

# TOP 20 HABITS OF HIGHLY UNSUCCESSFUL AND INEFFECTUAL LEADERS



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It's great to read books and articles about what the great leaders do so that we can model ourselves on the best, and I highly recommend that.

However, it's also worthwhile taking the time to understand what bad leaders do so that we can learn what to avoid which can be just as helpful.

Over my 25 years in leadership, here are some of the top habits of highly unsuccessful and ineffectual leaders that I have seen, and in some cases, their justification for having them.

These are habits best avoided, if possible!

## 1. Believe they have all the answers

They know that the reason that they have been put in charge is that they are smarter and better than everyone else. So when it comes to deciding strategy, solving problems, or resolving issues, there is no need, or point in involving anyone else.

One of my favourite quotes comes from Ken Blanchard "none is as smart as all of us."

Good leaders know this. They understand that our collective IQ far outweighs any individual IQ, and that it doesn't matter how smart you are you can't know everything.

## 2. React, don't respond

Driven by their emotions, they react quickly to situations without worrying about facts or the repercussions of their actions.

They can always show good emotional intelligence by apologizing later.

It's our EQ that determines how successful we will be as leaders, and good EQ allows us to manage our emotions. It enables us to understand our feelings, manage them and then take time to make

the right decision.

When we just react our thought processes are not fully optimal and this can cause us to make mistakes.

## 3. Take big risks, the bigger the better

They like to gamble and take big risks. Believing in the adage "Nothing Ventured Nothing Gained" and that Smart Risk taking is for wimps.

When I questioned a decision that one boss was taking his response was, "That's not your concern, I get paid big bucks to take the big risks and make the tough calls."

Personally, I thought he got paid the big bucks to take the right risks and to be successful, but what did I know.

Risk taking is key to success, as Mark Twain says, "why not go out on a limb, that is where the fruit is."

Good leaders focus on smart risk taking. They take their time to understand the situation, they understand the potential causes of failure, the probability of success and put plus in place to either mitigate that failure, respond to it quickly, or not take the risk if probability is too great.

## 4. Believe that talking about it and doing it are the same thing

I always remember the first boss I worked for, when the CEO asked him how it was going, he said: "It's going great, we have been discussing the problem for two days now." The only problem was, that was two days that the business couldn't operate, and we were no closer to finding a solution.

There is a time for talking, for agreeing on what needs to be done, but once we know what's needed then it's time for action.





## 5. Focus on blame not solutions

It's better to know whose fault it is so that we can fire them and make sure this doesn't happen again.

It's much easier to blame people than to accept our accountability and own up to our mistakes and failure. When we blame we give away our ability to fix things, to turn failure into success, which then contributes to being an ineffective and unsuccessful leader.

Good leaders understand the importance of accountability. When they refuse to blame and take ownership it sets the tone for the organization, it encourages others to take ownership and helps to create a culture of accountability.

## 6. Believe their own PR

There is a big difference between confidence and arrogance; the former helps build trust in the leader, the latter destroys it. As soon as you start to believe your own PR, then you are leaning more towards arrogance and starting down a path that is going to end in tears.

Arrogance clouds vision, it can make us feel that success is inevitable, and that we only have to turn up to succeed. But it doesn't work that way, anything worth achieving requires hard work and is going to have the occasional setback.

If our arrogance gets in our way of preparing for these challenges then this can seriously impact our ability to succeed.

Good leaders build confidence in themselves, their plans and in their teams.

## 7. Don't waste valuable time on planning and preparation

Sometimes you just have to dive and get it done. Don't worry about what's involved, or whether you're focused on the symptom or root cause, just do it.

My favorite comment was, "we can afford to spend time and money on planning; we just need to get started."

Which was interesting because we found the time and money to do it again correctly, after that first attempt failed badly.

I'm a big believer in the 5P rule Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance.

We need to make sure that we don't over prepare which can lead to procrastination and delay us from taking action, but we do need to make sure that we have done the minimum preparation needed.

## 8. Hire people beneath them

As a leader, it is critical that you are the most skillful and knowledgeable member of the team, that way everyone can focus on their job rather than working out how they could replace you.

I worked at one company where the boss told me that he liked to recruit from the bottom quartile because it kept the costs down. He then added, "the only problem with that was the results sucked." Who would have guessed that.

As leaders we should not be afraid to hire people who know more than we do, especially in some of the technically complex areas we may have to manage. A leader's job is not to know everything, not to be better than everyone, it's to get the best out of the team. One of the best ways to do that is to assemble the best possible team. If the leader can't or won't hire anyone better than themselves, then they become the limit of what the team can achieve.

## 9. Focusing on instant success

It's all about results, and if we find that they are not coming, then we need to move quickly on to another topic.

They believe that a lot of short-term success will lead to long-term success.

The challenge here is that we need to make sure that these short-term successes are sustainable and are aligned with our long terms goals.

If they are not, then they are just a distraction.

One of the best pieces of advice I know is Aim High, Start Small, and Keep Going.

This is because big successes are an accumulation of small successes, but they need to be the right successes. They need to be the ones that move us towards our overall goal.

When we get that right it acts as motivation and encourages our teams to continues as they can now see how success will be achieved.

## 10. Focus on the big picture, not the details

Don't worry about the details, focus on the big picture, as that will keep you motivated. We all know the devil is in the details, but that could lead to concerns, a lack of belief and even worse, demotivation.

As leaders we need to keep our eyes on both the big picture and the details.

We need to plan top-down, using our big picture vision, but then we need to confirm our plans bottom-up by checking on the details.

When we take this dual approach it will allow us to keep our

eyes on the prize and also know what things need to be done on a daily basis to keep us progressing towards that prize.

You will never get into heaven by focusing on the small details, but your project and businesses will go to hell if you ignore them.

## 11. Focus on weaknesses not strengths

As leaders we cannot have or show any weaknesses, so we need to work on eliminating them, or failing that, hiding them.

When it comes to weaknesses we all have them, probably more than we would like to admit. But when we focus on our weaknesses it takes us away from what we are good at, what differentiates us from everyone else.

We need to be honest about our weaknesses and those that hinder our chances of success need to be worked on, or we need to find someone to cover that area for us.

When we focus on our weaknesses we limit ourselves to mediocrity, when we focus on our strengths it allows us to potentially achieve greatness.

## 12. Confuse stubbornness with determination

"Winners never quit, and quitters never win" is a great approach to achieving results.

However you're bordering on stubbornness if your approach is failing but you refuse to change it.

Good leaders understand when things are not working and they know when the approach needs to be changed.

I like the approach of be stubborn about your goals, but flexible about your approach to achieving them.





### 13. Don't play well with others

It's hard to play well with others when you adopt a command and control approach to leadership. People like to be led not managed.

When you isolate yourself by not creating a network that you are supportive of, and that is supportive of you, this significantly restricts what can be achieved.

The bigger and more supportive our network is the larger the pool of available resources that we can call upon.

### 14. Think praise is for wimps

It's ok to praise people once we have achieved success, but praising people just to keep them happy is not a good approach to building a strong, resilient team.

We've got to be mean to keep them keen, and praising people too often makes a team soft.

At one company where I worked I was actually encouraged by HR to stop praising people. They said "people didn't need to be praised as they were just doing their jobs, jobs which they were paid to do, and that should be praise enough for them".

I was stunned at this, and asked why they felt this way, and our HR head said "well no one praises me for doing my job".

Just because you're not receiving praise doesn't mean that you should stop to praise others. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs praise and recognition is something that we all crave, and many crave it more than money.

Interestingly, a few weeks later I actually praised the Head of HR for doing their job, just to see how they responded. As you can probably guess they were very flattered and felt good about it. Even people who think praise is for wimps like to get praised.

Good leaders know the power of praise and look to create a culture of recognition, as they understand the positive impact that this has on results.

Also, the more you praise people the more praise you will receive.

### 15. Take, don't give

The more we take, the more we have, and that's how winners are made. It's a dog eat dog world, and we have to fight for our share.

Bad leaders adopt a scarcity attitude, believing that there is not enough to go around so focus on making sure they get their share, whether it be money, praise, or position.

Good leaders adopt an abundance approach, they are happy to share.

They understand that the more you give the more you can get back. They don't make it all about themselves, they put the team first and themselves second.

### 16. Quick to criticize

If you want people to improve, you need to point out their mistakes quickly and clearly. It's also best to do this publicly so that others can learn too.

Nothing kills enthusiasm quicker than criticism. The louder and more public the criticism, the quicker the enthusiasm and engagements dissipates.

It's much better to praise in public and criticize in private. We also need to remember that criticism needs to be helpful, supportive and of benefit.

If it isn't, then it's not criticism it's punishment.

Good leaders look to improve their teams through coaching and mentoring, not by criticizing and punishing.

### 17. Easily distracted

Never content with their current goals, they are constantly looking for the next big thing that they get involved in.

I think the reason for this is that it's much easier to start something new than to finish something important.

I worked for one boss who had a tremendous track record for starting amazing initiatives. However, when you looked at what was successfully completed it was a different story.

His answer was always the same, Leaders kick things off, managers complete them, and I am a leader.

Now while I understand the sentiment, it does require you to surround yourselves with the right managers people who you put into a position where they can be successful and then support them to succeed. When you do that, then yes you're not only a leader, you're a great leader.

But if you just kick-off important initiatives and then hand them to over to someone else, without a backward glance or any offer of support, then it's a different story.

Great leaders know it's about getting initiatives across the finishing line, that it's better to start one thing and finish it successfully than to have ten incomplete projects that ultimately fail.

## 18. Make excuses

There are a million and one reasons why things don't work out as planned, so it's not always our fault, and we need to remember that so don't become too de-motivated.

One boss told me never ever accept responsibility, as it could be career limiting, and to always have someone ready to blame or a good excuse handy.

As Rudyard Kipling says, "there are a thousand reasons but no excuses." I am a firm believer that once we start going down the excuse path then we are giving up, we are looking to blame circumstances, the situation or even someone else for failure.

We need to own our failure, learn from them and improve. We need to understand the reason for a failure and then look to mitigate it or eliminate it, this is how we progress.

## 19. Love to micro manage

It's hard to trust everyone, so by micro-managing your staff, you can keep a close eye on things, and look to offer advice or step in if things start to go wrong.

Micro management is one of the most limiting management techniques, as well as one of the worst, because when you micro manage it limits your scope of control to the number of people you can directly manage.

Great leaders understand the importance and power of delegation and empowerment. The more we share our control with our teams the more work that can get done and the bigger and better the results can be.

But it requires the leader to have confidence, not only in their

team, but also in their own leadership. The majority of times I see someone micro managing it's invariably because of a lack of confidence in themselves.

They prefer to be hand-on doing the work rather than leading.

Micro management is extremely negative and it's not good for the person being micro managed, as it can be difficult to perform under such close inspection, and it's not good for the manager either.

No one likes to be micro managed nor work for someone that is a micro manager.

## 20. Practice inconsistently

It's great to be inconsistent because it keeps your team guessing, which in turn keeps them on their toes.

Predictability, on the other hand, can lead to complacency.

It's true that we need to keep our teams on their toes, but there are much better approaches than a lack of consistency. We can do it by challenging them to keep improving, by having regular reviews where we look to hold them accountable.

In fact I would say that predictability in these aspects is more likely to keep your team on their toes. If you know you will be reviewed weekly or monthly it will encourage you to make sure the tasks are completed.

Whereas inconsistency breeds doubt, uncertainty and fear in our teams.

One boss that I worked for, he was terribly inconsistent. What he felt was good work one week could be perceived as poor performance the following week. Teams presenting to him never knew where they stood, because they didn't have a consistent picture of what good looked like.

When teams know what good looks like, then they can aim for it, and they also know when they have achieved it and that increases the probability of success.

Team like consistency and predictability, it helps them in their decision making and ensuring high performance.

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**These traits are not just limited to ineffective and unsuccessful leaders, many of us can exhibit them from time to time, I know that I have and occasionally still do, but we need to look to eradicate these behaviours and bad habits if we want to become good leaders.**

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