



Breaking Bad Leadership Habits

A Look At the Top 10

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While most companies acknowledge that leaders need to be developed and that systems need to be in place to support high performance leadership, there are just as many who don't. In fact, for every organization that develops their leaders strategically or when the need is so great, they have no choice, there are just as many who still don't.

Given the lack of training for people in, or moving into, leadership roles, you'd think that it's easy to one day just show up and lead. However, we know that is not the case. The reality is that ineffective or bad leadership habits are created by practicing without any training or understanding of the actual skills that are at the foundation of effective leadership.

Overusing Strengths

When we lack the proper training and skill development as leaders, we are forced to rely solely on our hard-wired strengths to lead others. Unfortunately, this actually causes us to overuse these strengths, and to use approaches that are not necessarily effective when leading others.

For example, a leader who is exceptional at seeing the big picture and focusing on the future may get his/her people excited about the vision, but if that is the only direction they provide, employees will be lost in terms of what to do, when and how to do it in order to achieve that vision.



And here we are blaming millennials for not staying in one place when it's actually a deficit of leadership skill that's causing it.

Failure to Develop Weaknesses

Equally, without development, we end up at the mercy of our weaknesses—or less developed functions of our personality / brain—which will undermine our approach to leading people. We often see CEO clients, whose natural strengths are to be in control and decisive, being passive and powerless when it comes to managing the performance of their direct reports or resolving interpersonal issues. This is the result of not having developed up the skills and confidence required to effectively use the relational functions of their brains, so they simply avoid the discomfort and feelings of incompetence by not addressing these issues and/or performance gaps.

Focus on Good vs. Effective

The deficit in leadership skills and proper development prior to and throughout the career of a leader results in inaccurate beliefs about their abilities as leaders. It also shifts the measurement to “am I a good leader?”, in other words do people like me, from the real goal of being an effective leader.

When we lack an understanding of the actual skills involved in being a leader, and focus our self-assessment on the wrong criteria, bad habits emerge and are reinforced as being the right way to lead. These bad leadership habits will last throughout their careers, impede their effectiveness and eventually get passed down to the next generation.

If you have ever tried to change a habit, you know how difficult it is to break. By the time many leaders get the training they need, they are already so set in their ways, that it takes even more developmental support to shift the behaviour...

10 Most Common Bad Leadership Habits

Here are ten of the most common bad habits leaders develop without proper training and developmental support:

Habit #1: Treating everyone as though they are just like you

The CEO's we work with rarely have leadership training but consider themselves to be effective at leading. Most of them are effective at leading the business but are at a loss when it comes to leading people. Many believe that because they worked their way to the top and the business is successful that their leaders should be able to do it the same way.

When they can't, these CEO's don't believe it has anything to do with them and their own failure to develop their performance as leaders. Instead, these same leaders will complain about the next generation leaders and how they don't

know how good they have it, never changing their own approach to managing or developing their leaders to be more effective. After all, if they are great leaders without having done any development, why would anyone else need it?

Habit #2: Thinking the right person will fix your issues

Untrained leaders get in the habit of blaming a person, rather than looking at the issues strategically and systematically. Not looking at what the leaders need to be successful in their roles causes senior leaders to look outside their organization for someone to rescue them—what we refer to as magic bullet thinking.

They don't see that the leadership gap is caused by a lack of formal leadership training as well as absence of effective performance management practices through which leaders are held accountable to performance standards.

When the new person fails to save them, which they will since it's the same person who hired them without changing their own approach, they limp along rather than shooting forward with new energy and ideas as expected. In some organizations, we have seen this pattern repeated over and over, as the CEO or senior leader fires their 'weakest link' and never address their lack of effectiveness as the root cause of the performance gaps.

Habit #3: Thinking that if someone did their previous job well, they can lead

For those of you unfamiliar with the Peter Principle, it is a concept in management developed by Laurence J. Peter. He observed that people in a hierarchy tend to rise to their

"level of incompetence". This is one of the worst habits senior leaders develop and one that repeatedly stalls organizational progress. Few leaders, in our experience, have an accurate ability to assess the potential and readiness of their direct reports.

As a result, they promote an employee based on their success in previous jobs into a leadership role without any development support or defining of expectations.

Habit #4: Not listening to the advice of consultants/experts

Many leaders limp along with organizational issues because they believe they should be able to figure things out for themselves. They are of the mindset that they shouldn't have to spend money on the expertise and resources needed to support the business such as an organizational review, engagement surveys or succession plans. When they do spend money, they too often discount the results and refuse to listen to the feedback and advice from the consultants.

As consultants, we see this time and time again. We hear CEO's asking senior leaders why a strategic initiative cannot be done in-house even though no one has ever undertaken such a project. A client of ours recently left her employer along with 75% of the senior leadership team after the founders refused to follow the advice of the consultant they hired to address organizational issues. When they didn't like the recommendation, they simply fired the consultant, as though they never received the advice, and are now struggling to stay afloat.

Habit #5: Not delegating decision making authority

When a leader doesn't delegate decision making authority as a natural part of making sure things get done and employees are developed, they foster dependence on themselves and create a bottleneck that impedes success. While it may be a boost to their ego that everyone must come to them, it creates a dependency on the leader causing employees to stop speaking their minds.

Since the leader acts as the decision-maker and the person "who knows it best", employees feel less inclined to learn or look for solutions. In essence, "if you are treated like a child, you'll start acting like a child". Instead of making decisions on their own, employees continue to run everything by the leader. This doesn't just harm the employees' ability to learn and develop, but also hits productivity levels.

Habit #6: Allow Excessive Inclusion

Many new leaders aren't accustomed to having authority and try to reduce or eliminate the natural power of their role. They are of the mindset that they are "Just one of the guys," "Any idea is a good idea," or "All employees should be able to do things the way they think best." While there are times for inclusion, having everyone included in the decision-making process just so that no one feels left out is inefficient, time consuming and often ends in power plays.

Leaders run the risk of appearing to be incapable of making decisions on their own. They can slow down planning processes or

bring people to meetings that have nothing to contribute. This so-called collaborative decision-making process only serves to frustrate those employees who have earned the right to participate in decisions.

Habit #7: Treating everyone the same

Many leaders behave as though "one-size fits all" when it comes to communicating to employees. They expect employees should figure out what they are saying if they don't understand. When something goes wrong because of a misunderstanding, they figure it's the employees' fault. Without training, leaders don't realize they need to adapt their style to meet the needs of employees rather than the leader expecting the employee to adapt and figure out what is expected of them.

Habit #8: Defending themselves and their performance

Most leaders like to believe they are doing a good job of leading. These leaders would rather not participate in a 360 Feedback Process or find reasons why they shouldn't take the feedback seriously. We have had many coaching sessions listening to clients rationalizing away feedback,



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so they can discount it. At the end of the day, if a leader's energy is going into defending their image as a great leader, they really aren't going to objectively assess their capabilities, nor are they going to change their behavior.

Habit #9: Failing to deal with poor performance

Because they have never learned how, many leaders don't deal with performance problems. They are afraid to upset employees by telling them they aren't performing well and put off having the discussion. When they observe an employee doing something differently than what they expected, they don't correct them. Internally, they rationalize why they shouldn't.

This habit causes leaders to make excuses for employees who fail to deliver what they expect and may complain to others rather than go to the employee themselves and correct their performance. This leads to further problems on the team and under-performing employees who may not even know they are doing anything wrong.

Habit #10: Avoiding conflict

The habit of not dealing with conflict gets in the way of driving performance for results. Leaders

who let infighting and dysfunctional behavior amongst team members exist usually expect employees to resolve it themselves by developing conflict skills that they won't develop themselves.

When conflict exists, the unskilled leader withdraws, leaving his or her team to work it out on their own. They may seem to others that they are incapable of leading, managing or correcting the performance of their subordinates or team. Often, the most dysfunctional employee's behavior creates a barrier to the growth and cohesiveness of the team. Team meetings become a waste of valuable time and costs the business large amounts of money in lost productivity.

Stop Bad Leadership Habits Before They Get Started

Instead of letting new managers take a trial-and-error approach that potentially leads to bad habits, organizations need to see leadership development as a key business strategy. Leaders are developed, not born and they need to learn skills, practice, gain experience and be coached and mentored to develop effective leadership habits.

It's estimated that currently, as many as two million millennials step into their first leadership role each year. Organizations need to focus on helping these first-time managers learn effective leadership skills before they take on management positions and provide support for them during their learning stage. Providing leadership skills prior to and during their first year can be a foundation for ongoing success.

Training Alone Doesn't Create Strong Leaders—developing effective leadership habits over time does

Senior leaders must get out of the way of next gen leaders getting training and experience and need to be prepared to develop themselves. Leadership development initiatives are doomed to fail without senior leadership buy in and participation. We have seen this time and again. When a senior leader doesn't know how to mentor, feels threatened or offended by the new things his direct report is suggesting (“Why don't we have an agenda and a chairperson for our meetings, so they don't go off the rails.”) and shuts it down with a devaluing comment, it can undo even the best leadership training.

Want to learn more?

Watch our complimentary webinar – **Breaking Bad Leadership Habits** – where we will build on the information from this article as well as explore the 10 most common bad leadership habits that leaders develop without training, how to stop these habits before they get started and how to replace bad habits with good ones. As well we will look at how organizations can train employees, especially the Millennials to build a foundation for leadership skills before they even take on a lead or supervisory role.

Click below to access our latest webinars or to learn more about permissive leadership.

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Do your leaders feel powerless?

Our **LEADING WITH AUTHORITY** program is specifically designed to transition leaders from permissive behaviours that get in the way of organizational success to leading assertively and with authority by building their confidence and their skills. Contact us for more details on bringing this program in-house.

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Caliber Leadership Systems is a Toronto-based consulting firm working with global clients striving to achieve their full potential. We specialize in helping clients build the infrastructure—systems, processes, structures, behaviour and leadership practices—necessary to prepare for and master the next level of organizational growth and development.

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