EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

INSPIRING YOUR TEAM TOWARD ACCOMPLISHMENTS



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Small Business Solutions & Inspiration

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5 Common Leadership Mistakes You're Probably Making



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Being a leader comes with a host of responsibilities, including being a good influence on those you work with and who work for you. Whether you've recently landed your first leadership role or you've been managing employees for years, there are always lessons to be learned and improvements to be made.

Because a leadership role is important, you owe it to yourself and your staff to always be sharp. This means being wise enough to recognize your weak points, and humble enough to work on correcting them.

Here are five common mistakes that leaders at all levels struggle with, and how you can fix them.

Lacking humility

Holding any position of power can be good for your ego, but don't let that position of power create a false sense of security. It's important that your employees know you're not above your shortcomings.

"Leaders must not be afraid to recognize their own failures," said Joe Chiarello,

owner of two Murphy Business & Financial Corporation franchises. “We all fall down at some point, but what really matters is the way we pick ourselves up and learn from our mistakes. This is what helps us grow and makes us stronger.”

Leading by example and having transparency with your team if you do something wrong or make a bad decision can go a long way.

Thinking emotionally

It’s easy to let your feelings about a situation influence the choice, and sometimes it makes sense to do so. But in business, using emotions as your sole justification for any choice is a bad practice. Your team needs to see the facts and logic backing up your choices if you want them to trust you.

“(When you’re) making decisions based on emotion … the team may not truly understand the rationale behind the decision being made, and in many cases, rationale may not exist,” said Christopher Ayala, partner at manufacturing company Gardner & Co. “This can lead to confusion, uncertainty of future roadmap plans or the validity of the decisions over time, slowly chiseling away at the effectiveness of the leader.”

When it comes to making a decision, he suggests taking a deep breath, stepping back and holding your tongue, then thinking.

Making emotional moves can lead to authorizing decisions without a full understanding, too. You don’t want to make decisions because you feel you have to. As a leader, you may find yourself in a position to make choices about things outside your area of expertise.

As a leader, you should be sensible enough to not make a final decision without consulting the people in your company who do have experience in these areas.

“While you may not fully understand that particular subject area you need to authorize; you do understand logic. Use this opportunity to understand why this recommendation is being made and what fail-safes your team has built into the process should the result not be what is expected,” said Jay Deakins, founder and CEO of Deacom. “A thorough cross-examination will confirm that there is a solid foundation for how the proposal was made and that all considerations were carefully explored.”

Avoiding conflict

One of the most difficult adjustments a new leader has to make is learning how to handle disagreements or problems that arise within the group. You may want to come off as fair and balanced but avoid calling people out for their negative behavior to avoid potential conflict. Doing so will hurt your whole staff more if you don't nip an issue in the bud.

"Managers often veer away from confrontation and try to avoid it at all costs. But when performance or personality issues go unaddressed, they fester and set an overall tone that minimizes the urgency of correcting mistakes," said Mark Feldman, vice president of marketing at Building Engines. "If there is (an) issue, it's best to address it right away when the situation is fresh."

Feldman notes managers incorrectly assume that a problem is the result of incompetence or poor performance when in actuality it's often a result of a misunderstanding of expectations.

"Create an environment that encourages continuous feedback, and be exact with dates and expected outcomes," he said.

Taking on unnecessary work

Leaders are typically hired or promoted to their positions because they know what needs to be done and how to do it. This may be accompanied by the mentality of "if you want something done right, do it yourself," which can be a dangerous attitude to have when managing a team.

Completing or tweaking your employees' work because it's not to your liking — or, similarly, failing to delegate tasks — not only creates more work for you, but also hinders your team from reaching its full potential.

"When leaders take on the responsibility of completing a team member's work, they are actually doing the team and themselves a disservice," said Nancy Mellard, national leader of CBIZ Women's Advantage. "(It) is breeding ground for disengagement."

According to Mellard, by getting into this habit, a talented team member may bring a project to only 75 percent completion, assuming the leader will finish the rest. As a result, performance will move in the wrong direction, while the leader

takes on more responsibility for the team's overall project demands.

"As leaders, we must push our teams to go beyond the satisfactory. It's different than delegating — it's challenging your team to take it upon themselves to perform better each time, and working alongside them to facilitate the process," she added.

"Empowerment is a tremendous tool — trust your staff's expertise and their ability to do their job. Give them clear direction and parameters, (and) be available to them," said Linda Lefebvre, owner of the My Salon Suite Ottawa franchise.

Not having faith in your abilities

You've been entrusted with a leadership position because someone else trusts your judgment. Consistently second-guessing yourself can rub off on others, and before you know it, no one trusts you. Don't be afraid to obey your gut instinct when it's right.

"While it's important to listen to others, employees and clients alike, sometimes this can be very dangerous to an innovative startup. If you truly believe in what you are doing, it's OK to listen only to yourself sometimes. (Be) loyal to your internal compass," said Moran Zur, CEO of SafeBeyond.

Additional reporting by Nicole Taylor. Some source interviews were conducted for a previous version of this article.

Leadership Language: Why Your Word Choices Matter



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Common wisdom about leadership often favors “leading by example,” so you might not think too much about the way your team interprets what you say. But the truth is, the words and phrases you use can have a very real impact on your team’s morale and productivity.

“Words are important,” said Isaac Oates, CEO of Justworks, an HR, benefits and payroll platform. “It’s through our words that we communicate our intentions. They are the main tools that we have for sharing our vision with our teams.”

This is especially true when you’re discussing an employee’s performance and engagement, said Vip Sandhir, founder and CEO of employee engagement platform HighGround. Leaders’ conversations about performance can have the biggest impression on their team members.

“Performance management is going through a renaissance,” Sandhir told Business News Daily. “The importance of that conversation and how it’s done [is changing]. It was typically one-sided, judging individuals based on numbers. But neuroscience research on how the brain reacts to conversations shows that [this

type of conversation] can trigger a threat response."

If, for example, you start a performance discussion by telling them they are a 3 or 4 out of 5, or threatening the employee's status at the company, that person will perceive it as unfair and judgmental, Sandhir said. The conversation will then be steered in that direction, he added. Instead, you should frame these conversations to focus on the employee and his or her career goals, to show that you want to work together to help that person improve, Sandhir said. **[See Related Story: Common Communication Failures (And How to Fix Them)]**

Making the most of your communication

Every employee is different and therefore will respond best to different types of motivational language. Stacey Philpot, a principal at Deloitte Consulting, said it's important to plan your words and phrases to ensure that you connect with your employees in a meaningful way.

"The most impactful leaders are the ones who think about how they will energize their people," Philpot said. "They know what makes their people feel confident and likewise what drains their energy. Rather than talking about plans or tactical objectives, they are able to link their employees' current circumstances with some kind of opportunity or outcome that they will care about."

Oates, who has a military background, noted that straightforward, action-oriented phrases that relate to your company's core values can be very motivational if you have a strong company culture.

"Some of our core company values are 'grit' and 'simplicity,' [so] I use phrases without a lot of fluff to motivate team members — phrases like, 'Let's do this!', 'Keep doing what you're doing' and 'We are laser-focused on XYZ,'" Oates said.

But there's no single "magic phrase" that will always inspire your team to achieve its best; motivational leadership comes from an authentic emotional connection with your team, said James Rohrbach, CEO of language school Fluent City.

"Look your colleagues in the eye [and] ask them how they are," Rohrbach said. "Really listen to the answers, and tell them regularly what you are grateful for in their work and why."

To this end, it's helpful to include employees in the ongoing conversation about the company's mission, and how their work aligns with it, said Shaun Ritchie,

CEO of EventBoard, a provider of meeting tools and workforce analytics.

“Check in on progress through a regularly scheduled, preferably face-to-face meeting, to align on progress and build trust,” Ritchie said. “If you’re doing that at appropriate intervals, you’ll have the confidence that the right things are being worked on, that issues are addressed before they become problems, [that] your team is held accountable and that you have the information you need to make decisions. Using encouraging but knowledgeable language helps to implement objectives and key results at all levels in our organization.”

“I like to let everyone know that their work is important and I appreciate the effort they put into all assignments, no matter how small,” added Kim Paone, senior vice president of Highwire Public Relations. “I think encouraging people to take on projects they have an interest in makes them work harder and, overall, produces better results.”

Learning the language of leadership

Even if you manage a global team with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, it’s still important to master the “language of leadership,” said Ray Carvey, executive vice president at Harvard Business Publishing.

“We’re connected by so many shared human experiences that enable us to live, grow and interact in universal ways,” Carvey said. “Whatever our industry, whatever our country [or] language, we all have to deal with the same business basics in order to run our companies successfully. It’s these common business situations and concerns that unite and move us forward.”

Despite these commonalities, it is still important to remember cultural differences that might impact the way your words are interpreted. Richard Stevenson, head of corporate communications at cloud-based ecommerce platform ePages.com, noted that having a clear, universal sense of mission is essential, but international staffers may expect and value differing styles of communication.

“I find that American and British talent thrive on very open and personalized feedback and an emphasis on development needs, while central European staff tend to relax more when there’s a structure to feedback, numeric inputs and reference to agreed goals and KPIs,” Stevenson told Business News Daily. “Be prepared to wear different hats day-to-day and do experiment in order to bring out the best in each of them.”

Philpot reminded leaders that motivating employees takes dedication and time. A one-off message of encouragement or the occasional “pat on the back” won’t be enough; you need to keep working at it and refining your message, she said.

“It can be like tossing a balloon into the air — with time, it is bound to descend,” Philpot said. “Sincerity, repetition and consistency of communication over time is what really makes the difference.”

How Leaders Shape Company Culture



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The words “workplace culture” often bring to mind companies like Google or Pixar, with bright colors, open offices, company social activities, and an atmosphere of fun as well as hard work. The reality, however, is that a strong workplace culture does not have to be fun-loving to be satisfying – and if the culture is not already satisfying for your employees, then a foosball table is not going to help.

Prem Kumar, senior director of product for employee engagement solutions provider TINYPulse, defined workplace culture as the “ethos of the organization. It’s what motivates, inspires and drives your organization. It’s a sum of each employee’s values, knowledge and interactions with one another.”

S. Chris Edmonds, author of “The Culture Engine” and founder of The Purposeful Culture Group, narrows it further: “Culture is how the organization is operating: how people treat each other, what methods are in place [for interaction].” To Edmonds, successful culture, whether your company prefers T-shirts or ties, boils down to trust, respect and dignity.

“Perks are cool, and if we look at Silicon Valley in its heyday, we may think we need things like scooters and world-class chefs, but if people are stabbing each

other in the back, it's not a good culture," he said. "It's about leaders treating each employee as a legitimate person and an asset, an attractive player who can be the face of the company."

Kumar added that this attitude is apparent in how a company can embrace diversity: "At its best, workplace culture is not only derived from a diverse employee base but drives them to be better as a collective whole."

The role of the leader

Leaders, especially senior leaders, have not been asked to examine the culture aspect of the company, but it's becoming more important than ever. Edmonds said that the inherent impatience of millennials drives the need. The new generations are not content to put in 25 years with a company to get a gold watch. Rather, "they want a place where they are valued, mentored and allowed to work where they do their best. It comes down to trust, respect and dignity," he said.

The first step for any leader looking to improve the workplace culture is to determine the values that reflect the company.

"All of the companies we've found to be truly successful are led by people who embrace that which makes them different and use it as a competitive advantage," Kumar said.

Once you have determined the core values that define your organization, you need to determine what concrete behaviors reflect those values. These too vary by organization. For example, a retailer with the value of "doing more for the customer" might have employees offer to help carry bags to the customer's car, while a mechanic shop with the same value might have free detailing with every repair.

Internally, of course, you can't go wrong with the core values of treating everyone with respect, trust and dignity. However, one company might give management the freedom to give time off for excellent behavior; others might have a group social to celebrate an occasion.

One key behavior TINYPulse studies have found that's central to all successful workplace cultures is transparency. "Transparency at its heart is paying people the respect of bringing them along on your journey – whether it's explaining why

a decision was made with honest detail or holding yourself and others accountable. This is key to a great culture," Kumar said.

Leading by example

Printing your company's values on T-shirts and posters is not enough. It's up to the leaders to model them, from the CEO to the direct manager. When management models the defined values and behaviors, employees start to follow suit. Again, the clearly defined behaviors are key, as they make it easy for managers to point out when someone is not following the company values (and give workers the ability to do the same for management).

"Culture is not something you can delegate to HR. You need to [model the behaviors] yourself because managers are looking to you," said Edmonds.

Edmonds noted that an improved culture leads to improved productivity – and that often leads to promotions.

"We regularly see performance go up 30 to 35 percent, and service up 40 percent or more as a result of improving the culture," he said. "The problem is that if the leader who championed the culture moves up, the new leader may change the culture and undo all the good."

Therefore, senior leadership must stay dedicated to the new culture, said Edmonds. "The behaviors have to become ingrained so that it survives the change of leadership and the organization can evolve with its mission."

What Makes a Great Leader? 7 Pros Share Their Views



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Throughout history, much has been written about what it means to be a leader. Ancient Chinese military general and "Art of War" author Sun Tzu described a leader as one who "cultivates the moral law, and strictly adheres to proper methods and discipline." Nineteenth-century historian Thomas Carlyle believed leaders were born and not made, while English philosopher Herbert Spencer argued that leaders were the result of the society in which they lived.

The decades that followed brought countless studies and research reports that detailed a wide variety of leadership skills, styles and characteristics, with researchers identifying distinct leader "types." Some authors even devoted their work to all the personal factors that influence an individual's approach to management.

With all of these differing schools of thought, it's clear that there's no single definition of leadership. What works for one leader may not necessarily work for another, depending on the circumstances and personality type. But there's one thing that nearly every academic, historian and even leaders themselves agree upon: A true leader must be able to inspire his or her team.

Business News Daily spoke with current business leaders about what leadership means to them, and how leaders can achieve the ultimate goal of inspiring others. [See Related Story: Inspiring Leadership Quotes]

Leaders can get the best out of people. "Today's top leaders are consistent with their approach, get their hands dirty and create a company culture that will last long after he or she [has left]. 'Comfort zones' are almost nonexistent under strong leadership, because each team member is pushed to their full potential. Great leaders also hire and inspire other great leaders, whom they trust to carry out the company mission and instill a sense of purpose that touches each and every staff member." – *Tom Villante, co-founder, chairman and CEO of payment processing company* YapStone

Leadership is all about giving and serving. "It is lonely at the top, but that's no excuse for not giving generously of your time, your experience and your encouragement to your team — and never expecting any of that in return. You are the person in the unique position of finding or uncovering strengths in people, leveraging them and celebrating them. If you're going to lead, and lead well, you have to put it all out there every day, regardless of the outcome. Leaders who hold back will eventually hold their teams back." – *Tricia Sciortino, president of* eaHELP*, a provider of virtual assistant services*

Leadership requires ambition. "Leaders are described with a mouthful of adjectives, such as passionate, visionary, charismatic, motivational and encouraging. However, I propose leadership is something simpler. It is ambition. Ambition creates hard work, determination and an unconditional desire to achieve. It generates an absolutely contagious energy that people follow and join naturally. If you are a leader in your organization, there is only one thing you need to understand about your role: never let your ambition fade." – *Corey Baggett, co-founder of ad technology firm* AdBoom Group

Good leaders have a good attitude. "A good leader can hold his or her emotions in check, especially in tough situations. For example, maybe you lost your best client, or a deal you've been working on falls through. Regardless, it's important for leaders to guide a team through challenging times, encouraging them and remaining positive along the way. Team morale is heavily contingent upon a leader's attitude." – *David Moore, founding partner and regional vice president of* Addison Group *staffing firm*

Leadership means being in touch with your people. "A leader places the people around him or her in a position that sets them up for success. This is a difficult task, because a leader must have an in-depth understanding of each individual, such as understanding their career goals and knowing what motivates them. By being committed to helping each person achieve their own personal goals, the leader sets the organization up for greatness. Leaders are [also] good listeners. They listen to verbal and nonverbal cues to understand [what is] occurring in the organization. This allows you to address problems before they become big issues." – *Andor Kovacs, CEO and founder of property restoration brand* Restoration 1

Leaders set the right example. "Leadership is setting an example in the way you act each day, while focusing on the bigger picture. It's about setting the tone for your team and organization in the way you interact with your own staff, your business partners and your customers. As a leader, it is your responsibility to establish goals, innovate, motivate and trust. A passionate and compassionate leader can energize a company. Set an example of cooperation, trust and openness. Focus on solutions and positivity instead of finding faults and blame for actions." – *Richard Kissane, president and CEO of Premium Franchise Brands, parent company of JAN-PRO and Maid Right Franchising*

Leaders can't stand alone. "The out-and-out leader in today's volatile and uncertain business environment had better not distance him or herself from the heat of the action. Demonstrating the competence to assess, decide and execute in a growing business drives confidence in the leader. Similarly, a great leader of an enterprise stands on the shoulders not of 'managerial Muppets' who obediently do as they are directed, but of other leadership giants who have different and complementary leadership skills. A business with only one leader will remain forever a small business." – *Richard Hytner, deputy chairman of Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide and author of "*Consiglieri: Leading from the Shadows*" (Profile Books, 2014)*

Additional reporting by Chad Brooks.

Are You an Effective Leader? 3 Questions to Ask Yourself



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Being a leader is all about motivating and guiding people toward accomplishments. But how do you know if you're actually getting "leadership" right?

You can (and should) get objective feedback from your team and your superiors about what you're doing and whether it's working. But there's one more person to consider when gaining insight and opinions about your work: yourself.

If you want to gauge your own effectiveness as a leader — and figure out which direction to go next — answer these three questions as honestly as you can.

What am I doing to empower people?

As a leader, your most important asset is your influence, said Richard Lorenzen, CEO of Fifth Avenue Brands. Without influence, you can't motivate your team to reach their goals. And how do you gain influence? By adding value to your team's lives and empowering them to do their jobs well each day.

Lorenzen said self-reflection about your influence and the effect you have on your team is crucial to evaluating your own effectiveness.

“All leaders need to spend at least some time in reflection each day, because that is ultimately how we assimilate all of the … feedback that we are constantly receiving,” he told Business News Daily. “[This] conscious habit not only allows you to measure your progress at the end of each day, but also to become more aware of opportunities to empower and add value to people as you go through your day.”

Empowerment can also come from sincerity and transparency with your employees. Moe Glenner, leadership expert and author of “PlusChange: Genesis of Innovation” (Lid Publishing, 2016), said leaders should say what they mean and mean what they say, to build trust among their team. They should also be keeping their team informed about what’s happening in the company, even if it seems small and insignificant at the time.

“Lack of information, misinformation or [sharing] on a ‘need-to-know’ basis [creates] for frustration, disillusionment and disengagement — all mortal enemies to the well-oiled team,” Glenner said. “By keeping everyone informed and on a timely basis, problems are discovered earlier and the team works smoother.”

How am I affecting my employees’ experience?

Empowerment of your team is important, but it’s likely not the only effect your leadership style is having on them. S. Chris Edmonds, founder and CEO of The Purposeful Culture Group and author of “The Culture Engine” (Wiley, 2014), said you need to think about how well you’re serving your employees’ needs, because employees who feel trusted and respected will feel more motivated to serve the company.

“A leader can evolve only by learning how his or her plans, decisions and actions impact the employee experience,” Edmonds said. “With that information, the leader can assess what to do more of — and less of — to create that safe, inspiring and productive team culture.”

Edmonds said the best way to focus on this is by looking at your “outcome” in terms of the energy of your work environment, rather than the processes and results.

“Leaders must observe, monitor and measure employee confidence, optimism, proactive skill application, proactive problem solving, etc. daily,” Edmonds said. “With that data, leaders can revise their messaging, clarify the direction and strategy, communicate frequently and learn daily to increase the health and quality of their work environment.”

What is my end goal, and how do I get there?

When you become a leader, you’re suddenly responsible for a lot more of the day-to-day workings of the business, and with that comes a lot of extra work. That’s why it’s so vital for leaders to constantly assess their ultimate reason for doing that work: the end goals their company expects them to achieve.

“Whether it is a long-term or short-term goal or project, [you need] to have that in mind to help prioritize what is important on any given day,” said Jennifer Lemcke, chief operating officer of Weed Man USA lawn care franchise.

Jay Deakins, founder and CEO of enterprise resource planning software company Deacom, noted how easy it is to get caught up in smaller tasks that do nothing to “move the needle” or get you closer to reaching your goals. You may think things like project-update meetings and team conference calls are pushing you toward progress, but they may not really be worth all the time they take up, he said.

“Leaders need to reduce the amount of time being wasted on the minutiae,” Deakins said. “Whether it is delegating responsibilities to other team members or adjusting the internal processes, they need to make time to step back and identify what they can do today to drive business growth tomorrow.”

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