

LEADERSHIP LEARNING GUIDE / EPISODE 7

Open-Door Policy? The CEO's Button Told a Different Story

Topic: Trust, integrity and leadership accessibility
Audience: Leadership, management and organizational behavior courses

ABOUT THE EPISODE

After an ownership change, a new president assured employees that his door was always open. When Pete introduced himself, the president's distant response left him feeling dismissed. Later, a maintenance friend demonstrated a desk button that closed the office door. In the context of that cold welcome, the button reinforced a message to keep away.

An open-door policy starts with how you treat the person who walks through it.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After watching, students should be able to:

- Explain how contradictions between a leader's words and actions affect trust.
- Distinguish legitimate privacy and focus time from behavior that discourages access.
- Describe how a dismissive response can prevent concerns and ideas from reaching leaders.
- Identify concrete actions that make a promise of availability credible.

FOUR PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Match words with actions. Employees judge promises through everyday interactions.
2. Make access meaningful. Acknowledge people and give them a clear way to be heard.
3. Protect time respectfully. If you are busy, arrange another time and follow through.
4. Respond constructively. Listen, ask questions and thank employees for speaking up.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did the ownership change make the president's behavior especially significant?
2. What did the first encounter communicate beyond the president's spoken words?
3. Would the button alone prove that the open-door promise was insincere? Why or why not?
4. How could the president have protected his time while still making Pete feel welcome?
5. What concerns, ideas or early warnings might employees withhold after a dismissive response?

FIVE-MINUTE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY / PUT A PROMISE INTO PRACTICE

In pairs, imagine a manager says, "I want your feedback," but repeatedly interrupts employees. Identify the contradiction, rewrite the manager's first response to a concern, and choose one action that would demonstrate follow-through. Agree on evidence the team could observe over the next week.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Trust grows when employees can see that a leader means what they say. Availability requires respectful responses and dependable follow-through, alongside reasonable boundaries.

A GOOD LEADER'S ACTIONS PROVE IT.

WATCH EPISODE 7

https://youtu.be/tIblIsczejA

Scan the code to watch on YouTube.





Explore the principles behind this case in
The Lean Leader's Playbook.
Explore how everyday actions determine whether employees believe a leader's promises.

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