

TRUTHFUL LEADERSHIP

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.” – I Corinthians 13

Quite simply, servant leaders tell the truth.

Being truthful isn't always easy. Sometimes you want to spare a person's feelings, or avoid looking at your own weaknesses. But being a leader requires you to see things as they really are, so you can work to make them better. This means acting with honesty and integrity, and sharing feedback – both giving and receiving – in a way that fosters care and truthfulness.

Being truthful doesn't give you license to be hurtful or reckless. In servant leadership, truthfulness is a way of expressing care for others.

Key Actions for Being Truthful

- **Do what you say you will do.**

Showing consistency between what you say and what you do is one of the foundations of *Leading with Love*. Servant leaders do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. They follow through on promises and aren't afraid of the truth. When others see you as a direct, truthful leader, they feel more confident and at ease because they know they can count on you.

Keep your word.

There is an adage that says, “Don't make promises you can't keep.” Keeping your word means behaving with consistency so that others know they can count on you. When you fail to keep your word, you communicate to others that you don't value them. You are keeping your word when you:

- Make promises and keep them.
- Communicate expectations others should have for you, and then follow through on your commitments.
- Let yourself be held accountable for what you said.

Act with integrity.

Leaders act with integrity when their words and expressed values match their actions; doing so consistently helps other know what to expect from you. You have integrity when you:

- Tell the truth, even when it is painful or inconvenient.
- Answer people's questions decisively, even when you need to admit the need for discretion.
- Act according to your values and beliefs every day.
- Behave in ways that are consistent with your expressed values, and the expressed values of Herschend Enterprises.

Key Actions for Being Truthful

- **Share feedback in an honest, caring way.**

Servant leaders are honest and direct when sharing feedback. They embrace the truth for the sake of developing others. Giving truthful feedback demonstrates that you sincerely care for the person and want him or her to succeed.

Follow the steps for sharing feedback.

1. Identify an opportunity to share feedback.

As you work with your team members, it is your responsibility to notice when a team member's behavior or performance is not meeting expectations. Behaviors that indicate feedback opportunities include things like:

- Not getting tasks done
- Making errors
- Failing to meet deadlines
- Failing to follow through on commitments
- Doing things that have a negative impact on guests or other team members
- Failing to follow policies or procedures
- Displaying a negative attitude
- Receiving complaints from guests or other team members

2. Share feedback at an appropriate time and place.

When you become aware of problems, it is important to provide feedback promptly, before small problems become bigger issues. Choose a time when the team member can listen and be open to hearing what you have to say. Feedback should always be given in private.

3. Establish your caring intent.

Truthful feedback is not about criticizing others; it's about caring for them enough to help them make adjustments so they can succeed. To avoid defensiveness, state what you want to cover in a thoughtful, non-critical manner.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- *“Joey, I'd like to take a few minutes to review the procedures for ...”*
- *“Susan, let's see if we can find a better way to ...”*
- *“Trish, I want to talk about the work schedules. A couple team members have voiced concerns about fairness. We want to be sure the schedules serve everyone's best interests.”*

Key Actions for Being Truthful

- Share feedback in an honest, caring way. (continued)

4. Describe what the person did and/or what you observed.

To be effective, your feedback must be honest, direct, and specific. Avoid focusing on your interpretations of their intentions, or what you think they did wrong. Describe the behavior or action you observed, so the other person will hear your message and you can begin working together to find a solution.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT NOT TO SAY:

- “You organized the food orders all wrong.”
- “You just don’t get how to greet guests.”

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- “The food orders were not organized according to the procedure and what the guests ordered.”
- “Guests were walking through the main gate and you were not making eye contact or greeting them in the way that’s expected.”

5. Describe the impact of what the person did.

It’s important to help the person understand how their behavior or action led to consequences for guests, the team, the organization, and/or you. When team members recognize the negative impact of their actions, most will be eager to make positive changes.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- “When the procedures aren’t followed, food orders can get held up or not filled correctly.”
- “If we don’t smile and greet the guests as they enter, they think we don’t care about them.”

6. Invite the other person to respond.

It is caring and respectful to get the other person’s perspective on what you have observed as well as the impact the action had on others. Encourage the other person to respond by asking open-ended questions.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- “How would you describe what happened?”
- “What is your view of the situation?”
- “What do you think?”
- “What are your thoughts on this?”

7. Work together to identify solutions.

Often team members can come up with their own solutions to performance issues, so be sure to ask for their input. However, it is also important to be specific about the changes you need to see. Think about the best way to provide suggestions, support, and/or coaching or training. Make sure the team member understands that it is his/her responsibility to take appropriate action. Document plans for what the team member will do to ensure the changes are clear, and fully agreed upon by team member and leader.

Key Actions for Being Truthful

- **Share feedback in an honest, caring way. (continued)**

- 7. Work together to identify solutions. (continued)**

EXAMPLES OF HOW TO BE HONEST AND DIRECT ABOUT THE CHANGE YOU NEED TO SEE:

- “I would like to see you do three things ... ”
- “Here are my thoughts on the changes you could make to ... ”

EXAMPLES OF HOW TO ENCOURAGE TAKING RESPONSIBILITY:

- “What steps can you take to ...?”
- “What ideas do you have about ...?”

If sharing feedback in an honest, caring way is not effective, or you encounter a recurring problem with an employee’s performance, you may need to implement the steps associated with Positive Discipline. To learn more about Positive Discipline, review the leader tool presented in the support materials for Truthful Leadership.

- **Respond to feedback from others in a caring, non-defensive way.**

Servant leaders are committed to serving others the best they can, which means they are open to and invite feedback from others, including guests, team members, and other leaders. Let others know that you welcome honest and direct feedback so that you can grow and learn as a leader.

Follow the steps for receiving feedback.

- 1. Agree to receive feedback at an appropriate time and place.**

Feedback should always occur in a private setting, where you won’t be overheard or interrupted. Be sure you are in an emotional space where you can listen attentively and take in what others tell you, even if it is uncomfortable to hear.

- 2. Ask, or let the person speak.**

Encourage the person to share their thoughts in an honest and direct way. Don’t interrupt, even when you are tempted to defend yourself. Let the person finish giving their feedback before you respond.

- 3. Listen with care.**

As you listen to the feedback, take notes about what the person is telling you. If you are unsure of what the person means or need some examples to help you understand, ask clarifying questions.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY:

- “Can you tell me more about that?”
- “Can you give me some of examples of how I’ve ...”
- “What did you mean when you said ...?”

Key Actions for Being Truthful (continued)

- **Respond to feedback from others in a caring, non-defensive way. (continued)**

4. Avoid responding defensively.

It is natural to feel defensive when someone is giving you negative feedback. But none of us do things perfectly all of the time, and we can all make improvements. As you listen to feedback, keep a positive mindset and practice humility. Consider these tips for avoiding responding in a defensive manner:

- Assume the person is honest and sincere about wanting to help you improve.
- Listen calmly while the other person is speaking. Take a few deep breaths and be silent, if needed. Tell the other person if and when you need a moment to take in what he or she said.
- Be compassionate with yourself. Again, remember that you can always do better and always improve the way you do things. Constant improvement is one of our core values.

5. Describe next steps, if appropriate.

If there are actions you feel you need to take, let the other person know what you plan to do. At the very least, tell the person you will consider their feedback carefully and let him/her know how you plan to proceed after thinking about what he/she has said.

6. Thank the other person for their honest and caring feedback.

Be sure to let the other person know that you appreciate their taking time to help you learn and grow. You may also want to thank them for their patience, honesty, and care.

