

20 guidelines for failing — as a leader, manager or supervisor

First, two facts.

- The vast majority of employees who quit their jobs do not leave their company; they leave "their boss".
- The vast majority of leaders, managers and supervisors who are fired, replaced, removed or who derail are not deficient in technical skills, expertise or know-how. They are fired, or fail, because of their lack of effective interpersonal skills.

One of the broad categories that needs to be addressed in today's workplace is learning and development but not just learning for the sake of the organization — learning and development that addresses issues and areas of self-discovery first, and then principles and practices that promote conscious and healthy relationships, commitment and accountability to each other.

Personal and professional growth in today's workplace require consistent introspection, self-reflection, and a conscious choice to eliminate dysfunctional behaviors that negatively affect the workplace atmosphere and adversely affect performance, productivity and profits. Personal change and transformation focus on an exploration of one's personal beliefs, assumptions, expectations and values regarding the nature and purpose of work, of management, of leading, of the organization. Truly knowing one's self includes seeking the thoughts, feelings, reflections and feedback of others. Employees with a healthy sense of self-esteem, and who feel engaged, seek out and create healthy and successful relationships with others.

In today's business environment, it the interpersonal skills and personal awareness not a policy, not a system, not a program, nor a personnel manual that enable leaders, managers and supervisors to successfully engage in, and create an atmosphere and culture that motivates employees. Successful and sustainable performance can take place only after people know how to talk with and interrelate to one another. No memo, no policy, and no system will ever make up for those leaders, managers and supervisors who are deficient in people skills.

If you are one of those leaders, managers or supervisors who thinks that credentials and technical competency and expertise alone are enough to ensure your workplace success and survival, perhaps it might be wise to think again.

So, if you want to contribute to creating a culture that is characterized by employee disengagement and low commitment, distrust, secrecy, lack of mutual accountability, resentment, low morale and toxic energy, lack of employee initiative, lack of constructive conflict, unhealthy relationships, absenteeism and presenteeism, constant turnover, and an undercurrent of malaise, all of which can point to *you*, here's one blueprint to follow:

Here are 20 guidelines for leaders, managers and supervisors who, consciously or unconsciously, wish to fail:

- Begin your responses to others' suggestions or ideas with "no", "but" or "however".
- Rationalize counter-productive processes, procedures and nonsensical bureaucratic practices by saying: "That's just the way it is".
- Judge others from a critical, subjective, "Why can't you be more like me!" perspective.
- Become defensive and rebellious every time someone questions, or is curious about, one of your thoughts, your beliefs or your decisions.
- Argue against or deceive those who don't agree with you.

- Justify your actions that may be unethical, immoral, or out of integrity because, "It's the way we do business in a competitive marketplace."
- Admonish those who make mistakes or disagree, and be sure to do it in public.
- Be emotionally disconnected and distant from your colleagues and direct reports.
- Be afraid and fearful of trying out new ways to think, to be and to do
- Shun creativity and innovation, and urge others to adhere to the "not invented here" syndrome.
- Be cold, calculating, emotionally unapproachable and unforgiving of others; run the show from a "Hey, this is a business! Perspective!"
- Be ungrounded, scattered, flighty, unfocused, and unbalanced mentally, emotionally, physically and/or spiritually.
- Shun truth, goodness and justice in favor of expediency, cutting corners and "making a buck as quickly as possible".
- Compete rather than cooperate with others; take the "I'm always right" infallibility road rather than seek mediation, or a win-win outcome when conflict arises.
- Be a source of weakness, confusion and calamity in the face of a stressful and uncertain environment, or crisis.
- Ignore caring for your mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health and well-being and encourage others to be uncaring as well.
- Be rigid, stubborn, and inflexible when it comes to considering change and taking risks.
- Allow the toxic energy of your anger, frustration and anxiety to leak out when engaged in conversations, dialogues and discussions.
- Don't allow yourself or others the time for self-reflection and deeper thinking.
- Don't love, or search for meaning in, what you do and communicate to others that purpose and meaning are unimportant.

Exploring whether any of these behaviors describes *you* is a first step towards the self-awareness that leads to personal and professional growth and fosters the sustainability that will keep your leadership, management and supervisory career on track.

This "soft skills" exploration, over and above your technical expertise and competence, can support you to engage in behaviors that effectively lead, manage, supervise, encourage, teach, guide, and coach others unhampered by interpersonal issues that create barriers to a harmonious, pleasant, and productive workplace culture and environment issues which can threaten and derail *your* career as a leader, manager or supervisor.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- How do you feel about the idea that "soft skills" are equally, perhaps more, important to defining your career as a successful leader, manager or supervisor?
- Do you manifest any of these 20 guidelines in your everyday interactions with others?
- Has anyone ever tugged on your sleeve about your lack of people skills in some way, shape or form?
- On a scale of 1-10, where does your boss lie when it comes to his/her people skills? If on the low end, how does this affect your relationship with him/her?
- What story might you tell yourself that justifies your feeling that technical expertise and not people skills is all that matters in how you deal with folks at work?
- Would you consider yourself a role model of one who uses people-skills effectively? Would others agree with you?
- Do you consider yourself a "people person"? Do others? How do you know?
- Is having effective people skills considered a core competency in your organization? Why? Why not?
- Do you ever think about skills or habits you have that may cause your co-workers to disengage from you personally or from their working with, or wanting to work with, you?

- If you are successful, do you believe your success is a justification for the way you behave or you are successful in spite of the way you behave? Do you know the difference?
- Do money, status, power and popularity get in the way of healthy and conscious relationships at work?
- Do you ever ask others, formally or informally, for feedback? Are you comfortable receiving feedback?
- Do you ever ask folks for their opinions, advice or suggestions and then argue with them when their input is not what you want to hear?
- Are you conscious of what's *underneath* the way folks respond to you in your presence — both verbally and non-verbally?
- Are you ever curious of how people perceive you? Do you ever consider how you contribute to others' perceptions of you?
- How happy are you at work?

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