



There's a reason we quit our jobs.

To be frank, it kinda sucked ass toward the end there. And a little before that too.

It wasn't totally your fault, but we just didn't feel like we could be creative there anymore, which was sad, because that's what we live for.

We know this kind of whining doesn't help much. And though we're still a little bitter about the whole working-for-you thing, we do appreciate how hard your job must be. It can't be easy to lead something as fragile as creativity.

Looking back, we probably should have helped you more at the time, but telling you how to do your job seemed harder than quitting. Sorry about that.

This book contains everything we should have told you but didn't. We hope it will make up for our mistake.

We work for more than just money.

Everyone's got to pay the rent. But that's not why we show up every day. We show up because we like making things. Especially beautiful things. And useful things. And things that matter.

We show up because creativity is its own reward. But if we go home feeling like we gave much more than we got, you can bet we'll soon be looking for a better deal.

Here's how you can give as good as you get:

How about a hug?

We're not mathematicians. We don't look up the formula and then arrive at a right answer. In fact, there is no formula, and there is no right answer. But still, to do the job right, we have to put our whole selves into the work.

It's a lot like being naked in public: Will anyone like what we've got to show?

We're not asking you to kiss our asses or anything. That would be pretty awkward. We're just asking for a little affirmation. So if you make it a habit to tell us what you like about our work, we can promise you that the work will only get better.

If you're not used to giving effusive, heart-felt praise, here's a little refresher:

"Holy-fucking-doodle-dandy! You are goooood."

"I dub thee: Sir Kickassalot."

"Damn, you've got a hot body. Of work!"

"Here, these are for you. (Hand employee your pants.)"

"You must be channeling Jesus, because you just saved my ass."

Or just say "Thanks" and mean it. We promise, it'll make lots of stuff better.

Fill ‘er up.

Inspiration is the most valuable thing you can give us. It makes our jobs better. It makes the work better. And the truth is, it makes our lives better. But some might say that inspiration is a luxury, and far beyond the responsibilities of management. We beg to differ. Creative teams live on inspiration. And they die without it.

You can do plenty to make sure your creative staff has the fuel it needs to keep being creative, day after day.

Make it a part of everyone’s job, including yours, to participate in inspiration sharing in one form or another. Be clear that if they’re not staying inspired, they’re not doing their jobs. And for fuck’s sake, make sure the organization supports them in that.

Show and tell

Create a culture, or at least a routine, of sharing all the inspiring things you discover out there in the world.

Magazine subscriptions

Get some that don’t suck. Duh.

Make us use our professional development stipend

Hold it against us if we don’t. Tough love and all that.

Take us out

Otherwise, we’ll have to join the Navy to see the world. And you know what they do to us “creative types” in the Navy.

Write it into the job description

Why wouldn’t you? (If you can come up with a good answer, you’re in the wrong line of work.)

Encourage accidents in the workplace.

People talk about the creative process like it's one thing. They go on to say that if you adhere to it, you'll be creative every time. Those people are idiots.

This isn't to say that there can be no method to our madness. Of course there are many useful creative techniques and tools and whatnot. But it's the madness that makes creativity possible, not the methods.

So don't fence us in. Give us the freedom to do the work you hired us to do, and let the process change from day to day. Better yet, make it a requirement of the job.

Budget for tangents

If you're committed to creativity, then you'll make room for it in every deadline you sign us up for.

Reward crazy

Because crazy is often the source of the world's next great idea.

Let us learn from our mistakes

If we believe strongly in a bad idea, let us present it and find out for ourselves how bad it really is.

Require and support independent projects

It'll make us happy, and it might even make you rich.

Your throne is made of porcelain, just like ours.
The work is the real king. We all serve it.

You work for more than just status.

Okay, mister big pouch, we get it: You're the king, we're the workers, and we work for you.

But guess what? Your throne is made of porcelain, just like ours. The work is the real king. We all serve it. So don't let your position get in the way of our work. Kill the hierarchy, and realize this: your job is to help us be successful, because your success depends on ours.

The king is dead. Long live the work.

Here's how you can pay tribute:

Show a little respect.

You wouldn't go into a restaurant and tell the chef how to do his job. And if the food you order is good, you wouldn't take credit for it.

So why does it feel like too many cooks in the kitchen?

You hired us because we're good at what we do, because we can do what you cannot. Accept the fact that there will be times when you're out of your league. That's ok. Just remember that you have faith in our abilities (right?), and let us do our job. Trust us—we'll make you look good.

And when we do, don't forget to send compliments to the chef.

Don't meddle

Collaboration can be great, but that's not the same thing as swooping in at the eleventh hour and turning things upside down.

Create a safe word

So that we can let you know that you're not being helpful, without worrying we'll get fired.

Know when to take a back seat

If you're not the lead on a project, don't steamroll the person who is.

Set the mood.

We like what we do. But we like it more when we're actually liking it, you know?
There isn't a person in the world who doesn't want to have fun. And if there is, we sure as hell don't want to know them.

You want it. We want it. Fucking everyone wants it.

And you know damn well that if the fun shows through in the work, people will want more.

Appoint a funmaker

Make it part of their job. Reward them for it. And don't forget to give them a budget.

Always make time for a pickup game

Remember exercise? Remember thinking clearly? Okay then.

Invite your clients and customers to play

We care about our work even more when we care about the people we're doing it for.
And they'll care more about it too.

You've got something in your teeth.

Look, we can tell when you're in a bad mood, and we can tell when you're taking it out on us. It's okay, everyone does it, we're all human.

But you're our leader and you have power we don't. It's your duty to be responsible about your shortcomings.

Think about it: Your personal inadequacies and insecurities are more visible to your employees than they are to your spouse. And it's much easier for us to leave you too.

Own your problems

Stop pretending you don't have any. We're much more likely to forgive you for them if you're straight up with us.

Know when you need a time-out

You've done enough already, thank you. Why don't you excuse yourself before you really fuck this up?

Go to the gym

Yoga, pilates, jazzercise, transcendental meditation—we don't care. Just don't work your stress out on us. (And anyway, you could stand to lose a few pounds too.)

See a shrink

Tell'm about your mother or something. We've got work to do. Sheesh.

We want a pitcher, not a belly itcher.

Sure, you get the biggest paycheck and the snazzy title, but that's not what makes you a leader.

What makes you a leader is that you behave in a way that deserves a following. You have a fucking vision, for crissakes, and some steps we can take to get there. You say what you mean, and you do what you say. And you always, always set the highest example.

We know it's a tall order, but we wouldn't have joined up with you if we didn't believe you could do it.

Talk to the other leaders

It's sort of obvious, but it's pretty hard to do good work when all our bosses are telling us different things.

Know what you want before you hire

Because it's hard for us to be successful if you've only got a vague idea of what success means. And it's impossible to be successful if we're not right for the job.

Get regular feedback

You want to get better at being our boss, right? We can help you with that.

What makes you a leader is that you behave
in a way that deserves a following.
You say what you mean, and you do what you say.

So that's it. That's all we've got.

We really hope it helps.

Better late than never, right?

info



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Language in Common](#) is a communications strategy and design studio making good things happen in culture and commerce. Write to them: conversation@languageincommon.com. And there's more trouble to be found at their inspiration feed, [tiny gigantic](#).

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This document was created on August 8, 2007 and is based on the best information available at that time. Check [here](#) for updates.

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