



An **Anthem** for Leadership: **Respect**

It's more than just a soulful song

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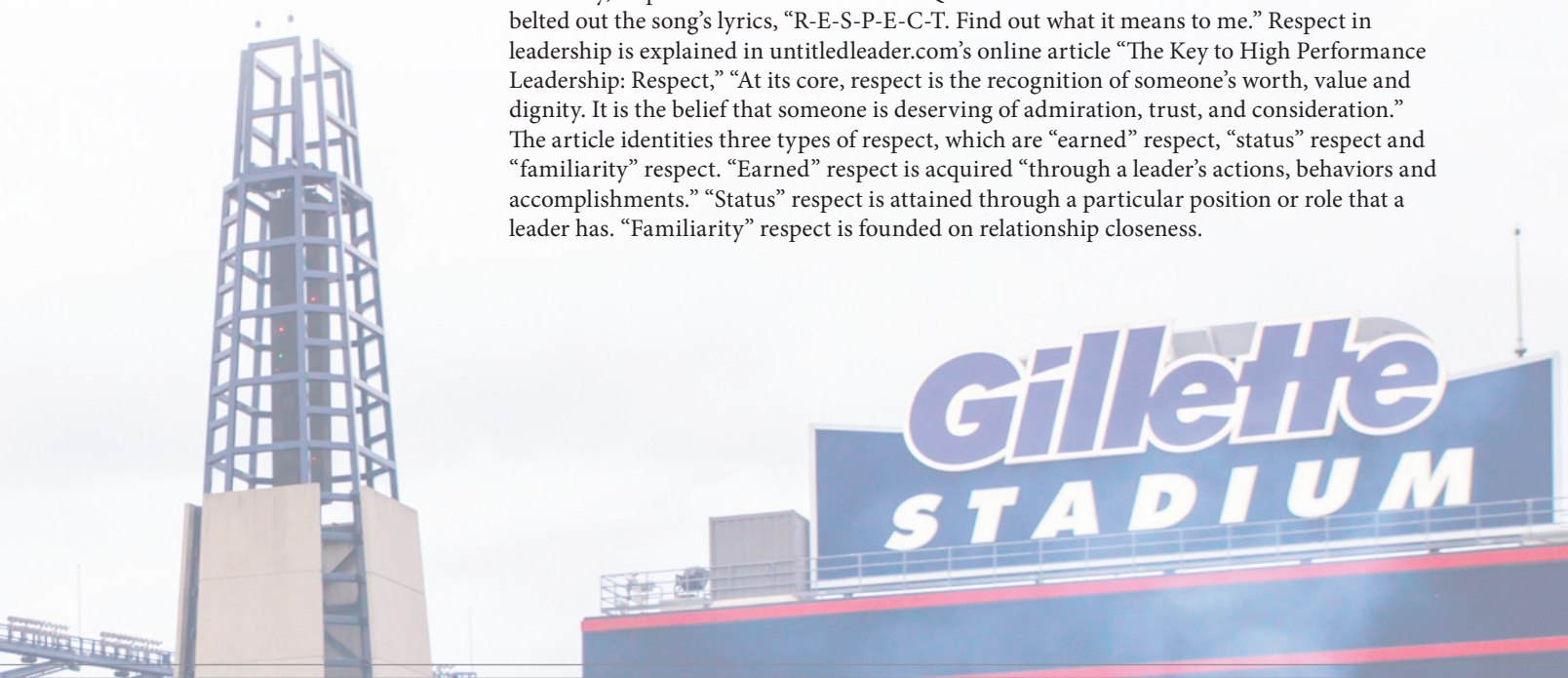
When I traveled by plane from Indianapolis to Denver for the inaugural IRWA Real Estate Law and Eminent Domain Symposium, I decided to indulge in watching an in-flight movie and chose “80 for Brady.” As an almost lifelong Hoosier who is a devoted Indianapolis Colts fan and does not embrace the New England Patriots, must less its former quarterback Tom Brady, initially, it was a stretch for me to choose the movie. However, I have been an enduring fan of the film’s four legendary stars — Lily Tomlin, Rita Moreno, Sally Field and Jane Fonda. For those of us of a certain generation, we fondly recall Tomlin as the nasal telephone operator on “Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-in,” Moreno as the saucy Anita in the film version of “West Side Story,” Field as the darling Sister Bertrille in “The Flying Nun” and Fonda as the sultry space traveler in “Barberella.”

Inspired by a true story, the movie “80 for Brady” is about four lifetime female friends and ardent Patriots fans who have an eventful excursion to the 2017 Super Bowl. While many valuable lessons can be extrapolated from the movie — the value of friendship, fulfilling your bucket list dream and the significance of undaunting perseverance — I was struck by something else. A pivotal scene of the movie occurs where Tomlin’s character, Louella, or “Lou” for short, maneuvers her way to the coordinators’ booth, perched high above the field, to contact her idol, Brady, around halftime when the Atlanta Falcons led the Patriots 21 to 3. In her monologue, she desperately urges Brady, who looks around confusedly and ultimately above toward the coordinators’ booth, to fight the good fight. “I’m Louella. I’m your biggest fan... right now, we have this one moment, and you’re down in this game a lot, but you’re Tom Brady... I love you because you are the best, and anyone who doesn’t love you respects you because you fight and never give up.” Ultimately, the Patriots achieved an extraordinary comeback, beating the Falcons 34 to 28 in 2017 Super Bowl.

Louella’s words to Brady in this scene ring true. Those who do not love, or even not like, Brady, certainly respect him. Respect, whether in football or the right of way industry, is a leadership cornerstone. Motivational speaker and author Brian Tracy has noted, “Respect is the key determinative of high-performance leadership. How much people respect you determines how well they perform.”

Respect — I’ll tell you what it means.

Musically, respect is embodied in the late Queen of Soul Arthea Franklin’s anthem. She belted out the song’s lyrics, “R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Find out what it means to me.” Respect in leadership is explained in untitledleader.com’s online article “The Key to High Performance Leadership: Respect,” “At its core, respect is the recognition of someone’s worth, value and dignity. It is the belief that someone is deserving of admiration, trust, and consideration.” The article identifies three types of respect, which are “earned” respect, “status” respect and “familiarity” respect. “Earned” respect is acquired “through a leader’s actions, behaviors and accomplishments.” “Status” respect is attained through a particular position or role that a leader has. “Familiarity” respect is founded on relationship closeness.





Respect is a critical trait for leaders. “When team members respect their leader, they are more likely to trust their judgment,” the untitledleader.com article adds. Trust between leaders and their teams is pivotal for leaders to be successful. The same article continues, “When team members respect their leader, they are more likely to be open and honest in their communication.”

How can a leader gain respect?

In his article “How to Earn Respect as a Leader,” Jim Whitehurst provides three ways that a leader can inure respect. The first way is to “[s]how passion for the purpose of your organization and constantly drive interest in it.” Passion is authentic and contagious. A passionate leader creates enthusiasm for the company or association and envelopes team members in that enthusiasm. The second way is to “[d]emonstrate confidence.” A confident leader is a leader who is followed. The third way is to “[e]ngage your people.” Engagement involves sincerity about vulnerabilities with team members and including them in resolutions. Although it can be tough for leaders to admit their weaknesses, “owing up to what you don’t know is an important way to build trust,” according to Whitehurst.

Although three types of respect in leadership are identified, the body of literature on respect in leadership focuses most intently on “earned” respect. “Earned” respect is a protracted process, which seems unfair, can be frustrating to a new leader and potentially lead to negativity on the leader’s behalf. Whitehall provides an example. “An enthusiastic new hire may join the company with the thought that his ideas will be heard equally, only to fall into a rut when he feels as if his good ideas are ignored.” He comments on how this frustration can be addressed. “Part of the solution is to set up expectations so people know that earning a reputation takes time and hard work.”

Is it better for a leader to be respected than liked?

Louella’s inspirational speech to Brady in “80 for Brady” begs a key question: Is it more important for a leader to be respected than loved or liked? Leaders are charged with making challenging decisions, and those decisions are not always popular. Some leaders are more concerned about admiration than respect, and they succumb to making uncontroversial decisions to avoid their teams’ negative reactions. Although it’s not always easy, for a leader whose moral compass points due north, the right decision is the one to always be made. In the final analysis though, the dichotomy between respect and likability may not be so distinct. At the very least, respect provides for a team’s acceptance of a leader’s difficult decision. The untitledleader.com article expounds on the interplay between a team’s respect for a leader and acceptance of hard decisions. “When team members respect their leader, they are more likely to be influenced by their opinions and ideas. This can be especially important in situations where difficult decisions need to be made or changes need to be implemented.”

Respect is a two-way street.

Successful leaders are not only respected, but they give respect to their team members. Although mutual respect at the workplace or in other organizations seems obvious, most team members do not feel respected. In an “HBR on Leadership” interview, author and Associate Professor of Management at Marquette University Kristie Rogers reports that “the vast majority of people say that their expectation is not met.” Surprisingly, according to Dr. Rogers, most leaders are completely unaware that their teams do not feel respected, which is even worse.

How can a leader foster a culture of respect in an organization?

A leader can foster a culture of respect in several ways. First, lead by example. My own leadership experience is that team members will follow those leaders who do, or have done, what the team members are expected to do. Second, promote diverse views, even if you may not always agree with them. Different views can lead to innovative approaches to assignments and projects. In his article “The Power of Respectful Leadership: Creating Thriving Workplaces,” Aaron Hall expounds on this way to further a culture of respect in an organization. “By promoting inclusivity in the workplace, organizations can create an environment that embraces the unique contributions of every individual.” Third, advance open and candid communication. This type of communication encourages team members to express themselves without fear of reprisal or unconstructive criticism. Finally, insist on civility in your professional environment. Unfortunately, civility seems to have been abandoned in so many places these days. Even just “please” and “thank you” go a long way in the workplace. Raising one’s voice, name calling and demeaning others is wholly unacceptable. A lack of civility is toxic and should never be tolerated.

In an August 2023 article on his self-titled website, Attorney Aaron Hall says, the positive take away from creating and maintaining a culture of respect is that “[r]esearch has shown that the influence of respectful leadership on employee productivity is significant. When leaders treat their subordinates with respect, it creates a positive work environment that fosters motivation and commitment.” In the end, isn’t that what all dedicated leaders want — a happy, motivated and productive team? 🌟



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