

# Common Mistakes Made by Leaders



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Leadership is a concept and great skill that is only partially understood by many of those who have been given the profound responsibility of leading others to a common and valuable goal. It is easy to talk about the qualities of a good leader. Just mention Patton, Jobs, Roosevelt, Kennedy or Buffett and murmurs of approval will fill the room. However, if you read any of the biographies of these and other “super” leaders, a good deal of the text will be devoted to mistakes each made on the way to their specific greatness. This article is devoted to a sample of the common mistakes made by leaders of all sorts.

- The most precious and difficult thing for a CEO to obtain is a clear view of his world. People may wish to flatter him, spare him unpleasantness or hide a failure of their own. Their intentions are not always disingenuous. It’s just that his power as a CEO tends to cause people to distort their message by bending their words and actions to earn favors. CEOs who don’t recognize this fact are doomed to failure.
- Those Leaders who rule by fear are usually the most insecure. An interesting discovery was that these individuals actually believe their employees enjoy working for them, when in fact the fear they instill fosters hate and disgust and ineffectiveness.
- Excessive pressure on employees, combined with a single-minded focus to meet goals, will often kill initiative and creativity. The overbearing behavior of a Leader will inhibit openness and honesty; it will greatly diminish the quality of any team.
- By selecting followers rather than potential Leaders, the Leader of an organization, a department or a team dramatically limits its potential for growth and its ability to recognize problems brewing on the horizon.
- Many misguided Leaders have the mentality that it is their role and duty to catch people doing something wrong. Once this kind of mentality permeates the culture of an organization, the employees become fearful. A sword-wielding Leader will never get the best from his or her employees.
- There is no such thing as “off the record.” It’s simply not good practice for Leaders to show weakness to others. Celebrate publicly; Cry alone. Leaders don’t open-up to people with their inner feelings of doubt or hurt - half don’t care, the other half are glad its you and not them! Nobody feels sorry for you for more than an hour, but they will never forget your moment of inappropriate vulnerability.

-Like it or not, a judgment will be made of the leader based on who influences her, who he spends time with and whose counsel she seeks. New leaders get in trouble by creating a little inner-circle of advisors that nobody can penetrate. This inner circle often leads to 'group-think' and can substantially limit new ideas, creativity and growth.

-Be very careful not to fall into the trap of cronyism. Any leader who pushes "his boys" often causes morale problems within the ranks. Practicing cronyism also can hurt the very people you are trying to help, especially if you push someone into a position before they are ready for the promotion.

-The handling of flatterers and bootlickers is an issue related to cronyism. In all companies, there are people who are very skillful in pleasing the boss by bearing good news, false cheer and by stroking the boss's ego. They are always looking for ways to make the boss happy, worrying about getting a lot of "face time" and serving their personal agendas and ambitions. Watch Out!

-Leaders should avoid bringing a substantial number of former colleagues with them when they move to a new position. A leader who drags "her team" along is likely to undermine the morale of the new company. It also will be very difficult to develop good rapport with new associates and communication channels will be harder to establish. Further, you will gain more credibility as a person of self-confidence and independent thought if you do not drag along with you a group of cronies as you move from job to job.

So, where does all this lead us to? The obvious conclusion is that leaders are not born to greatness Great leadership requires great thought, the ability to adapt, continual curiosity and great humility and it is hard work to become, over time, an effective and productive leader. Leaders must educate themselves, learn from their mistakes, (anyone remember learning to ride a bike as a child), involve their whole team and besides great curiosity, they must be rock solid honest.

Excerpted from our upcoming book, "The Field-Guide for Manager's and Supervisors." Be sure to review our recent book, "The Results-Focused Organization." I can be reached via email @ donz@sdwnet.com, Web @ sdwnet.com