

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Aretha Franklin famously sang about respect in 1967, demanding that she be taken seriously by her man. The same approach should be taken in the workplace. We are taught from an early age to respect our elders, our seniors, those with more experience or those in positions of authority. Yet coming along shortly after those early messages is the recognition that respect has to be earned. One of the essential means of earning respect is to give it. Respect is a two-way, mutual process.

I learnt very quickly indeed after leaving Sandhurst with a commission that having some insignia on your shoulder was not what resulted in you being respected by the soldiers that you were set to lead. In fact the opposite was true – I had to truly respect their knowledge, experience, dedication and loyalty.

In the general workplace, sadly, I have often come across managers and supervisors that have little or no respect for their workforce. I have heard them talk about and refer to their team members in derogatory terms. There is often a general expectation that the workforce will be cutting corners and taking shortcuts in the procedures for their own benefit, when in truth the motivation for such unsafe behaviour is often driven by the manager.

This lack of respect can be demonstrated by a failure to involve the workforce; failing to listen to their ideas or suggestions; not giving good quality feedback; and, only looking for and recognising unsafe practices when in reality most behaviour exhibited by most people is safe and deserves just as much attention – this time positively.

The safety culture of an organisation cannot be separated from the safety leadership and great leadership is about involvement, communication and motivation. Failure to provide these results in low morale and poor performance. If you expect poor standards that is probably what you will get because your expectations will be broadcast via your behaviour – which accounts for most of our communication.

So, respecting your workforce is crucial to achieving success. They are a great asset. They possibly know more about the job than you do. If you treat them appropriately they might share that knowledge and experience and you might learn something – if they think you deserve it. Involve, listen, share and above all go out and catch them working safely.