

Top 5 Leadership Traps and How to Avoid Them

*What **not** to do to be a great leader*

With so much written about leadership these days, it's easy to become overwhelmed and confused. If you google 'leadership' you'll return over 132,000,000 results! Given that no one has the time to read the plethora of leadership concepts, let alone apply them, this article 'cuts to the chase' with five simple things you **shouldn't** be doing if you want the satisfaction and recognition that comes with being a great leader.

1. Buy into Self-Doubt

Self-doubt is one of the most common leadership curses experienced by even the best leaders. Have you ever noticed what happens, the moment you start to doubt yourself? The little voice inside your head is busily judging your ability and undermining your beliefs and decisions.

Before you know it, you're projecting uncertainty and others believe you – '*maybe he's just not up to the job*'. You start to dread going to work and notice a constant, gnawing, tense feeling that lowers your tolerance and drives you to jump to unsubstantiated conclusions.

The Antedote – Develop Unshakable Self-Belief

- Knowing that every problem has a solution and reminding yourself that you have solved more complex challenges in the past is the first step to affirming your self-belief.
- Step back and regain your perspective. Self-belief comes from keeping your eye firmly on the big picture and reminding yourself that whatever caused the crippling 'self-doubt crisis' will pass.
- Remember this isn't all about you! Move your ego out of the way and check in on the reasons why you're in a leadership role. Invariably this will be because others recognized your ability to lead and ultimately you are here to serve them.

2. Panic Under Pressure

Often triggered by self doubt, panicking under pressure directly undermines your leadership ability. This could play out as driving your team to achieve unrealistic deadlines, working incredibly long hours and expecting them to do the same and investing huge amounts of energy to 'cover your butt'!

The Antedote – Take control of the situation

- Feeling you have little control and that it's out of your hands, leads directly to panic. Turn this around by **recognize what's within your control**. Focus your time and energy on actions you will take to positively influence the outcome.
- **Step up and take direct responsibility** for your actions and the desired outcome. Focus on what can be done and the best way to go about it. Clarify what success looks like and develop a compelling and irresistible vision that others can believe in.

- Harness the knowledge, experience, ideas and power of your team. Collectively, you stand a far greater chance of succeeding if you collaborate to take control of the situation. Remember, your role is to enable them to solve the problem that caused the panic, not do it for them.

3. Procrastinate

If you look around at those who are considered to be weak leaders, chances are that among other things, they are procrastinators. Indecisive and prone to distract people from their key purpose and goals, they just never seem to get anything much done. The problem with this is that others quickly lose respect, confidence and trust in these people who wonder why they are overlooked for promotion.

The Antedote - Deliver Results and Outcomes

- **Stop talking about it and get on with it!** You'll ultimately be judged on what you do or don't achieve. The easiest way to overcome procrastination is to deliver your commitments on or preferably ahead of the agreed date. Break the goal down to manageable, time-framed actions to step you gradually towards the desired end result.
- **Manage the expectations of those who are relying on you.** The only certainty in business is change and leaders often fail to re-negotiate the goal when other influencing factors change. For example, a key customer may change its commitment or delivery expectations and there is a need to re-negotiate terms to meet their expectations. Speak up early and guide your team to develop alternative solutions.
- **Be decisive and confident by trusting your own judgement** is one of the most powerful ways to overcome procrastination. Great leaders make mistakes and learn from them so quit aiming for perfection (guaranteed to fuel procrastination) and aim for excellence instead.

4. Intimidate and Disregard Others

Old style command and control style leadership works well in armed combat situations but has little effect anywhere else these days. Gen X quietly frowns on 'bullying' while Gen Y openly disregards it. Leaders who intimidate and disregard others quickly find themselves without followers, removing any chance of success. 'My way or the highway' approaches just don't work and lead to fear, mistrust and lack of motivation.

The Antedote - Develop Self-Awareness.

- **Notice how others perceive you.** While you may believe you are projecting strong, decisive leadership, it could well be interpreted as autocratic and constraining. Seek feedback from those you lead to discover what they really believe and need.
- **If you're not getting the results you want, check in on how flexible you are.** Do you modify the way you act and respond to changing situations? You may need to become more inclusive, patient and collaborative.
- The most powerful tool in a great leader's toolkit is **active listening**. **Be fully present and genuinely consider what you're being told** (before responding), to build respect and trust. Hear what's being said for vital information you may not be aware of. Listen for what's not being said to get to the core of an issue.

5. Faking It

There's no better way to lose trust, respect and credibility than being someone you're not! Those who are always 'punching above their weight' or those who 'schmooze' with a self-promoting ulterior motive, are quickly found out. It takes a lot of energy, time and effort to be someone you're not. At best you'll be overlooked for sought after assignments. At worst you'll be the first on the redundancy list when the next restructure happens.

The Antedote – Be Who You Really Are

- Often described as 'authentic leadership', this involves **being clear about your values and ensuring your actions reflect with who you are.** This doesn't mean sticking doggedly to your beliefs. Modify your views and flex your approach to achieve the desired outcome.
- **Consistently model the behaviours you wish to see in others.** This could be as simple as arriving on time to all meetings (shows respect); stating meeting outcomes at the start and insisting on sticking with the agenda (shows commitment and focus).
- The easiest way to 'be who you are' is to **embrace your unique leadership qualities, park the judgement (of self and others) and feel comfortable in your own skin.** Watch how others start seeking you out when you relax and allow your passion, beliefs and behaviours do the talking.

Leadership Traps are easy to fall into. How many of these have you seen yourself (or others) subscribe to, often without realizing you're doing it? Fortunately, they are easily avoided by applying the antedotes. Great Leadership comes from believing in yourself; taking control of the situation; delivering results; being constantly self aware and authentic.

For more easy ways to avoid these and other common leadership traps, contact [Possibility to Reality](http://www.p2r.com.au) today to see how we can help.