

Fundamentally, this is a people leadership question. But don't be hard on yourself, the ability for even the best people leader to thrive is contingent on two things: (1) the society in which they are leading and (2) the culture of the organization.

The good news is that both are changeable - and both are opportunities for you to shine as a leader - not just a people leader. And the senior you are, the bigger impact that you can have.

As is publicly known, I worked for a very long time at Capital One. Like most large corporations they embraced the concept of "increasingly blurring the lines between work and personal life" aka the title of this article - but other than some trident HR folks who would repeat it on calls, it's not something I *felt*. And that was true from the very moment that I entered the workforce, as a wide-eyed, gay man of color. I always felt "less than" and a little unsure of myself. How did I combat that? By working hard, and being a little abrasive. I never took opportunities to get closer to senior people in a personal way because work was stressful enough - why extend the performance beyond closing time for a few more anxiety-induced duckets?

And certainly some people did - at a cost. A female finance executive commented to me that she watched "the game" on a Sunday night so that she would have something to talk to with the boys on Monday morning meetings. That floored me. She was giving up her weekend; her precious time with her family; the few hours a week she had to recharge - so that the men on Monday didn't feel awkward if she were to say "I have no comment on the game - I'm not into sports" - and of course we know that when we make a person feel rightfully awkward - they might like you less - which lowers your chance at promotion.

So what to do here? I'm glad you asked. Imagine if the senior person on that Monday call equally devoted the "5 minutes of fluff talk" to a round robin with everyone asking how their weekend was, and engaged equally. That leader would automatically get to know each person more. The leader would better understand what the person likes and how they spend their time. Over time, a genuine connection would be formed between the leader and the associate (and in this example, both the leader and associate are both very senior leaders - but of course we all have a boss). That more senior person becomes a servant leader.

And servant leadership is one thing that definitely trickles down. :) The feeling that the leader cultivated on the Monday morning call - one of acceptance, caring, and genuine interest - suddenly means they are allowing and encouraging "bring your whole self to work." And happy, accepted, cared for teams are happier, more productive, and are more loyal.

So be a leader, and just ask the question. How are you? How was your weekend? Is there anything that I can do to help *you*? Then, listen. Truly listen.