



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – October 2004

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji helps turn managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

Broken windows and leadership

In 1982, authors James Wilson and George Kelling put forward the Broken Windows theory to explain the epidemic element of crime. They argued that crime is the inevitable result of disorder. If a window in a building is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken. That leads to more petty crime, then serious crime, and finally urban decay. If you've got broken windows, they say, you've got to fix them pretty quickly, else expect rapid community deterioration. The ultimate theory is that small things matter - often more than the big things.

This is true of workplace relationships as well. As a leader, it's the little actions you take that show your people you care (or not). If the little things happening in your department lead your employees to believe that no one cares or no one is in charge, then that leads to petty grievances, then serious grievances, and finally a demoralized workplace. If you have broken windows in your department, it's important to fix them quickly.

Fortunately, this epidemic quality can apply in reverse as well. If you do little things to show people that you care, then that leads to a positive work environment, then happy and committed employees, and finally a high-performing and cohesive team. Ultimately, small actions matter.