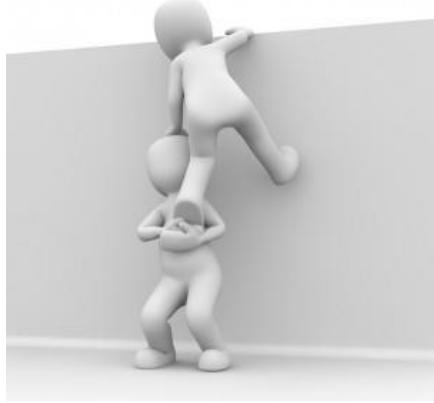


C.S. Lewis said, "Put first things first and we get second things thrown in: put second things first and we lose both first and second things."¹

That's sound advice, but it begs the question, "What are the first things and what are the second things?" As free-thinking individuals, we get to choose what our first and second things are going to be. But our choices have consequences and to make the choice is to accept the consequences of that choice.

When it comes to our careers and growing our organizations, one of those choices is how we're going to view other people. We can choose:



1. To focus on our own success, and hope (or assume) that others will benefit
2. To focus on shared success, believing that helping others succeed will benefit us

Let's take a brief look at the impact of each of those options:

American culture is very individualistic and often promotes ideas like, "looking out for number one", and "if I don't take care of myself, who will". If the scope of what we want to accomplish in life is small enough that we can do it all by ourselves, perhaps that works (although I doubt it). But as soon as our vision gets bigger than our own capacity, we need other people.

You can strong-arm me into doing what you want. Try to make it hard for me to leave, or even threaten or make me feel like a failure if I don't meet your expectations. But all you'll ever get from me is the minimum effort to meet your requirements. You can tell when an organization is led this way by looking at the high employee turnover, listening to the grumblings of staff, and observing the low productivity. When the highest priority is "keeping the boss happy", an organization's success is always capped at less than its full potential.

To get the most out of me, I have to know that I'm a valuable part of the organization's success. I need to feel cared for and safe. I need to know that I'm growing and reaching my own full potential. I need to know my leader has my back and is willing to make personal sacrifices for my benefit. Under that kind of leadership, organizations thrive, conquer incredible obstacles, and reach unimaginable heights. The leaders and the led all achieve greater success.

There is a catch: *You can't fake it.* You really do have to care about the success of the people you are leading. You really do have to make personal sacrifices. You really do have to listen to people and give them credit for their ideas. You really do have to be appreciative and express gratitude. You really do have to put them first and force your own ego into the backseat.

Selfishness as a "first thing" defines your limits. Selflessness adds many rungs to the ladder of success.

¹C. S. Lewis, Letters of C. S. Lewis, ed. and memoir W. H. Lewis (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966; reprint: New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), p. 228.