

An Interview with Chip Averwater
Author of “Great Manager Are Always Nice”

Intro: Chip Averwater is an author and businessman—retired chairman of Amro Music Stores, a musical instrument retailer based in Memphis, TN. In addition to his book on retailing, “Retail Truths: The Unconventional Wisdom of Retailing,” he has recently released a book on management, “Great Managers Are Always Nice.” Welcome, Chip.

What is the premise of “Great Managers Are Always Nice”?

The book contends that it’s possible for managers to be nice—always nice—and that in today’s workplace nice gets better results. There is never a reason for a manager to be less than nice, and the measurement of a manager is the situations that he can handle nicely.

Do you feel that’s controversial in contemporary management practice?

Unfortunately, yes. Too many books, articles, and managers recommend being tough and distant with employees. Probably we’ve all heard advice like, “Don’t get too close to your employees or you won’t be able to enforce the rules and demand results.”

Regrettably, threats, scolding, and discipline are still being used to “motivate” employees, despite clear evidence that they’re highly demotivational.

And you feel there’s a better way?

I believe nice builds motivation and allows us to create teams, share objectives, encourage improvements, increase skills, and improve retention.

But let me be clear, by being nice I don’t mean compromising on results, overlooking underperformance, ignoring misbehaviors, allowing chaos, etc. That’s not managing.

Nice management must address all of those and more. The nice manager simply does it with respect and encouragement, so employees not only conform to expectations but build commitment to the team and its goals.

What are the advantages of a manager being nice?

Nice increases communication (Probably we’ve all experienced “The boss is the last to know.”), creates confidence, attracts better employees, improves retention, and is healthier. But it’s also the right thing to do. We can work together and make the best of our time together, or we can work against each other and make each other miserable.

You use a manager, Mike Mitchell, to illustrate nice methods of handling management situations.

Who is Mike Mitchell?

Mike is a mythical manager. According to legend, no one has ever heard Mike say a disparaging word to an employee.

The book follows Mike through the typical as well as the most difficult management situations—building motivation, coaching improvement, counseling underperformance, correcting inappropriate behavior, resolving disputes, even firing. In every case, Mike is respectful, encouraging, and nice.

Why did you feel the need to use Mike in the book?

Most managers read management books, but we often don't envision how we could use the ideas in daily management. Following Mike and listening to his words allows us to see firsthand how he uses the ideas and indeed how we could too. Some managers might even choose to use Mike's words.

Why did write this book?

In over 40 years, I've watched, worked with, and coached many managers. Some were good and taught me better methods. Many others were finding their way and developing their skills, often by trial and error. Mistakes in management can be painful to watch, not to mention expensive.

Perhaps the most expensive and painful mistake is not treating employees with respect and encouragement. You simply can't build a team and keep your stars if they don't take pride in their work and feel respected.

I'd like to think this book can help some of those developing managers skip some of the painful lessons

What's next? Another management book?

I think I used all my thoughts on management in this book. 😊 But I do feel strongly about good management and who knows where inspiration will strike next?