



## 4. BUILD TRUST

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### *Care, Like You Really Mean It*

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People don't care how much you know. They want to know how much you care.

— FAMILIAR SAYING

I don't know if there are any MBA programs that have courses entitled "How to Love 101" or "The Caring Workplace," but there should be. It's impossible to lead in business—or in life—unless you genuinely care about people. That's what matters. Period.

My experience working at every level of business—from being the guy who set up and cleaned furniture showrooms to being president of a multibillion-dollar international company—is that it's much more important to lead with your heart than with your head. Love and trust are the universal motivators. And there's no trust without caring.

When I talk about caring, I'm talking about putting other people before yourself—not just the bosses and colleagues and staff you work with every day, but all the people inside your organization, as well the people in the outside world whom you serve, including customers and suppliers. Caring about people keeps you focused on what truly matters.

### **Show, Don't Just Tell**

A casual “love ya” tossed at a spouse upon leaving the house in the morning, without a warm hug and a look into each other's eyes, can be an empty gesture. So, too, is caring in the workplace, unless we have the actions and results that go with it. We have to “Care, like we mean it.” It's something that we need to practice every day.

You show caring when:

- You start with yourself and appreciate and take pleasure in your positive results and daily experiences; you are authentically vulnerable. You invite feedback when you know in your heart of hearts that your performance is not what it should be.
- You appreciate others, say thank you, and acknowledge contributions wherever they come from. When an individual's performance isn't meeting expectations, you offer honest, truthful, and timely feedback and deliver it in a positive and caring way. You do not wait for review time to give authentic feedback.
- You take responsibility for giving and receiving honest appreciation and coaching. You understand that caring, as an

aspect of leadership, isn't solely a hierarchical event. Just as experience travels in both directions, so does caring. The expert and the novice both have something to contribute. The advice and support of your friend or your spouse can be just as important and meaningful as the insight and direction of the VP who has been in the organization for ten years.

You can be sure not caring is just as powerful as caring. Without caring you can't become an outstanding performer. You may not always get back the caring you give—it's not a quid pro quo. But you can't possibly build an organization that cares if you don't care. The whole world knows the difference. At the level of the individual, your colleagues, peers, and customers can feel your lack of commitment. At the level of the global corporation, when you don't care, the reputation you aspire to is undermined by gossip and stories that are the exact opposite of the ones you want to be known for.

Once, at a Starbucks leadership meeting, somebody asked the question, “We have over a hundred thousand people at Starbucks now. How can we possibly expect all of us to care?” And my answer back was, “How can we not?”

### **When Did Caring Become a Dirty Word?**

For some unimaginable reason, most corporations are biased against showing care in the workplace. It always strikes me as one of the most ironic things in business when I see recruiting brochures or letters from the CEO stress “care” as a core company value, but then the company acts in a way that is 180 degrees from the words they espoused.

We seem to admire the stoic, the person with a great poker face, the stone-faced negotiator. Caring is one of our most powerful resources, but often we don't reward and elevate the leaders who master the ability to use it appropriately. The difference between an average manager and a great manager is that the latter understands that we can't hide our caring and still be genuine or effective. If we don't truly care about other people and have the guts to show it—even when things go badly—our humanity disappears. We have to remember that it's always about the people. We may be rewarded for the results we achieve in the organization, but we'll never know the results we *might* have achieved if we truly showed we cared. Results without caring are empty results. They're just not sustainable.

#### **You Can't Fake It**

Caring isn't easy, and it isn't the same as being nice. We hired a young manager to work on strategy at Starbucks. He was one of the smartest people you'll ever meet. He was sharp, and his analysis would always wow you. He'd figure out what needed to get done, and then he'd press forward to get the necessary results. So what was the problem? He was always out of kilter with the people on his team, and they complained that he was difficult to work with.

Sometimes, however, personal leadership requires that we care more about others than we perceive others to care for us. If the results are there, if the commitment is there, if no one is being harmed, as leaders and team members we need to give our care without waiting for it to be returned.

With this manager's knowledge, I went around to all his people and asked if they thought he cared about the business and cared about them—even if he didn't show it, or didn't show it in the way they wanted him to. To a person, no one doubted his abilities or the fact that they mattered. I asked each team member to speak up to the manager when they felt ignored or hurt. I asked them to take responsibility for caring—and they came through. Over time, he took on several big projects and achieved outstanding financial results for the company. Was he a perfect human being? No. But in the end, the people were able to move past their expectations of how they wanted things to be. They were able to set aside their focus on *me* to create a larger *we*.

It needs to be repeated: People are not assets. Caring isn't just about admiring the charismatic leaders, the people that everybody likes, or the in crowd. This is the big caring we do that shows we "care, like we really mean it." It's about words and actions that everybody sees and recognizes. There's an old adage that says, "People don't care how much you know, they want to know how much you care."

#### **Letters from the Front Lines**

In the early years of Starbucks, we were really focused on being coffee experts. In fact, some people perceived us as arrogant and maybe even coffee snobs. We knew that we made great coffee and that a great product was one of the keys to building a great company. So it was a wake-up call when I came back from a trip one time to find three letters complaining about Starbucks customer service.

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These letters weren't about the coffee . . . they were about the people. They were complaining about the human side of the equation. Lapses in service can happen in any organization, no matter what its size, but these letters went deeper than complaints about a particular store or person. Each of these letters was written with a lot of care and feeling, and each one went to the heart of our values, our one hat. One letter was particularly vivid, saying, "I love your coffee and I go into your store every day. But I want to be treated like a human being who matters. Apparently customers are not important to you."

It was the beginning of recognizing that we're not just a coffee company, we're a human service company. We were learning that "good service is hands and feet, but great service is heart." I decided to write a note to all the store managers throughout the organization, explaining to them how these letters made me feel. I wanted them to know that I was sad and disappointed that we hadn't showed we cared. I asked for their thoughts and ideas on what we could do to build a truly caring organization.

We decided to invite the managers of the specific stores involved *and* our customers, the three people who wrote the letters, to come together to talk. We didn't have a particular agenda or message in mind, but we knew that if we were able to get people together, the power of human connection would triumph. Sometimes I think, despite all the imperfection and the mistakes we've made, that's really the essence of Starbucks. If we have a problem, we bet on the human spirit and believe that when people come together, face-to-face, the human connection wins out.

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When the customers talked, the results were emotional and powerful. It was crystal clear that we had become too wrapped up in the coffee and our knowledge of it, to the exclusion of the real business we were in—the business of people. Our love for coffee was clear to us, but our love for people was not clear to ourselves or our customers. We got swept up in our passion for the product instead of our passion for the people. This was a critical moment in the history of Starbucks. We learned that caring mattered and that we could never take it for granted. It reminded us what we were really about.

**Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart.**

— ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

### Caring Every Day: The Half-Life of Relationships

Showing you care is a way to make sure that you keep people with you on your journey through life. Caring creates trust. If you don't want to take my word for it, for just one week, every time your spouse or significant other says, "I love you," mumble some unintelligible response. I guarantee you'll have a conversation by the end of that week. You could be married for twenty-five years and have raised four children and two dogs, and you will still have a conversation at the end of the week. Relationships break down incredibly fast because of one simple thing: Other people don't trust that you care. Now, can you imagine how fast trust breaks down in a business, without the glue of committed relationships and community to hold it together?

None of us should go a day, a week, or a month without some form of genuine communication with the people we care about. Don't wait until there's a problem. When you wait, people think you don't care. Open, honest attention and dialogue is the glue of healthy relationships. Without caring, relationships don't last—at work or at home.

### **Do the Right Thing**

As Rabbi Hillel's saying goes: "If not me, who? And if not now, when?"

It doesn't matter who you are, if you care, you pick up the cigarette butts. You pick up the straws and the straw wrappers. If you see a Starbucks cup, you stop your car and pick it up. And you pick up the other stuff there, too. (OK, it is truth time . . . sometimes I have left the McDonald's ones.) That piece of paper with the Starbucks name on it reflects on all of us at Starbucks. When you pick it up, you set an example. Even when no one is looking. Even when it's not comfortable.

It's the same with people.

Let's say there's a mistake, there are unexpected losses, and the company chairman or president or division head comes roaring in, saying, "How could you have let that happen? How can you keep the person who did that here?" The leader needs to stand between the bullet and the person it's aimed at. You might feel it's easier to say, "Fine, I'll go fix that problem. I'll let that person go." But the positive results that come from the boss standing in front of a bullet are immeasurable. That kind of caring drives an organization. People will go anywhere and do anything for the person who cares like they really mean it—and puts that caring into action.

### **Never Close the Door**

When you start to close the door on anybody, the doors close on everybody. I'm not talking about your office door. When you begin to shun or reject one person, your care is compromised. The message gets out as if the slamming sound was on a voice mail broadcast from your office. We need to work at relationships and caring with *all* people.

It's funny, isn't it, how often the people you are closest to are the people you go through the most challenging times with. The desire to overcome adversity is one of the most compelling human drives. Doing so with another person creates an intimate bond. When you face challenges with those you work with, a deep love is created. I have found that I can get through almost anything if I believe the other person cares . . . about me, about themselves, and about our mission.

Yes, leaders set caring in motion. When the doors close, when there's fear, then our attention is on ourselves and not other people. But each of us has to practice the habits of caring the best we can. When you care about others—your favorite people *and* the people that are harder for you to deal with—you can get through the stress and worry. You can handle the mistakes. Your peers and colleagues and customers stick with you to get outstanding results and build outstanding organizations. Caring, big caring, caring like you mean it, isn't in the rule book.

### **Caring at the Top: H2O**

From the beginning, Howard Schultz knew that he wanted to build a different kind of company and that trust—with all the people—would be an essential ingredient. That trust began

with the leadership team he brought together to drive and manage our growth and our transition to a national, and, eventually, global organization.

I was brought on board to oversee the stores, the people, and the people systems at Starbucks. Orin Smith was brought on as CFO to establish fiscal systems and manage our financial resources. Always the visionary, Howard drove our market-growth strategy and our ascent to the top of each mountain on the horizon.

It was in these intense years, shortly before going public and through the initial phase of our expansion, that the mood and culture of the company was established. We each had our distinct roles, individual strengths and weaknesses, and of course our own egos. But together we were a perfect fit.

Early on, we got into the habit of meeting on Monday nights to have dinner, compare notes, catch up on our personal lives, and celebrate or commiserate together, depending on what was going on. I remember laughing, crying, talking quietly, and arguing loudly. Every week was different, but through it all what developed was a deep sense of trust and shared values. No matter what the issues were, we grew to care deeply about each other.

That mutual trust and caring transferred and flowed through the rest of the organization. Over time, people in the company coined the term H2O (Howard Howard and Orin) to refer to us. I'm not so sure it's coincidental that the term also means water. There was a flow of communication that made the three of us, and the company, stronger than we would be by ourselves. There was an energy that kept us moving and never allowed us to get stuck.

One of us was always in the right frame of mind to deal with the matter at hand, whether we needed more risk-taking, more

caution, or more stability, whether we needed more thoughtfulness about our financial picture, more persistence in a new venture, or to put more passion and attention in supporting the people in our stores and the people we served. Like a great basketball team, we could pass the ball without even knowing where we were aiming, and we could count on someone being there to receive the pass.

This trust at the top also meant there was always someone people could talk to. Deidra Wager, who was head of retail operations, once told me that whenever there was a major conflict or a crisis between us in the organization, she knew "the H2O alchemy would work" and the situation would be dealt with. She knew we didn't play one off the other, nor did we create our own fiefdoms or organizational structures. A conversation with one of us was a conversation with all of us.

Our leadership goals were never about ourselves as individuals; they were always about all of us. That clarity has made all the difference. We didn't join Starbucks to build our résumés or our careers. The overarching value the three of us shared was that our people and our customers were more important than we were. That's how we lived. We cared for one another and we extended our care to the whole Starbucks team. We gave them our respect and the security that comes from knowing there is honesty and care at the highest level of the company.

### **Getting Big and Staying Small**

When people know how much you care, they come back. We built Starbucks with a relentless commitment to learning and sharing all we could about our coffee. But we never could have created the

**In the high art of serving others, workers sustain their morale, management keeps the customers, and the nation prospers. One of the indisputable lessons of life is that we cannot get or keep anything for ourselves alone unless we also get it for others.**

— RICHARD J. SNEED

Starbucks we have without an equally passionate approach to ensuring that our humanity doesn't get lost along the way.

At a certain point in the mid-nineties, when we had grown to the point where we had several thousand employees—up from the hundreds we had had just a few years before—we realized that it was important to figure out how to keep all of us focused on our mission of serving people—all the people. We asked ourselves, how can we keep that sense of personal caring alive, when we can't know everyone in the company?

Around that time we were reminded of the powerful ideas of the economist E. F. Schumacher. In his book *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, written in 1973, he wrote: "The fundamental task is to achieve smallness within a large organization." From that, Howard Schultz developed the mantra "staying small while growing big."

When the North American operation was still small, I really wanted to make a big deal of each person. I thought the way to do this was to recognize people for their everyday achievements and to catch people doing the little things right. If someone wanted to recognize a colleague, we'd go to their cubicle or office and say thank you for doing X, Y, or Z, and we'd give them a big shiny helium balloon that would bob overhead so everyone on

the floor would see it. Any person who observed someone doing something right could celebrate them with a balloon.

It was a fun, joyful, and collectively satisfying way to show one another we cared. We tried to take the idea to the stores, but it was too unwieldy and cumbersome, so we eventually switched to pins to recognize good deeds. Another custom we put in place, which I stole from an early mentor, proved equally worthwhile and has become part of the Starbucks culture worldwide. I sent birthday and company anniversary cards to most everybody in the organization. It started with about sixty cards every month.

By the time I retired, I was sending out more than twenty-five hundred a month. Imagine. Every time I was on an airplane or in front of the television, there I was, signing cards and writing notes. Boxes and boxes of them. Despite the fact that, by the end, it was an overwhelming task, it had become a part of the Starbucks lore and practice of "getting big and staying small." In fact, when I left day-to-day responsibilities at the company, sending cards had taken on a life of its own. Almost all leaders throughout the organization were sending out cards. Today, when I see people around the company, they still come up to me and tell me how much those cards meant to them. The essence of this idea is that we must always find tangible ways to show we care about one another. Though the gesture of sending cards was small, the impact was deep and sustaining.

To deliver the often-complicated orders at Starbucks, the store partners have to really and truly listen. They have to care. This is not a corporate skill. It's a human skill. It's not about coffee, but about connecting with other people. One person and one cup of coffee at a time. I have tried hard to live and lead by the spirit contained in this Chinese proverb: "If you want to

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build for one year from now, grow wheat. If you want to build for ten years from now, grow trees. If you want to build for one hundred years from now, grow people.”

### EXTRA SHOTS: Build Trust

- Does your workplace, team, family have a culture of caring? What could you do to make it more so?
- How do you show you really care? Do you mean it at home?
- Do you equate caring with lack of toughness? If so, can you suspend this belief—even for a day or a week?
- What have you done that you're proud of—today—this week—this year?
- What has a co-worker or employee done that has helped the whole team get closer to achieving a goal? Did you acknowledge and appreciate this act?
- Is there a place in your organization where you can “act small”? Try it out.
- What part are you playing to build a culture of trust in your organization?

## 5. LISTEN FOR THE TRUTH

### *The Walls Talk*

Compassionate emptiness.

—A BUDDHIST TEACHING

**H**ave you ever been to an art museum and stood before a great work of art? It captivates you and transports you to a new place. The mythologist Joseph Campbell used to call this epiphany an *aesthetic arrest*. The art “stops” you and communicates with you if you let it. The same phenomenon can happen in conversation with another person. When we stop and wait for the meaning and emotions to unfold, we will hear a message. This is communication with heart.

Something similar happens when we're struck by the ambience when we walk into a particular office, cubicle, home, or store. We sometimes have an immediate sense of peace, unease,