

walk
awhile
in *my*
shoes

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

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based on the inner thoughts of hundreds of managers
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 Employee:

I am every manager. I'm known by many labels: owner, executive, department head, supervisor, team leader, boss ... and sometimes a few less flattering ones I'd rather not mention but do know exist.

I am woman, and I am man. 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 son. I am a daughter. I'm married and single, a parent and without children. I'm alone and I'm surrounded by people I care about deeply.

Like you, I am a human being filled with joys, fears, frustrations, and hopes. Behind my "management facade" I feel, I laugh, and yes, I occasionally 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”

If you're expecting a lecture on the merits of change, forget it! That's not what this is about. Sure, I know that constant change is a fact of life. And yes, I fully understand that you either adapt to change or fight it in vain and watch the world leave you behind. But in reality, most times I'm as uncomfortable and downright scared of change as you are.

Maybe you see me as the instigator or “perpetrator” of change. If you do, to a degree you're right. Sponsoring and supporting change is one of my responsibilities — and it's an absolute necessity in order to keep our organization successful and protect our jobs. But besides being a source of change, I'm also a victim of it. And when it comes “rolling downhill,” I end up having to make as many adjustments as anyone else.

Like you, I have comfort zones that give me peace and a sense of stability. And just like you, my cage gets rattled when I have to change my habits by doing new and different things. Take this to the bank: **You're not the only one here who's afraid of the unknown.** I don't know what's out there any more than you do. But I do know that we have no other choice but to adapt, grow, and keep moving forward. Just look around. I think you'll agree. And I think you'll also find a whole bunch of changes that have turned out pretty darned positive.

So at those times when it seems like I just can't make up my mind what it is I want you to do — when each day brings a different requirement — maybe you could cut me a little slack. I'm doing the best I can ... and I'm right in the middle of it with you.

When it comes to change,
try walking awhile in *my* shoes!

If I had done everything
I'm credited with,
I'd be speaking to
you from a laboratory
jar at Harvard.

– Frank Sinatra

On how you perceive me

Someone once said, “If you want to be liked, don’t become a boss.” They were right! You just can’t please everyone. If I’ve learned anything, it’s that no matter what I do, inevitably somebody’s gonna be chapped. That’s a reality that comes with the job. I accept it. But there’s another reality I’d like you to know about — a reality that comes with being human: I care what you and others think of me.

Do I sometimes *act* like I don’t care? Sure! But with few exceptions, it’s just that — an act. You see, convincing myself that I don’t care (or at least trying to) gets me through difficult situations. It’s what helps me follow through on what I believe to be right when the right thing is also the unpopular thing. If you’re a parent, you undoubtedly understand what I’m saying.

I especially care what you think about me when it comes to honesty, integrity, and fairness. I’ll bet you consider yourself a fair person. You probably take pride in that. Well, so do I. But occasionally I get a bum rap for being unfair in my dealings with employees. You hear one side of the story — without all the facts — and form an opinion about me. I know it and it bothers me, but I can’t defend myself because the facts are usually confidential. So I take the rap ... and pretend I don’t care. But I do.

I fully understand that I must *earn* your trust and respect just as you must earn mine. And I’m working to do that. As I work on it, maybe you could give me the same benefit of the doubt that you would wish from me.

Before you judge me, try walking awhile in *my* shoes!

On evaluating employee performance

I admit it. I have a love/hate attitude about performance evaluations. I love it when you do great work and I get to tell you, and perhaps reward you for your contributions. On the other hand, I hate it when you don't do great work, and I not only have to tell you, but also deal with your objections, disappointment, and even hostility.

Doing performance evaluations is a basic responsibility of management. It's necessary to ensure we all get the feedback we need to keep our performance on track. But it's a part of the job I'm not always comfortable with. Think it's easy to play judge and jury over someone else's work? Trust me, it isn't — especially if *my* assessment affects *your* salary ... and your future. And the more people I have to appraise, the tougher it gets. Lots of second guessing myself; lots of rules and parameters to follow; lots of writer's cramp; and sometimes lots of heated discussion.

Most people think they do great work. Many of them are right ... but not all of them. In the end, I *must* call it like I see it. That's all I can do.

That's all you could do if you walked awhile in *my* shoes.

**It's much safer to
obey than to rule.**

– Thomas à Kempis