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Cultivating and Growing Your Team: Why Having Kickass Leadership Benefits Everyone

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By Katie O'Hara

The first time I met the boss who would later become not only the most influential person I've ever had the honor of working for but also one of my mentors and closest friends, I was *pissed*.

I had been the lead hostess at a high-end French restaurant for a while and the current management team had a rather laissez-faire approach to things. They handed me the iPad on the first day and never questioned any choices I made after that. They usually sat in the office and let me run the floor how I saw fit. I took as many smoke breaks as I wanted to and I had little to no supervision or guidance. That was exactly how I wanted it. I was 23 and a recent college graduate with no direction or ambition. I wanted a fun job to pass the time. The current team didn't interfere with that plan, that is, until they decided to open a new restaurant and bring in a new manager to our location.

When the new guy (who actually happened to be industry vet) walked in, I had a feeling my free reign was coming to an end, and I was not about to go down without a fight. I had a strong sense of entitlement and a substantially oversized chip on my shoulder to protect, after all.

Initially, the new guy was quiet and observant. He was kind and mild-mannered and asked a lot of questions. I saw this behavior as a direct threat and was highly suspicious of him. However, as time passed and we both eased into our roles with each other, I began to let my guard down and decided that I would not actually need to run him off. He was allowed to stay. He basically let me continue my job as I had been doing, but now, he was always around. Always lurking. And he was ALWAYS asking questions. The constant barrage of questions is when I finally realized that things were no longer operating as they previously were. The new guy wanted to know *why*. *Why* I did everything I did. And he tricked me into thinking he truly didn't know, so I always felt the need to go into great detail. Next, he started asking *what if?* *What if we altered some procedures? What if we stopped giving servers chits?* The what-ifs never ended.

The new guy played a solid trick on me. He came in and completely flipped the script and did so in such a way that not only did I not even notice it was happening – thereby preventing me from protesting it entirely – but he also somehow managed to make me level up at the same damn time. I was now a completely different hostess (one with far less attitude) and member of the team. I was no longer interested in a job just to pass the time. I was committed to this industry, and I wanted to devour as much information as I could. I gave a shit about him and about the team. I wanted to learn everything from him. I wanted to know how I could be better, what more I could do, and most importantly, I wanted to know how in the fuck he ran expo on a Friday night during a pre-theatre dinner rush while simultaneously managing a party in the PDR - without even breaking a sweat.

The greatest trick the new guy ever played on our little restaurant turned out to be no trick at all. It was some damn fine leadership. He led by example. He asked questions – *so many questions* – and encouraged us to find the answers on our own; not because we had to but because we wanted to. He encouraged us to train for every position. I learned how to expo and serve under his guidance, and he didn't even lose his shit when I had a panic attack during a 200+ cover party and had to leave work, thus leaving him down a server. He worked hard and he cared so much about every member of his team, and because he cared, we cared. Every one of us became more invested in our jobs and in each other. By being an active observer, he was able to come in and see where we could all grow as individuals and as a whole. He led us there by example and he allowed us to find answers through deductive reasoning. He fostered his team's growth and curiosity and encouraged us all to aim higher, do better, be better. Because of his incredible leadership, he was able to lead one of the most kickass teams that that restaurant had ever seen. He truly taught his team to fish, thereby feeding us all for life.

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Katie O'Hara has been working in the restaurant industry for roughly 10 years. She has done it all, from bussing to serving to pastry prep and everything in between but her favorite role is that of the hostess. She thrives on the fast-paced and ever-changing environments that go hand in hand with service industry jobs, loves getting to connect with new guests, and help to cultivate the 'perfect' dining experience for them.

Katie recently started her own business working as a freelance writer. The professional path that brought her to where she is today includes time spent in both fine dining establishments and dive bars alike, as well as teaching, operations, marketing, sales, and web + graphic design.

When not on the floor or working as a wordsmith, Katie, a Colorado native from Steamboat Springs, loves spending her time running, snowboarding, practicing yoga, traveling, reading, exploring Denver's booming dining scene, and most importantly, fulfilling her lifelong dream of becoming the world's finest cat lady.

To connect with Katie regarding any potential freelance opportunities - or to share funny cat stories and videos with her - she can be found on [Instagram](#) or by [emailing](#) her.

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