

Visits to the Cellar

A wise shah once ruled an ancient land. He was beloved because he cared for his people and tried to understand how his decisions affected their lives.

He tried to see life from their vantage point, and to do so would frequently disguise himself and wander among them.

On one occasion, he disguised himself as a poor man and went to visit the public baths. There he learned that the water for the baths was heated by a furnace in the cellar, where one man ceaselessly tended the fire.

The shah descended to this netherworld and befriended the man. They shared a meal together and, in the weeks that followed, the shah, in disguise, made many visits to the cellar. The man who attended the bathhouse fire became attached to the visitor, because no one had ever shown such interest in him.

During this time, the shah did not reveal his identity, because he feared the man would ask for special favors and gifts, and would ruin the relationship they had developed. But one day, when the shah finally admitted who he was, he was gratified with the fire tender's reaction.

“You left your comfortable palace and throne to sit with me in this hot cellar on so many occasions. You ate my humble food and showed you cared about what happens to me. On other people you might bestow material riches, but to me you have given the best gift of all. You have given yourself.”

What a remarkable lesson for leaders! The axiom is well-known and true: People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

– Beecher Hunter