

Monkey see, monkey do

Most management books say you should model the behavior you want from your employees. That's good advice—sometimes.

In some cases you can serve as a role model and still not get the results you seek. Employees may either not heed your example or find it hard to copy:

As a rule, demonstrate behavior when it's hard to explain or break down into steps. If you're training salespeople how to network at a conference, have them tail you as you meet and greet attendees. They're bound to pick up some tips by osmosis, even if you can't commit to paper exactly what you do that works.

Also demonstrate what you want if you face a credibility problem. Perhaps you're new and unproven— and you're much younger than the grizzled veterans you now oversee. If employees doubt your background or experience, showing them what you want them to do can convince them to follow your lead.

Don't model the desired behavior when your employees already understand what you need. They may benefit from more practice rather than observing you.

Finally, skip the modeling if you want people to figure it out for themselves. If there's more than one "right" way, let them troll for solutions.