

LEADERSHIP GEEKS

CHEAT SHEET



5 COMMON LEADERSHIP MISTAKES

AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

Often, we think of leadership in big, flashy terms: making multi-million dollar deals, eloquent speeches and presentations or turning around a company's fortunes. We also remember high-profile leadership mistakes (Enron, Volkswagen, Exxon, etc), and the ensuing corporate scandals.

In reality, for most of us, being a leader is much less glamorous. It's the hard day-to-day work of managing people and relationships, ensuring your team performs well, and trying to create a positive work environment. The stakes may be smaller but the challenges are just as difficult, and small, daily leadership mistakes add up over time to quiet failures.

Here's our handy Leadership Geeks Cheat Sheet that identifies 5 common leadership mistakes and how to avoid them:

1. NOT DELEGATING

This is a common pitfall for leaders, especially newer ones: a leader feels that his team can't do a particular task as well or as quickly as he can, so he avoids delegating. Even if the leader's time could be better spent on something more important, he doesn't want to see the task done by someone else if the quality will suffer -- even by a small margin.

By not delegating, you become a bottleneck for getting things done. This results in frustrated team members and missed opportunities. Imagine your staff waiting a few days for you to get time to finish a report so they can move forward with the rest of the project, when they could have easily done the report themselves.

HOW TO AVOID IT:

As a leader, you need to give up the urge to do everything yourself, so you have time and energy to focus on the bigger picture. Your job is to do the things that only you can do, and let your team help you with everything else. It's not always easy to delegate, but it's absolutely necessary for the growth of your team.

2. NOT ASKING FOR FEEDBACK AND IDEAS

Good leaders are good at giving feedback; great leaders are good at asking for feedback. Even though we know that feedback and communication are important for good leadership, we often forget to provide a system for receiving feedback and constructive criticism.

Getting feedback from your supporters can help you stay ahead of trends and take advantage of opportunities as they come up. Take the story of the MacDonalds corporation as an example. Although Ray Kroc had a deep commitment to his vision, he actively sought out new ideas and innovations that would help the business. In fact, it was advice from his franchise operators that pushed him to develop new products like the Big Mac and the Egg McMuffin. Though some of his new product experiments failed (have you ever heard of the Hula Burger?), on the whole the organization thrived because it stayed flexible and Kroc listened to feedback from franchisees.

HOW TO AVOID IT:

In your organization, are you the only one coming up with ideas? Make sure to allow channels for feedback from your employees or team members to help your team come up with the next 'Big Mac'! Spend time listening to your people and reward them when they come up with good ideas.

3. NOT VALUING YOUR PEOPLE

It can be tempting to take for granted the people who work for you. It takes time (and sometimes money) to invest in relationships, and you might feel like your resources could be spent elsewhere.

Unfortunately, this ignores the reality that as a leader, your followers and influence are your biggest asset. When Sam Walton was running Walmart, the company had a reputation for taking extremely good care of their employees. Walton gave every employee a chance to share in the company's success by allowing them to purchase Walmart stock options at a discount. He saw every employee as an associate of the business and wanted them to enjoy Walmart's success. After Walton passed away, Walmart has struggled with employees because the new leadership treated them more like replaceable cogs in a machine. The result may have been short term cost-cutting and profits, but long-term it's meant a downward spiral for Walmart's reputation and a breach of trust with its employees and customers.

HOW TO AVOID IT:

There's a saying that goes, "If you can make people around you successful, then you will be successful too." By valuing every single employee or team member, you will grow your personal and organizational success as well. Make your people feel like a valued part of the organization by allowing them to share successes, be it by stock options or other forms of rewards.

4. NOT GETTING IN TRENCHES

Although your 'job description' as a leader or manager is necessarily different from people working under you, you should be careful not to lose perspective about the day to day work of your team.

It's hard to know what your staff or team members are going through unless you periodically join them in the work they're doing. General George S. Patton famously said, "No good decision was ever made in a swivel chair." In other words, great leaders aren't afraid to get their hands dirty and spend time in the field. Patton realized the importance of seeing firsthand the hardships and challenges of his team, in order to better lead his men.

HOW TO AVOID IT:

Periodically join your team 'in the field' to better understand their strengths and struggles. In addition to gaining respect from your team by demonstrating you are not above working with them, you will also find yourself better equipped to make organizational decisions.

5. NOT HAVING A BIG ENOUGH VISION

Between thinking too big and not thinking big enough, most of us tend towards the latter. Whether it's fear of failure, or simply not taking the time, it's important to realize when we're short-selling ourselves with a weak vision of the future.

Although it might seem counterintuitive, bigger dreams may actually be easier to achieve than mediocre ones, because a grand vision inspires other people to help you. As Walt Disney said, "All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them." Walt built his Disney empire on storytelling. But what many people don't know is that Disney often used storytelling in his meetings with executives and team members to illustrate his vision for his company and legacy. Thanks to his vision and the people it inspired, Disney became one of the most important business and creative leaders of his time.

HOW TO AVOID IT:

Periodically join your team 'in the field' to better understand their strengths and struggles. In addition to gaining respect from your team by demonstrating you are not above working with them, you will also find yourself better equipped to make organizational decisions.

