The Biggest Downfall of Leaders

What undermines great leadership?

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In your quest to become a great leader it is helpful to consider some of the biggest downfalls of leaders today.

1. **Lack of self-knowledge:** Most leaders are unaware of their own personal psychology, mental programs and underlying motivations. Most of what we “see” is shaped by our impressions, our history, our preconceptions and our personal “baggage.” We don’t see people and situations as they actually are because we are too busy reacting to our own internal experiences of what they evoke in us. We therefore react to our own unconscious responses to our own assumptions history, stimulated by however we perceive what is externally before us. The more clearly you see the world as it actually is, rather than as your interpretation or reaction to it, it would become more obvious what you need to do. You wouldn’t be acting out of the past, your own personal needs or reactive interpretations. You would see what is needed in the moment, in this particular situation. It is the personal responsibility of leaders to know themselves, understand their own personal psychology and develop the capability of seeing beyond it. It’s like upgrading the software on your computer. If you know how to upgrade the software of your mental programs, you would immediately get positive changes in performance. You’d get immediate improvements in how you think, feel and act. There are many methods and modalities that offer leaders the opportunity to increase their personal effectiveness in this way and move beyond the limitations of their current thinking.
2. **They do not know how to make change happen**. Leaders generally lack the skills for generating new possibilities of thinking feeling and acting in themselves or others. Leaders today must be effective facilitators of change and organizational transformation. They must be able to create stability and efficiency in a climate of rapid change. An inability to do so results in stagnation, stuck positions, lack of innovation, conflict among team members and a lack of velocity in moving forward. Although many people try to change they find themselves unsuccessful in doing so. They continue to exhibit ways of leading that become obsolete and counterproductive and therefore produce fewer and fewer positive results. Leaders today must be able to adapt to the changing market and changing world. The failure to adapt to change is the fatal flaw of the fast-tracker who clings to a once successful leadership style or business strategy long after it stops producing results. Sadly, an organization’s workforce often have to work around their leaders in order to get things done. Because change is difficult for most people, knowing powerful technologies and methods for creating change are essential in today business environment. Being able to observe and define team and company-wide dynamics and patterns is essential. Learning to shift team dynamics that limit success to interactions that generate collaboration, motivation and innovation.

“The world we have created is a product of our way of thinking,” said Einstein. Nothing will change in the future without fundamentally new ways of thinking. This is the real work of leadership.

**3. Inability To Create Powerful Relationships**

1. Poor relationship skills represent the single biggest reason for failure - and the most crucial flaw to recognize and remedy. Leaders typically can't inspire and win the loyalty of subordinates because they aren't good listeners, don't give and take criticism well and view conflict as something bad instead of something inevitable and an opportunity to build relationship. The ability to relate to others in a productive way that forwards extraordinary results, creating alignment and cooperation is the biggest key to success. Being able to relate successfully with others is core to being able to motivate and influence them. Without that you are left with outdated “carrot and stick” methods to motivate people. The power differential in relationships within hierarchies are not inherently bad, despite the bad press they receive today. They can facilitate organizational efficiency and effectiveness when done well. “Doing it well” depends upon the intentions and motivations of the leadership of the organization. When a leader’s choice is to truly serve an organization and its people, the hierarchal power that separates the leader and those led is less likely to be corrupt. According to Robert Greenleaf, author of Servant Leadership, the potential of hierarchy to corrupt would be dissolved if leaders chose to serve those they led – if they saw their job as true service. This is a vast difference from organizations that are guided by people who have risen to positions of authority because of technical skills, good financial decisions, political savvy or desire for wealth and power. When you consider the people who have had the greatest positive influence on your life and your career, you will find that their ability to relate to you successfully was in some way a critical element. In recent surveys I’ve conducted some of the most admired qualities in leaders included:

* Good listener
* Caring
* Visionary
* Walked their talk
* Open to feedback
* Excellent communicator
* Demonstrated personal integrity
* Trustworthy
* Respectful of others
* Challenges and inspires others

Least admired included:

* Bullying
* Disrespectful
* Lack of communication
* Doesn’t care about the employees
* Doesn’t listen
* Unavailable
* Defensive
* Only wants to make themselves look good

As Bill Clinton’s campaign manager decreed ,“It’s the economy, stupid!” to be the theme for the 1992 presidential campaign, organizational leaders would do well to recognize that “It’s the relationships, stupid,” is a key insight to understanding the nature of successful organizations.

At the heart of every organization are its people and the web of relationships that are formed by working together.

At the core of things getting done in an organization is the quality of the relationships of its people and this begins with leadership. Although companies are always working to streamline and improve processes and systems, it’s the people in any organization that make things happen or not. Processes and systems are tools that are used by people. It’s the quality of relating within an organization on a day-to-day, person-to-person basis that makes or breaks results-oriented productivity. It’s the people who have to work with the systems--through them, around them, under or over them in order to respond to the needs of others, the demands of the market, fulfilling a promise or completing a project. Often they are challenged by having to get a matter taken care of immediately or having a team come through for them. The importance of relationships in an organization begins with the way that this is demonstrated by the leadership of the organization. The message that relationships matter must come from the top. This must not be lip-service, but must be made evident in every interaction with an organization’s leaders.

Organizational responsiveness is a direct result of organizational relationships.