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GUEST COMMENT

If a monkey could do their jobs ...

BY TERRY WALL

A monkey could do your job." A boss actually told me that. It was a part-time job I had in college, and the boss was a couple levels above me. But that's what he told me. Without any pretense, or apology, or any attempt to water it down, he just said it: "A monkey could do your job."

My job was to call people, tell them that their credit cards had been canceled, and ask them to cut up their cards and mail them to us. Most of the people did just that.

Seven or eight of us did this in the evenings and on Saturdays. You had to be good on the phone, able to put up with abuse, and willing to listen to some crazy stories.

But according to this high-up guy, a monkey could do your job." His name was Al, but behind his back people called him "Smooth Al" because he could be prettily smooth when he wanted to. He was complaining to me about what a bunch of jerks worked there. He said they were all, present company included, a bunch of lazy jerks. I disagreed, and said they'd probably work harder if he treated them

with more respect. Al was notorious for treating the employees with utter disdain. (Except for the young, pretty women employees, with them, Smooth Al was at his smoothest.)

Smooth Al said, "You're just giving me a lot of psychology nonsense you're learning in college. The truth is, a monkey could do your job. So don't talk to me about respect."

I think of Smooth Al whenever I hear managers complain about employees being lazy or incompetent. True, some employees ARE lazy or incompetent, but I really believe they represent a tiny minority. Other employees are not lazy but receive such disrespect from their managers that they just don't work as hard as they should. The fault for this is shared by the managers.

When managers regard employees in general as being lazy, incompetent or as malcontents or people whose jobs are so simple that a monkey could do it, this attitude comes across in those managers' actions, words and facial expressions. Employees are smart enough to recognize this, even when the managers, like Smooth Al, talk a good game. Disrespect employees, and you shouldn't be surprised

when they don't perform that well.

Managers get the kind of employees they deserve. Treat them with disdain, they'll perform poorly. Treat them with respect and they'll be engaged, committed to company goals and more productive.

But employees will see through all the fluff. It was the same with Smooth Al. One time he was taking people on a tour of the office, and paid me a very nice compliment.

That was the "public" Smooth Al. Underneath, I knew he thought a monkey could do my job, and other employees knew he felt that way.

A leader's attitude is ALWAYS showing. Even if there's only one employee we don't like, or don't respect, that attitude will come across to that employee.

As leaders we need to look at our attitudes toward employees in general, and as individuals, and remember that employees can read our attitudes. Does your attitude show a genuine respect for the employees? If a monkey could do their jobs, what do they need you for?

Terry Wall is president of T.G. Wall Management Consulting in the Philadelphia area.