

The 7 Ways Leaders Get in their own Way!

If you're like most managers you're under constant pressure to deliver results with an ever-increasing workload. In order to effectively deliver those results, your job is to lead in a way that will inspire, stimulate and engage your people. One of the biggest challenges you face is managing your own workload and also taking the time to effectively assist your direct reports to grow and develop.

Here are 7 ways many managers stab themselves in the foot without meaning to~ some of these may also be getting in your way of doing great work:

1. Accessibility

In coaching leaders I've seen both extremes:

Being too Accessible - for goodness sake, close your office door and focus on getting your top priorities for the day completed. I have had some leaders start with 2 hours a day of closed door focused work time. Be sure to tell your team members the designated times of day your door will be closed. Also tell them that unless they're bleeding or on fire do not knock on your door!

Being Invisible - your people want to see you, talk to you and connect with you. Come out of your office and check-in with your team members, ask them what they're top 3 priorities are right now, give them positive feedback, be visible and available (within reason).

Take for example, let's examine a new manager I worked with, I'll call her "Celeste". Celeste believed she was very available to her staff as she kept her office door open most of the day. However, in a leadership assessment survey, it was revealed that her direct reports did not feel she was approachable. Her team members wanted her to come out of her office and make herself physically more available to them.

2. Not Keeping your Word

People are watching you. To build trust, it is important that you keep your word. Trust is often broken inadvertently.

People need to see us delivering on commitments and keeping promises. We can easily break our word unintentionally. For example, a client told me a story about making an offhanded comment in a meeting. Without giving it much thought, she offered support to her team on a project. But she didn't follow up on this item. Her team members interpreted her comment of support as a "commitment." Having completely forgotten about this, she had inadvertently planted seeds of distrust with some team members that came back to haunt her in a subsequent meeting. Don't give your word unless you plan to keep it. Not keeping your commitments is the number one way to shatter the trust of your team members.

3. Believing you have to have all the answers

If you have employees coming to your office with questions or seeking advice too often you may have created an environment of dependency. Sometimes this goes hand- in-hand with being too accessible.

If every time someone comes to your door with a problem, you tell them how to solve it, you've just missed a golden opportunity to further the growth and development of your direct report.

This is ineffective for a number of reasons: 1) people start to dumb down 2) you are not leveraging their brain power- what you hired them for in the first place because 3) the minute you start telling people what to do, they stop thinking! Instead of solving the problem ask a few questions like: What do you think would be the best approach to solving this? What are your options? What is the first thing you need to do? etc. etc....and when are you going to get back to me on this and let me know the result? Very quickly, your people will begin to ask themselves these questions and start coming to you with their own solutions.

PS: You don't have to have all the answers and it is okay to ask for help when you need it!

4. Your Feedback may be Lacking

People will be frustrated if they're micro-managed or if they're left alone so much they never receive feedback of any kind. Most people complain that they only time they get feedback is when something goes wrong. There is a lot more constructive rather than acknowledgement feedback given in most

organizations. And even the constructive feedback isn't usually delivered effectively.

You must be in tune with each individual's feedback needs and be able to deliver positive reinforcement or a constructive message in a way that is respectful, impactful and relevant to your team member.

Most people are acknowledgement deprived at work. When someone has gone the extra mile to meet a deadline or complete a project with excellence, and no appreciation is given, what are the chances they will want to extend themselves again? This is not a good equation for galvanizing engagement from your team members.

5. You Feel You have to Do all the Work

You sometimes feel frustrated because you are not spending enough time on the kind of work you feel you do best and what you were hired to do.

You get a lot done but too much time is spent putting out fires or getting bogged down in the daily operations. You would like to spend more time on the high value work you love. You have a hard time letting go of your power and delegating to others. You need to let go and delegate more. Remember the leader with the shortest to-do list wins!

For example, let's explore the story of a past client I worked with, I'll call him Joe. Joe was an open-door policy manager. He worked 60-80 hours a week and most weekends. His employees were not nearly as engaged as they could've been. His wife and children missed him. He was tired a lot and even with working all these hours, he never felt quite caught up. Through our coaching work together Joe discovered an effective way to delegate that created a more engaged, accountable team. Joe is now able to focus on getting more great work done. He doesn't work late nights and weekends anymore. He is happier. His family is happier. His team is thrilled and the results have never been better!

6. Your need to share too much-

You may think you are a pretty good communicator but I see leaders making all sorts of communication errors. One of the most common mistakes relates to a need to "share too much."

For example, let's say one of your employees is telling you a story about a challenge they're experiencing. Before they've even finished the story you've jumped in, "I know exactly what you mean, 5 years ago I was in a similar situation and....blah, blah, blah. In the blink of an eye, the focus of the conversation has shifted from being all about your employee to being all about you.

How do you think your employee is feeling right now? If you want to have conversations that further the growth and development of others do not usurp the conversation and fill the room with your stories. This tendency to entertain or give advice is not helpful in this context. We've all done it and it doesn't work.

Instead, focus on being present and engaged. Deep listening and asking insightful questions with the intent to draw people out and help them solve their own problems will transform your conversations. Being present to others is fundamental to building strong relationships. People will leave these interactions with a sense of validation and expansion. In order to achieve this you must leave your need to problem solve or tell your tale at home and come to the conversation with open ears and a curious mind.

As you bring more consciousness to your tendency to "share too much" and begin to practice being more "interested" instead of "interesting" you will build more trust and respect from others ultimately strengthening your relationships.

7. Your Need to be Liked

Let's face it, we all have a need to be liked. This is part of being human. However, sometimes this need gets in your way of dealing with issues in an effective manner. By avoiding dealing with unwanted behaviors that impact the morale and productivity of the rest of team- the seeds of de-motivation begin to take root.

For example, many years ago I worked with a CEO, I'll call him Sid. Sid had a high need for approval. He also avoided conflict at all costs. This avoidance started to result in a loss of approval and respect from his colleagues. The difficulties began when Sid tried to manage communications by email so he wouldn't have to deal with these situations in person or over the phone. In many cases, the conflict escalated as messages were misinterpreted due to the lack of non-verbal cues.

Countless hours were wasted in wordsmithing and firing emails back and forth with neither party feeling there was any real resolution to the problem. Sid learned some guidelines and skills to conduct these conversations more effectively. Sid soon began to step up, speak up and nip issues in the bud before they became completely unworkable. His colleagues took note and acknowledged him for his willingness to deal with workplace challenges even if he didn't always do it perfectly.

We must not allow our need to be liked to get in the way of us doing what is best for our team, dept. or organization. This includes dealing with issues in person and in a timely fashion versus avoiding them.