of what their anger was about. He does not let incidents slide. *"If you don't go there when something comes up you have lost the opportunity for growth."* He wants the other person to really get how he has experienced them through their communication. He wants them to know that he got triggered by the communication...he wants to put himself in their shoes so then they can both learn.

3 Core Values at the heart of LinkedIn's Compassionate Culture

Open honest and *constructive* ... these are the values of the Linked In company. And the value of being constructive was very purposefully added. It is not enough simply to be transparent, many companies focus on that but it can bring up a lot of confrontation. Some people even encourage it. "That is not our way at Linked in. You can't just express anger - that is not OK".

Does compassionate management still work if you have deadlines and other pressures?

Soren Gordhamer enquired about the reaction of other business people? Is it realistic? Does being compassionate mean there are no repercussions ? Is this just a 'touchy feely' way to run a business? **Is compassion about being too kind and therefore losing productivity?**

Caring for your people means facing challenging situations WITH them

Jeff responded: Some people feel that managing compassionately means never making a difficult decision or never providing constructive feedback. That's wrong. Or, they think it means being too kind and therefore losing productivity.



Firstly, in terms of avoiding giving people harsh feedback, it's not compassionate to let someone stay in a role that they really can't do. One of the single most important lessons that he has learnt in his current role ... when you have people on your team who, for some reason no longer fit any more, you have to do something about it. Often a manager will really not want to confront this situation with their team member. You cannot leave people in roles which they are ill-equipped to handle. It's **our job as leaders to recognise whether someone is in the right position or not**. Make sure the person is equipped to do their job. *They* know when they are in over their head. You can see it in their body language hear it in their voice tone. It is harmful to all to let this continue . Think about the negative energy they are taking home to their families. You must intervene, support them and create a timetable for change. Be open, honest and constructive.**That is compassion!**

Perhaps this compassionate stuff only works in California.....?!

People need meaning. All people, everywhere. They need to feel like what they are doing has a purpose. People need to feel heard. All human beings need to feel heard. It reinforces that they exist. If people don't feel heard repeatedly, they go from frustration to anger, and much worse. This bodes badly for society. People who work for you want to know they are making a difference in and with your company. If a person is working for a boss who is not setting them up to be successful or not recognising their worth or giving good coaching, then you are going to have real conflict.

"The greatest productivity enhancer I can think of is making sure people feel heard and feel valued, and that they are in a role where they can make a difference."

4 Key Pointers for How to deal with a Difficult Boss

Soren asked how people can take this learning and use it on their own difficult managers?

How can they facilitate a conversation with their boss in a way that will create the optimum opportunity for real understanding? Compassion is what will help you face up to difficult relations.

1 Have the conversation with your manager. Create opportunity for real conversation.

Where you do have choice in your employment you can be open and honest. Where you are more financially strapped and a loss of a job is more risky, it is much harder.. and that is why that survey shows that 70% are dissatisfied! If your boss is punitive and you are not sure how they will react then you must look long and hard about whether you do want to continue working for them....

Jeff grew up with 360 feedback being part of the business process. He sees it as a gift when people approach him with feedback. That is how we improve. Business is all about growing as individuals and as teams.

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of those surveyed hate their jobs ... or are completely disengaged. When they asked why ... many of the people surveyed complained of **"Bosses from Hell"**.

2 You have to be honest You have to lay it out there.

Prepare for that discussion. Are they ready for the kind of feedback you are going to provide? Are they themselves vulnerable - your manager? Just because they are in charge does not mean that they are not insecure. Think through how they are going to respond. What will it trigger in them?

3 Look them straight in the eye. Don't look down, don't look at the desk. You are providing them with important feedback, you have to believe it, you have to mean it. Stay grounded, have the right kind of energy and intention. When you break eye contact it undermines the confidence with which you communicate.

4 Don't be afraid to make your own self vulnerable, this is really really important. If you can make yourself vulnerable then you open up the space for them to be vulnerable too. Then you can really start to connect. Tell them how you are feeling.

Give Honest Feedback - tell them how you feel!

Try saying in a meeting - *you hurt my feelings*. Try that!! Most occasions, it was NOT their intention to hurt you. They have no idea they are hurting your feelings. When somebody is being harsh or rude to you, say *excuse me you're hurting my feelings*. That really puts a stop to it.

Some of the best advice he ever had: **It is better to be loving than it is to be right!** *Especially when you know you are right added Soren!!*

3 Practical applications of compassionate management

1 Recognise when you are feeling what others are feeling, especially some kind of sufferingEmpathy is when we feel what they feel. However, **the compassionate response** is where we move to do something about their problem.

2 Be the spectator to your own thoughts - step back, catch yourself with any anger rising ... watch the conversation and what's going on. Why are they getting angry? Why are you getting angry? Get back to what you are both trying to solve.

3 Compassion is not conditional. It's even more important with people you don't like. That is when it matters the most!

What is Jeff’s vision for Compassionate Management in a corporate setting

Make compassion start in the DNA of the next generation of leaders.

LinkedIn has brought in world class learning and development resources for all their employees. Fred Kofman author of the book ‘Conscious Business’ is available to everyone in Linked In employees and teams. Fred also writes as an influencer on Linked for all 277 million members Your business leadership has to believe in this. Everybody has to embrace this it. They have to be “all in.... that means, it has to be reinforced at every turn. You have to recruit against it. Walk the walk. Hold yourself accountable. Have to work with the new behaviour day in day out.

Getting the right culture fit is more important than just the right skill set

It’s easy to pull together in the same direction when things are going well, much harder when things aren’t going so well. Everybody needs to align to your values. Hyper-growth companies have a tendency to lower their standards while recruiting. They tend to hire people in their own image.... They start to bring in people with the right skills but not necessarily the right cultural fit. This is the beginning of their problems while they grow.

This is even more important as you grow internationally. The DNA in these new offices will determine how the company will grow in the future. It becomes harder to force the right kind of behaviour. Make sure that your team understand your values and what they mean. Evaluate performance against your values.

Sensing there is a shift happening in business ... something is happening

He is starting to meet more like-minded CEOs in Silicon Valley. He recently attended a mindfulness and consciousness in business event in the city and was surprised and impressed to find that the audience was a Who’s Who of Silicon Valley. He says they were all there because these issues are important to them. He sees how these values are also becoming important to them - **something is happening.**

How to recruit people into this compassionate value system

Ask people how they manage through various scenarios. It becomes obvious what their values are. Ask them ... *What does compassion mean to them?* When you yourself so congruently embrace these philosophies, walk the walk, you will then begin to attract people who resonate with this. It becomes self selective in your culture - these values and practices will resonate with other people. Look ahead to the future: The younger generation will not put up with an uncompassionate culture.

Use different metrics: good questions to ask of employees

Do you understand what your role is in the company?
Does your manager provide the right kind of support.

His 3 key priorities to his health, well-being and energy

Sleep, Exercise & Good Diet

He does not function without good sleep .. it affects his short term memory, synthesis skills and energy. When you are in your 20s you can get away with skipping a bit of sleep or exercise. His wife got him to work out. She knows him better than he knows himself. She knows what keeps him in shape. He can really feel the difference when he lets exercise slide. He also eats well - his wife is a great cook. He stresses the importance of not bringing your weariness home. Keep something in the tank for your family. You must bring compassion to the people who are the most important in your life. His wife is the foundation of his home, and his home is the foundation of this entire practice that we have talked about today. It is so important that you start managing compassionately at home.

It takes a lot of energy to manage compassionately. He has to ensure he looks after himself to stay in balance. To be there for other people, he really has to manage his energy well.

His daily tip for keeping himself balanced - avoid an overcrowded diary

His personal mindfulness practice is fitness plus he gives himself SPACE everyday.

He also blocks out 2 hours a day that are unscheduled. Grey areas in his diary. His PA knows to ensure this happens and she has worked with him for 15-16 years ...!

The chance to think and breath Brainstorm, give advice, one on one walks with others . Give yourself buffer time. Coach instead of problem solve.

That is his mindfulness practice. Carve out time just to be able to think.

Remember: At heart, we're all the same ... the world over

"It's important to embrace what is unique about each person ... and at the same time acknowledge that **we are all in this together**. We have a universally shared culture. The concepts we have talked about today are shared by everyone. All over the world there is an understanding of the importance and value of managing with compassion. Deep down we all recognise that importance but we can forget and perhaps have a tendency to project our worldview on to others. With the new technologies ... and the more connected the world becomes, the more we recognise that humanity is the same. We are the same deep down, we want the same things. We just have to get past the baggage that we bring to the table and then reinforce the best of what we have and reinforce our connections and what we have in common."

Three books Jeff recommended:

<http://www.amazon.com/Art-Happiness-Handbook-Living/dp/0743506308>

Howard Cutler

<http://www.amazon.com/Conscious-Business-Build-Through-Values/dp/1591795176>

Fred Kofman

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Corporate-Mystic-Guidebook-Visionaries/dp/055337494X>

"Corporate mystic".

Link to blog post - Gina's Q&A with Jeff

<http://ginalazenby.wordpress.com/2014/02/12/does-a-compassionate-work-culture-attract-more-women/>

Link to Jeff's own blog post on Managing Compassionately

<http://www.linkedin.com/today/post/article/20121015034012-22330283-managing-compassionately?>

Blog post about this interview on Feminine Leadership Today

<http://feminineleadershiptoday.wordpress.com/2014/02/12/the-role-of-compassion-in-linkedins-success/>

***Notes and transcription by Gina Lazenby February 12th, 2014
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