

The Pledge of Managerial Power

Management ethics shouldn't just prevent bad acts but encourage people to care for each other. Truly caring for employees guarantees your organization's lasting success, but using managerial power correctly takes careful thought.

What Does Caring at Work Look Like?

To **sympathize** is to *understand* someone else's suffering. To **empathize** is to *feel* that suffering. To be **compassionate** is to *want to alleviate* that suffering.

But to **care** is the highest standard: it means to *take action* to relieve suffering *and* to help others be happy—meaning, to feel safe, appreciated, and proud.

The large language models of AI are well suited to clarifying semantics. Checking AI against the Merriam-Webster Collegiate dictionary clarified this progression from "sympathy" to "caring."



Paul O'Neill, former US Secretary of the Treasury, became CEO of Alcoa Aluminum in 1987. In his first week, he used his enormous managerial power to make safety, not profits, his top priority. Wall Street predicted bankruptcy, but when he retired 13 years later, Alcoa had reduced workdays lost to injury from 1.86 to 0.2 per 100 workers—and profits had quintupled.

How can Managers Use Their Power Correctly?

The misuse of managerial power isn't limited to businesses: many NGOs and government agencies also have unhappy employees. Studies¹ suggest 40 to 70% of people are unhappy at their work. We believe it's simply wrong to miss opportunities to help co-workers succeed.

The Pledge of Managerial Power (on page 4) is management's standard of ethics. It is difficult to use one's power compassionately, wisely, and effectively. Page 5 has ideas for working with the Pledge; the next two pages are meant to improve understanding and foster reflection:

- Do No Harm
- Take Care of Others
- Share What You Know

Management is a calling with profound rewards.

¹ "[Why You Are Unhappy at Work.](#)" Harvard Business School. Sean Silverthorne. 22 January 2018.

Do No Harm

Be aware of the power you have: A word, a glance, or a day of neglect can make an employee feel unsafe and unappreciated, fearful for their promotion or job. The greater the power, the greater the effect: the chief executive can start a cancer of mistrust and disengagement with one thoughtless outburst.

But we believe few bosses are bullies. We believe most misuse their power *because no one ever talked to them about it*. That's why Awareness is the first of the four principles of the Pledge.

Power in and of itself is not bad; it only becomes so when we try to force the less powerful around us to submit to our personal will. - Thich Naht Hanh

Accept the reality: Some managers tell themselves, *"I leave my employees alone. I just ask them to do their jobs, and I stay out of their personal lives. Morality isn't an issue."* Denying the effects of managerial power can wreck teamwork: the proper use of power is needed to provide goals, guide behavior, gather resources, and make decisions.

Understand the costs: An unhappy employee makes mistakes, and they won't put in their best effort or collaborate wholeheartedly. An employee's unhappiness infects others, so they begin to gossip, complain, and disengage. Low employee engagement reduces customer satisfaction, quality, and retention. Even a 1% productivity loss has a huge effect on income.

What harms the individual harms the organization.

Take Care of Others

Lead by example: No policy or poster will counteract one instance of an executive's misuse of power. No "soft skills" training provides 1% of the value of their example. All executives should exemplify fairness and kindness in their daily work and expect them in recruitment, onboarding, and evaluations.

For some, management is a spiritual practice: The moral use of management power is manifested in how we care for others, which every moral tradition teaches us to practice with everyone in every situation. The Golden Rule is always active.

Strengthen the organization: The moral use of managerial power produces higher productivity, higher retention, and greater creativity. This generates an upward spiral of customer satisfaction, sales, and margins—and a culture that attracts the best job candidates.

See our post, [How to be a Truly Caring Manager](#)

Share What You Know

The leader must inspire to lead. Caring is inspirational. The chief executive should be the first to adopt the Pledge and lead discussions among the senior managers.

Create a caring culture: Adopt the Pledge for the organization. Create and communicate HR policies that include the Pledge. Recognize and reward managers—or anyone—that is exceptionally caring. Discuss ethics regularly. See term [1.1.1 Business ethics](#) in The Index of Management Terms & Practices for materials and discussion questions.

Provide meaningful work: People love to work with others on something bigger than themselves. Helping someone feel proud and fulfilled at work requires giving them work that is challenging and meaningful—something they care about.

Great managers use their power to provide teams with exciting challenges and the resources and skills to meet them. Seeing others succeed is the work that managers care about.

Mentor for both competence and caring: To provide meaningful work, managers must know what they're doing in practical terms. Refer to the Milwaukee Model, the standard of management competence at www.theindex.net/about.

Mentors should regularly bring their protégés back to the Pledge and ask useful questions about caring for particular colleagues and teammates.

Inspire caring outside the workplace: The members of the Center for Management Terms & Practices believe work is an excellent place to learn how to sympathize, empathize, be compassionate, and care for all the people around us. *Managers can make our world a better place.*

The author remembers his first job, as property manager of a Chicago office building. A tenant had complained about the lobby's cleanliness, so the president of my firm paid me a visit.

He could have yelled but instead just asked me to look around the lobby. "Did you see that piece of duct tape over the revolving door?" I hadn't. He smiled and left. He used kindness and patience, not power, to teach me from my mistake.



The author thanks the participants in Viterbo University's 2023 conference "Blessed are the Peacemakers" for their improvements to The Pledge.

THE PLEDGE OF MANAGERIAL POWER

The Organization's Pledge

Our organization succeeds only if all our employees are happy at work, that they feel safe, appreciated, and proud of what we achieve together. Managers at every level will treat every employee as they themselves want to be treated. We have no place for bullies or bigots.

The executives have taken this pledge. We will set good examples, take care when delegating power, and will apply its principles to how we hire, train, evaluate, and reward managers and employees.

The Manager's Pledge

I will strive to be a caring manager, someone who puts others first.

I want to help all the people with whom I work feel safe, appreciated, and proud.

I accept this challenge knowing it requires compassion, wisdom, and strength.

When I make mistakes, I will take responsibility, apologize, and learn.

AWARENESS Simply being **aware** of how their power can help or hurt will reduce mistakes and inspire managers to care for their employees, treating them with fairness and kindness.

Pledge: I will reflect often on the good and harm I can do with my managerial power.

Inquiry: When was I recently reminded of the effects of my managerial power?

INTROSPECTION Learning to use managerial power compassionately requires **introspection**, asking challenging questions about one's own attitudes, words, and actions.

Pledge: I will be proud of learning the moral lessons of being a good manager.

Inquiry: How is being a manager making me a better person?

APPROPRIATENESS Policies provide guidelines, but every person and situation are unique, so managers must listen carefully and treat each employee **appropriately**.

Pledge: I will think about each employee carefully and treat them as individuals.

Inquiry: How have I managed people differently though the same kinds of challenges?

INTENTION It is hard to be kind and patient all the time, so it is important to set a daily **intention** to help others succeed.

Pledge: I will use my managerial power every day to care for others.

Inquiry: When did I last use my power to help an individual or group succeed?

WORKING WITH THE PLEDGE

Did you ever have a manager who cared about you, challenged you, helped you achieve more than you thought possible? Do you want to be that kind of boss for your team?

A Program of Caring: Patience, Repetition, and Intuition

There isn't a Yes/No checklist for being caring, but this outline will help bring the Pledge to life in your career. This journey takes time and repetition; these ideas can be gentle reminders to embody those attitudes in action. We must be patient and trust our intuition to tell us if we are stepping correctly.

AWARENESS: When was I recently reminded of the effects of my managerial power?

- Observe other managers. Caring sometimes looks and sounds subtle.
- Discuss with your manager or mentor. Caring for others could be a standing discussion item.
- Listen: Spotify podcast "[How Great Managers Use Power & Authority](#)" (enhance.training)

INTROSPECTION: How is being a manager making me a better person?

- Sit and think. Stress and caffeine can make quiet reflection difficult, but it is still good to do.
- Keep a journal at home. Set aside 30 minutes weekly to write your thoughts and questions.
- Watch: TEDx talk, "[Introspection, Living a Life Without Regrets](#)" (Kartikey Brahmabhatt)

APPROPRIATENESS: How have I managed people differently though the same challenges?

- Keep asking, "*How can I help you?*"
- Add to your journal weekly, positive comments about the people you manage
- Read David Brooks's, "[How to Know a Person](#)"

INTENTION: When did I last use my power to help an individual or group succeed?

- Plan exactly how you are going to help each of your employees meet one of their big goals.
- State your promise to care openly and often. "*I'm here to help each of you succeed!*"
- Read post, "[4 Easy Steps to Intention Setting](#)" (Georgia Witkin, Ph.D. *Psychology Today*)



Meetings are Mirrors on Managers

Before How could this meeting help someone meet one of their goals?
During Am I really listening to what this discussion means to the others?
After What personal opportunities opened up for any of the participants?

We all make mistakes. When we do, we must take responsibility, apologize, and learn. Accept also that there will be days when you don't feel like you care about others. That's a sign to take care of yourself. If things get too heavy, be sure to talk to someone, perhaps your spiritual teacher.

It's hard to be a good manager, but the reward is knowing you've helped people feel safe, appreciated, and proud of what they've accomplished individually and as a team.