Dear TEAM!

Career Development

First, I want to thank you for your input. Given that this was the first time that comments from the direct report were included in managerial evaluations, no one was sure what to expect. I'll be honest with you: I was one of the managers fighting against it. Something that I recognize was simply the result of fear. Fear of change — but more importantly — fear of being forced to admit that some of my leadership qualities still need improvement.

Second, I need you to know that I'm the boss I am today because my team was not afraid of letting me know what kind of leader I could be, and was patient as I evolved. Here is another moment of honesty: I was afraid about leaving behind the only way I knew to manage.

I watched you go from an energetic and contributing team, to a bunch of brooding — well, babies — which is something I thought was inappropriate in the workplace. We give you a job. You do that job. That was my philosophy. It wasn't that I was trying to be a bully, but my behavior was based on the bosses I'd had before I was in charge. Quite frankly, I had never really thought about whether I exhibited proper leadership qualities because I was so focused on keeping you in line. I managed the way I had been managed — which is the only way I'd known before.

I now realize that there is space for both managing and leading and it is my job to find a balance of time for each. I also realized that the more that I step back and let you lead yourselves, the less leading I have to do. And honestly, that has been the best part.

Leading yourselves provides several important benefits to both the organization and to our team. The high morale in our department has not gone unnoticed and neither has the increased productively and creativity of our work. Other managers are constantly seeking to lure you away from our team.

What I have come to realize is that our relationship has become just that: a relationship. Being able to interact, listen to, and respect each other's contributions is crucial not only to getting the work done, but also to making it exceptional in the process. Our ability to do this is built on the back of trust — something I didn't think was necessary a few years ago.

So, yes, you are the reason why I am who I am today. And again, I want to thank you for every article, book, and sideward glance you gave in those moments I stuck my foot in my mouth. I know that my success — our success — is a joint effort and has never been solely about me.

I think it's important for me to say this to you, as there will come a point in time when we will go our separate ways. There are still lots of organizations, departments, and managers who continue using top-down, command and control management styles. Some of us may even end up working for them again. You should be aware that your approach of getting me to take a long, hard look in the mirror will not work for everyone. If that is the case, your job will be in jeopardy. Your behavior was risky and while it worked out this time, do not think that it will work again. My one piece of advice is to always look for win-win approaches that do not denigrate the individual. If you don't appreciate it, most people don't either.

Change is scary, not because things will be different, but because we must be different. Even the good change we want is challenging. For most of us, starting a job here was a good change that we wanted. We applied, interviewed, and got the job. That change, while good, meant we were necessarily going to be different. Just keep that thought in mind as you continue your work toward improving your future work environments and, at times, your bosses.

I appreciate each of you and am truly thankful for opening my eyes to what the possibilities for work could be: not just a place to grind out products and services, but an opportunity to build something from a place of vision and common goals. You were right that "together everyone achieves more" when we choose to be a team rather than a group of people where it's "every man for himself."

Sincerely,

TEAM Leader (formerly a boss)

Whitnie Wiley

Former ACC Docket Columnist

Whitnie Wiley was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the Lead the Way column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.