

7 LEADERSHIP BLIND SPOTS THAT DRIVE YOUR TEAM CRAZY

Carey Nieuwhof

If you lead, you are more than aware of the incredible responsibility you have toward others. Leadership, by definition, is not a solo sport. You're leading others, and how you do it ultimately determines how effective you are as a leader. It also means you need to become exceptionally self-aware of your weaknesses.

If you think about it, the leaders you've probably liked the least have been the least self-aware. As a shortcut, here are 7 common things leaders do that drive their team crazy. I know this because I have done the first 5 at different points in my leadership.

1. Underestimating how much work it takes

You're in an incredible position of trust as a leader. When you say things, your team does its best to make them happen. But some leaders are notorious for underestimating how much time a task will take. Sometimes leaders fall into the trap of thinking they can be like God and simply speak things into being.

Of course, the leader hasn't properly estimated the impact this is going to have on the team. Underestimating how much work something takes can seem like an initial advantage because it makes seemingly impossible things happen. But it can also be incredibly demotivating to your team when you significantly underestimate how much work something will take.

Often leaders are afraid to ask how much work something will take because they fear leaders will say no. If you have a good team, that's almost never the case. They just want to know that *you* know and appreciate the effort and will allocate the budget and the staffing the proposal needs. And if you don't have enough budget or staffing, often your team will say yes anyway and make it happen. They just need your encouragement and understanding of what it will cost them.

If this describes you, next time take the time to sit down with your team and think through how much work it will take to get you there. Then plan for it. The fix can be that simple.

2. Impulsive, emotion-based decision making

I asked my amazing assistant what I do that drives her the most crazy. This was her pick. Yep, leaders are passionate. Even impulsive. They are used to creating something out of nothing. Sometimes that's good, as in *Hey, why don't we launch two campuses at once? Or hey, why don't we start a podcast and see if anything happens?*

Often, the impulsiveness and emotion are driven from a place of discontent with the status quo. That is, after all, the impetus to change. I may be bothered by something I think needs fixing immediately. I may be discontent about a situation I think the entire team needs to address immediately.

But not all discontent is holy. Sometimes my discontent comes from having a bad day, or being moody, or just deciding something on the spur of the moment. And then I almost always reverse the decision the next day or the next week. Or bump what was priority #1 down to priority #32 because it just isn't as important anymore. That's frustrating for people.

I've gotten better at this, but when my assistant senses it's happening, she's become great at asking "So are you serious about this or is this just how you feel in the moment?" Often that shakes me out of the moment, and I'll say "Right...I'm probably just upset about something. Let me sleep on it." Or I'll ask her what she thinks (or check with some other leaders) and they'll tell me I'm just worked up about something and I need to relax.

Just because you're upset about something as a leader doesn't mean it should become the top priority of the organization.

3. Being indecisive

I've seen indecisive leadership sink more than a few ships. Your job as a leader is to make decisions that make things happen. That doesn't mean you make decisions all by yourself. The best leaders always involve a team in their decision making. But you still need to make a decision.

What makes decision making hard at a senior leadership level is that it's only the toughest decisions that make it to you. All the easy decisions already got made long before they reached your desk.

- And that can lead to delay.
- Delay leads to paralysis.
- And paralysis leads to stagnation and decline.
- Delayed decision-making demotivates your team.

So make a decision, and create a process for making sure decisions get made regularly and quickly. Sure, every once in a while, you need to take a long time to make a decision. But far too many leaders use that as an excuse. Decide.

4. Being too decisive and not valuing input

Every problem has a flip side, and the flip side of being indecisive is being too decisive. Some leaders make instant decisions without any input from anyone else, and that is also frustrating to their teams.

I think it's a good practice for every senior leader to be a part of something they don't lead. I work with a couple of organizations on the side where I'm not the senior leader or where I sit on the board. It helps me realize what it feels like to *not* be the senior leader.

So, know that I really appreciate it when CEOs ask for my opinion, when they value my input when they seek my counsel. Even if I disagree with their decision, I know they consulted others, and that gives me confidence in their decision. As Andy Stanley has so aptly said, leaders who refuse to listen will eventually be surrounded by people who have nothing significant to say.

5. Creating an unsustainable pace

You can be tempted to burn the midnight oil as a leader. Most great leaders do at one time or another. But leaders can also create an unsustainable pace for their team. Your team feels guilty about going home long before you do. And when you're pounding out emails at 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. 7 days a week, it makes your team feel lazy. It also makes you look incredibly unhealthy.

I have a very strong appetite for work, but I've let my team know what my expectation for *them* is. Just because I work long hours (on a variety of things) doesn't mean everyone has to.

One of a leader's chief responsibilities is to create a sustainable pace for their entire team.'

6. Working too few hours

Sometimes leaders end up working too few hours. That's perhaps even more demotivating than working too many hours. Always work as hard as you expect your team to work. Even harder (but see above). Leaders who phone it in have no place in real leadership.

7. Expecting others to put in more than you're willing to put in

Leadership requires your all. If your organization requires donations, contribute—sacrificially. If your organization requires volunteers—volunteer for something, even though you get paid for your staff role. Never expect more from your team than you're willing to personally put in.

That doesn't mean you should always be first in and last to leave. You have to focus on roles in which you can contribute most. But it does mean you should be willing to go the extra mile. When a leader is working less passionately fewer hours than their team, the team loses both passion for the mission and respect for the leader.