



The 6 habits of highly ineffective leaders

The 6 habits of highly ineffective leaders. Where do leaders get it wrong? What are the leadership habits that separate the good from the bad?



If you do a google search on leadership, you will be met with over 796 million webpages. There is certainly no shortage of information, much of which is grounded in good principles. The challenge leaders have is that they tend to be time poor, and as a result, default to a leadership style based on entrenched habits. Some of the habits are very good, but others — not so much. Many leaders aren't even aware of the habits they have formed and the positive or negative effect they can have on their team and their business

“Great leaders don't set out to be a leader... they set out to make a difference. It's never about the role — always about the goal.”

- Lisa Haisha

Having the privilege of working closely with senior leaders across multiple industries for the past 20 years, you begin to notice patterns. You begin to see the leaders who stand out and those that stand back. You understand why only a small number of leaders make an actual difference. The first step towards better leadership is awareness.

“Chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken.”

- Warren Buffet

In helping build some awareness, below is a list of what I refer to as the 6 habits of highly ineffective leaders.

1. Confusing effectiveness with efficiency

Efficiency is doing things the right way. Effectiveness is doing the right thing. Becoming more efficient in processes that are ineffective is a common problem in many organisations. There are better ways to do things and it is a leader's job, ably supported by his or her team, to find them.

2. Lack of team engagement

An engaged team is more productive, takes less sick leave, and achieves goals 31% more regularly than unhappy peers.[1] Therefore, it makes sense for leaders to cultivate an environment that enables high levels of team engagement. This requires leaders to understand the unique motivational drivers of each team member; appropriately reward and recognise achievement; let their voice be heard in an appropriate way and empower them to deliver results.

3. Micromanaging

'I perform better under strict micromanagement', said no employee ever. Team members want to be empowered, trusted, and free to make decisions. To do this they need to be capable, have clarity on outcomes and understand decision scope (when to decide, when to refer). I have seen far too many talented individuals leave leaders due to painful micromanagement tendencies.

4. Proliferation of meetings

Good diary management is essential for leaders to be effective. The same applies to meeting management. In many organisations, meetings can chew up large portions of a leader's time with very little return. It still amazes me how many meetings lack clear outcomes, a clear agenda and involve people that need not be there. It is far better to have fewer, more effective meetings that lead to important actions. As an aside, just because typical calendar invites default to 30-minute time slots, doesn't mean that meetings need to fall neatly within this time period.

5. Lack of focus and the rise of DDDs

Ineffective leaders often have so many priorities that nothing is a priority. Add to that the rise of DDDs — Digital Distraction Devices (eg. smartphones, tablets etc.) and you've got a recipe for underachievement. The best leaders understand that their time and energy must be focused in vital few areas while limiting the magnetic pull of DDDs.

6. Poor communication and alignment

It is refreshing to see an executive team singing from the same song sheet. They have a common understanding of the strategic situation, stretching outcomes which they are committed to and a robust plan to execute within defined timeframes. But how well does this translate to the levels below the executive? Oh, there it is ... the uncomfortable silence. Many leaders fail to align and communicate effectively across the broader organisation. 7,600 leaders were recently asked in a Harvard Business Review study what the single greatest challenge to executing a company's strategy was. Almost a third cited failure to coordinate across business units. The same study showed that only one third of leaders could name even two of the top five strategic priorities.[2]

The best leaders have great awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Knowledge of course isn't power. It is potential power. It is what you do with that awareness that makes all the difference.

[1] <http://www.inc.com/ariana-ayu/5-simple-ways-to-build-a-happy-and-engaged-team.html>

[2] *Harvard Business Review*: 'Why Strategy Execution Unravels - and What to Do About It' by D Sull, C Sull and