



Something on rudeness increase and the Senpai – Kōhai philosophy.

Strange day yesterday

First I see a McKinsey Quarterly mail coming in, indicating that rudeness experienced from managers and colleagues is on the rise. In 1998, according to the article, 49% employees suffered from this. This went to 55% in 2011 and 62% in 2016...!

Frightening figures by itself but confirming what I experience in daily live. Being a Flemish guy we tend to, however, use some French expressions in our language. To put it their way, the "Savoir Vivre" level decreases rapidly, in my view.

Secondly, a well-known picture of John Wooden and Kareem Abdul – Jabbar passes on LI. Used in an interesting article indicating that we always need to remember the ones who went before us in our field of expertise and helped us to develop the level we are on now.

Seeing both pass with an interval of an hour, give and take, catapulted me back to my (Japanese) martial arts studies. It was there that I first encountered the concept of Senpai – Kōhai.

The Senpai – Kōhai philosophy

I allow myself the flexibility, to give some short Wikipedia extracts, as to what it means as a "relational principle".

"Senpai (先輩, "Earlier colleague") and Kōhai (後輩, "Later colleague") are terms from the Japanese language describing an informal hierarchical interpersonal relationship found in organizations, associations, clubs, businesses and schools in Japan. The concept is based in Japanese philosophy and has permeated Japanese society.

The relationship is an interdependent one, as a Senpai requires a Kōhai and vice versa, and establishes a bond determined by the date of entry to an organization. Senpai refers to the member of higher experience, hierarchy, level or age in the organization who offers assistance, friendship and counsel to a new or inexperienced member, known as the Kōhai, who must demonstrate gratitude, respect, and occasionally personal loyalty.

Over time this mechanism has allowed the transfer of experience and knowledge, as well as the expansion of acquaintances. It also allows the development of beneficial experiences between both, as the Kōhai benefits from the Senpai's knowledge and the Senpai learns new experiences from the Kōhai by way of developing a sense of responsibility."



What we can learn

There are those that will find this very old school. Some people even pop to mind, for me!

But one of the challenges today is that there is practically no time anymore for mentorship in organizations. This relational principle would allow us to work on fundamental topics such as respect and trust. And help people to understand what they do and do not know and /or practice!

I'm not saying that there should be a blind respect for elderly colleagues. I'm saying that each individual can teach us something because they are, in that specific topic/field, a lot further as a professional and/or as a human being.

Conclusion

It would not hurt to respect and honor that a bit more. Or as the people in the East put it, the teacher becomes the student and the student becomes the teacher...!

Marc Van Obberghen
Partner - Inscriptio