

walk  
awhile  
in *my*  
shoes

*gut-level, real-world messages  
from employees to managers*

**Eric Harvey and Steve Ventura**

based on the inner thoughts of hundreds of employees  
shared in discussions over an eighteen-year period

**Do not judge  
any man  
until you have walked  
two moons  
in his moccasins.**

– Native American saying

Dear Manager:

I am every employee, and I work in every part of this organization. My collar is blue, pink, and white ... and frequently stained with the sweat that comes with hard work.

I am man, and I am woman. I'm every color, every belief, and every size. I'm old, young, and everything in between. I've worked here longer than you and not as long as you. I am a daughter. I am a son. I'm married and single, a parent and without children. I'm alone and I'm surrounded by people I care about deeply.

Sometimes you may think of me as only a number, or perhaps just another small cog in a very large wheel that you have to manage. But like you, I am a human being filled with joys, fears, frustrations, and hopes. I feel, I laugh, and I hurt. And, like you, I want to be understood, accepted, and appreciated.

The following pages are about opening up to you — about sharing my feelings on just a few of the many aspects of my job and how they affect me. Some of what you read may surprise you ... some may bring a laugh or two. All of these pages, I hope, will encourage you to see me in a new and perhaps much different light.

I ask that you receive these messages with the same level of compassion and understanding that you wish from me as I read the flip side of this book. Chances are we're not as different as you may think. And just maybe ... you'll be more inclined to "meet me in the middle," where we can begin a new and better working relationship.

Hear me. Understand me.

Walk awhile in *my* shoes.

# On “change”

Okay, I admit it. When it comes to change, one of my first thoughts tends to be: “I wish you’d make up your mind!” One day you want me to do *this*, the next day it’s *that* ... and sometimes it’s both *this and that* on the *same* day.

Change is particularly tough on me because when it gets “rolling downhill,” guess who’s usually standing at the bottom of the hill? Me! I’m rarely the “decider,” but almost always the “doer.” Seems like I no sooner get comfortable and proficient with my job and WHAM! — a whole new set of requirements and expectations are dropped on me. I *do* like feeling that I’m making a contribution to this organization. But it’s getting harder and harder to feel that way.

Like you, I’m learning that continuous change and life are one and the same. But some changes are a lot easier to swallow than others. I’m basically okay with doing things differently to keep up with our competitors. But I do reject those changes that are sometimes required because you screwed up and didn’t think things through. Maybe if you asked my opinion a little more often, that wouldn’t happen.

My biggest problem with change comes when you don’t take the time to explain **why!** If you know why, tell me, and you’ll increase the odds that I’ll support what has to be done. If you don’t know why, **try to find out!**

I’m struggling with this new business environment of ours. I’m doing the best I can, but I’m scared. A little more sensitivity and patience on your part will go a long way toward helping me cope.

Change may not be easy for you, but at least you’re calling some of the shots. Try walking awhile in *my* shoes!

Sometimes I feel like  
I'm standing at the  
corner of WALK and  
DON'T WALK!

– Unknown

# On recognition

I've been known to say, "I don't want any pats on the back — just put it in my check." Well, don't believe it. It's a crock! Regardless of how I may act, I do care a great deal what you and others think of me and what I do. Recognition is important to me. That's why I wear award pins, belt buckles, and the like; that's why I display trophies in my home; that's why I hang certificates on my wall.

Believe it or not, I'm looking for more from this job than just a paycheck. There's got to be more, 'cause I'm sure not gonna get rich on what I make! What *do* I want? I want to feel good about myself and the work I do; I want to feel like I really am an important part of this organization. And I tend to gauge my self-worth by others' perceptions ... I often see myself through *your* eyes.

I fully realize that I don't do great work all the time. Some days I hit the bull's-eye, some days I'm in the outer rings, and once in a while, I miss the target altogether. I don't expect you to see me as a top-notch performer all the time. But I do expect to be periodically recognized when I either go above and beyond the call of duty or just maintain good, solid performance over a long period of time. And the more you recognize my good work, the more good work I want to do. It's funny the way that works. I think it's all part of "human nature."

I know you're often so busy you probably don't think about recognizing me. And maybe you sometimes figure you don't get recognition yourself, so why should you give it to others? But if you'll just make a greater effort to let me know you appreciate me, I'll do my best to reciprocate. And I promise I won't complain about receiving too much praise!

Please understand how important this is to me. Walk awhile in *my* shoes.

# On performance evaluations

From my perspective, both the *best* and the *worst* thing about performance evaluations is that they usually only happen once a year. Why best? Because they tend to be tedious and sometimes painful processes — similar to annual trips to the dentist. Why worst? Because all too often, they're the *only* time I get any detailed feedback on how well I am (or am not) doing. And sometimes even that doesn't happen "constructively."

Evaluations represent scary-land for me because they are *subjective* in nature. Your opinion is going to affect my future. And there are no guarantees that one evaluator (and most of the time it is just *one* evaluator) really knows my job and how well I do it. So sometimes I can't help but worry that my rating will be based solely on how well you like me. I worry you'll forget the good and remember only the bad. And I worry that my input won't be considered in the process.

I understand that performance evaluations probably aren't the most favorite part of your job. But they *are* important to me ... I've got a lot riding on them. If all you can do is call it like you see it, then please make sure you look hard enough to see the true picture.

And as you're looking, maybe you could consider periodically giving me a little more *informal* feedback — the kind where there's not so much on the line. Make it constructive, and I'll do my best to receive it constructively.

Have strong feelings about performance evaluations? Walk awhile in my shoes!

**When you point  
your finger at me,  
remember that  
three of your fingers  
are pointing back  
at you!**

– Louis Nizer  
(adaptation)