



Leaders Behaving Badly

14 Leadership Behaviors that Cause Harm

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The Center Consulting Group is passionate about advancing leadership and organizational health. We believe this article on bad leadership behaviors will be a helpful resource for you and your team. As an extension of our vision of advancing organizational health, we are providing this resource without charge.

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Introduction

Think of those you admire, those who had a positive influence on you and others. Now, think of someone who you did not respect, someone who had little positive influence and often had a negative impact on others. What was it about the person you did not respect that made him or her different from the hundreds of other people you have met? What sets him or her apart? In our years of reviewing other writers and research, as well as observing behaviors in our consulting with hundreds of leaders and organizations, we have come to realize that healthy leaders are not super-human, but they are different. And leaders who manifest bad behaviors are not all bad, but they can cause harm to themselves, others, and the health of their organization.

One of the fascinating observations about the Bible is that God does not sanitize His leaders behaving badly, reminding us that any leader can manifest healthy behavior at one time and unhealthy behavior the next. King Saul possessed great power but was crippled by his insecurity. King David was an exceptional leader but impulsively went after a married woman. King Solomon had extraordinary wisdom, but even he slipped into a string of foolish choices. Samson had super-human strength but failed to



listen to his parents' counsel regarding dating partners. In the New Testament, John Mark was given a great opportunity to work with Paul but was freaked out by fear.

Now consider two more recent examples of leaders, Sarah and Jake. Sarah had held successful positions in two financial service businesses and a non-profit. Her reputation was consistently positive, regardless of where she served. She was viewed as trustworthy and was also able to make hard decisions and deliver consistent results, all while caring about those around her. Don't misunderstand, not everyone thought highly of her. She was not super-human, but she consistently had a positive impact on most of those around her. This held true for over 45 years of leadership.

Jake had held a number of leadership roles in his lifetime. He had held eight positions in a variety of churches and other organizations. People were inspired by his public communication skills. In front of a group, he could sell snow to an Alaskan in the dead of winter! However, when he wasn't in front of a group speaking, he would hunker down in his office, use his secretary to keep people away from him, and avoid spending time with his colleagues. In each of his positions, he would start out strong but eventually either begin to lose credibility or end up in the midst of conflict by thinking he knew better than the other leaders around him. It was almost as if he was the Wizard of Oz. At first glance, Jake was powerful and significant. But when the curtain blew back, he was just a little man with a few tools and tricks that made him look greater than he was. It was all just an illusion. At least the wizard could acknowledge the trick when he was exposed. However, when Jake was exposed, he never acknowledged his short-comings. He blamed others and eventually would either quit and move on to another position or be asked to resign. He demonstrated a rather simple yet pathetic pattern: present a good show during interviews, impress people early on, hit a time of dissatisfaction, and then, move out. He too was certainly not super-human, but his bad behaviors resulted in serious negative side effects for himself and others.



Like all of us, Jake and Sarah are human with inherent talents and gifts as well as limitations and weaknesses. So, what behaviors differentiated Jake from Sarah? We have identified and explained the top fourteen bad behaviors that harm a leader’s effectiveness and influence. As you continue reading, look for one or two with which you may personally relate to. This article will also offer steps to help you manage these behaviors if any are prevalent in your life.

14 Types of Leaders Behaving Badly

<p>01</p>  <p>The Toxic Leader If people can't get along with me, that's their problem!</p>	<p>02</p>  <p>The Conflict Avoiding Leader Jesus was a peacemaker, and so am I.</p>
<p>03</p>  <p>The Proud Leader I'm not arrogant. I'm just confident.</p>	<p>04</p>  <p>The Control Freak Leader I cannot, not be in charge!</p>
<p>05</p>  <p>The Defensive Leader You made this mistake, not me!</p>	<p>06</p>  <p>The Lukewarm Leader I'm not unmotivated. I'm just content.</p>
<p>07</p>  <p>The Free Range Leader I don't like boundaries. I need freedom!</p>	<p>08</p>  <p>The Narcissist Leader I'm special, and I know it.</p>
<p>09</p>  <p>The Socially Clueless Leader I'm not dysfunctional. I'm just not a people person.</p>	<p>10</p>  <p>The Distractible Leader I have a really great idea, again!</p>
<p>11</p>  <p>The Non-Resilient Leader When the going gets tough, run!</p>	<p>12</p>  <p>The Intentionally Deaf Leader I can hear you. I just choose not to listen to you.</p>
<p>13</p>  <p>The NO Can Do Leader I'm sorry, but the answer is NO.</p>	<p>14</p>  <p>The Silent Suffering Leader If you only knew how I am really feeling!</p>



THE TOXIC LEADER



If people can't get along with me, that's their problem!



1. The Toxic Leader

Sue was the director of a non-profit social service agency who was despised by many. Even with all of her social service education, she had emerged as a nasty and unwelcome leader. Sue was known to yell at employees for not doing what she expected, ridicule team members in the middle of a meeting in front of their peers, and threaten to fire people when she got really angry. Employees and a few board members quietly referred to her as “the witch” and used words like “mean,” “angry,” “unpredictable,” and “volatile” to describe their perceptions of her. While it took far too long for the board to intervene, she was eventually confronted and dismissed. To no surprise, she was nasty and aggressive on her way out the door.

Toxic leaders cause harm. They are like cancer cells in that they may start out normal or benign, but over time, they move from normal to dangerous and damaging behaviors. Toxic leaders manifest a number of “markers” including:

- Failing to reflect values of civility
- Deliberately misleading followers
- Using threat and intimidation to control others
- Setting people against one another
- Leaving people damaged and cynical
- Being unapproachable
- Creating undiscussables between them and the staff
- Causing good people to leave

Since such leaders may actually be producing short-term results and many people are afraid of them, whistleblowers are often ignored or even dismissed. Sometimes it takes a catastrophic event like a lawsuit or major moral or criminal episode before the harm of a toxic leader is stopped. After the dust settles, the carnage of their bad behavior is self-evident.



THE CONFLICT AVOIDING LEADER



Jesus was a peacemaker and so am I.



2. The Conflict Avoiding Leader

If you were to look up a picture of a peacemaker, it could easily be Mike. As a Christian pastor, Mike took seriously the biblical instruction to live at peace with all people. This is a very noble goal in some circumstances. However, as a leader of a church, you sometimes have to make tough decisions, decisions that will result in someone not liking you. Mike's solution was to avoid conflict at all costs. One of his tactics was to agree with one person or group's ideas and then agree with another person or group even though the two views opposed each other! This would infuriate people who, in private conversations, would make disparaging remarks about Mike being duplicitous and lacking a backbone. In addition, he failed to hold poor performing staff accountable, he did not disagree with any board discussion, and he avoided confronting a church member who was acting inappropriately. In his pursuit of avoiding conflict, he ended up losing credibility and the respect of many around him.

Mike was manifesting what Edwin Friedman called "a failure of nerve." In his book *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, Friedman describes characteristics of someone like Mike:

A highly anxious risk-avoider, someone who is more concerned with good feelings than with progress, someone whose life revolves around the axis of consensus, a 'middler', someone who is so incapable of taking well-defined stands that his 'disability' seems to be genetic, someone who functions as if she had been filleted of her backbone, someone who treats conflict or anxiety like mustard gas – one whiff, on goes the emotional gas mask, and he flits. Such leaders are nice if not charming.

THE PROUD LEADER



I'm not arrogant. I'm just confident.



3. The Proud Leader

Tim was the newly appointed general manager of a medium sized business. Although he was young and had an untested track record in successful leadership, he did have nice academic credentials and plenty of confidence. However, even though he mesmerized many with his eloquent speaking abilities and spoke with great confidence, it did not take long before people saw the other side of him that moved beyond confidence into arrogance. He



knew what was best, and he was going to make the changes he wanted regardless of what others thought. After all, he was very book smart! When members of his staff or leadership team pushed back, they paid the price of alienation and sometimes even termination. He was a proud leader and well on his way to destroying himself and the organization entrusted to him.

There is a big difference yet fine line between confidence and arrogance. Confidence generally grows from a proven long-term record of success. Arrogance grows from an over-inflated view of self and is centered in the heart of a person who is proud. In other words, confidence grows from evidence while arrogance grows from brokenness. Leaders such as Tim cannot see themselves as proud especially since those closest to them may not see it or would be too fearful of telling them. Such leaders are slow to ask for help and quick to blame others. They don't value their staff's skills or experience and therefore don't ask for input or build a collaborative work environment. God hates pride and explains that the proud person will generate conflict and ultimately experience humility and disgrace.

THE CONTROL FREAK LEADER



I cannot, not be in
charge!



4. The Control Freak Leader

Alan was a gifted visionary. He had a passion to start a new church that would be a different kind of church. And it succeeded in a big way, at least for awhile. At first 30 people came, then 50, then 150, and eventually 450 people were attending. They went from using rental space to eventually owning a phenomenal 25 acre property with a worship center, office complex, and youth building. The staff expanded, the budget grew, and the impact was at an all time high when the small signs of something not right began to grow faster and faster. Alan was trying to control every element of the church including how the offices were decorated, what meetings the volunteers were required to attend, how the youth ministry was managed, and even how the trees were pruned! After almost 20 years, the exciting, vibrant ministry collapsed upon Alan, and he tried to control it, even to the very day when he was voted out of leadership.



Highly controlling behavior can result in or be the result of some of the other bad behaviors. For example, people who are narcissists, proud, or highly fearful can become control freaks even though it may be for different reasons. Some leaders believe they know better or that others will never do it as well as them. Other leaders are highly controlling because of their desire to guard their own position or reputation. Still others are very gifted leaders who possess critical thinking skills and keen insights. They can often see things others cannot. However, if they are too dedicated to being perfectionists, they may become a source of irritation by not trusting the skills and judgments of others. Regardless of the reasons, control freaks will likely cause harm to themselves by becoming overwhelmed (it's a lot of work trying to control everything!) and will drive away top talent.

THE DEFENSIVE LEADER



You made the mistake, not me!



5. The Defensive Leader

When confronted with a mistake or suggested improvement, Dave became like a Pit Bull set after a poodle. He would attack "the enemy." Dave was the president of a small college. He was a very gifted leader being both entrepreneurial and charismatic in his influence. However, like many leaders, he had the bad behavior of becoming defensive when something would go wrong. One time, after receiving some tough criticism on a Leader 360 Feedback Evaluation, he became so angry that he confronted a number of employees and blamed them for the challenges he was facing. As his defensiveness grew, those around him became increasingly unwilling to tell him the truth. After all, they were the problem, not him! Eventually, Dave was encouraged to move on, which he did defending himself all the way to his next job.

It is common for people to respond with defensive routines when given feedback they may not believe or want to hear. Defensive routines often hinder the recipient from learning and may influence the giver to choose to withhold feedback. Some of the most common defensive routines include:



blaming, attacking, denying, withdrawing, and spiritualizing. Being challenged or critiqued regarding such issues can create defensiveness in pastors, just like in anyone else. In his book *Overcoming Organizational Defenses*, Dr. Chris Argyris states that defensive responses often grow out of a fear of embarrassment or threat. There are sometimes common, but perhaps unspoken, reasons for defensiveness including feeling under-appreciated, handling chronic health issues, dealing with the unlikelihood of being able to find another job, and experiencing anxiety from possibly having to move away from family and friends. If the underlying reasons are not acknowledged, Christian leaders can gloss over them by spiritualizing what is happening.

Spiritualization often occurs when a sound decision-making process is eliminated. It takes a variety of forms including inappropriately placing God's approval on a decision, confusing prayer with decision-making, misapplication of the Bible, and labeling others as unspiritual. Spiritualization artificially simplifies the issue and seldom leads to wise decisions. Ultimately, it abuses and trivializes God and His Word. Spiritualization often results in attacking others who disagree.

THE LUKEWARM LEADER



I'm not unmotivated.
I'm just content.



6. The Lukewarm Leader

Chris had been in pastoral ministry for over 24 years and had served in his present church for the past seven years. Chris was a good dad, husband, and was well liked by many. However, it seemed each of the four churches he led over the years was flat when he arrived and flat when he left. Neither the churches nor Chris showed any signs of momentum. When Chris leaves his present church, it is likely the church will neither be much better or much worse. It will be nice and lukewarm, just like its leader.

While contentment can be a good trait when it comes to material possessions and other desires, it can also reflect low energy or worse, laziness, lack of innovation, and absence of passion. In some ways,



lukewarm leaders manifest a failure to thrive. They don't push themselves very hard and they attract followers similar to themselves. Donors, potential employees, and volunteers seldom follow these leaders because they provide very few reasons to be followed.

THE FREE RANGE LEADER



I don't like boundaries.
I need freedom!



7. The Free Range Leader

In many ways, Jason was a really talented guy. He was outgoing, technically skilled and always looking for the next social party. However, he did not like people directing his path especially when their path was different than his. For Jason, the word “submission” was a very bad word. It made him cringe inside. Jason’s supervisor would guide him, coach him and even threaten him. Being the social guy that he was, Jason never really fought back. Instead, he just didn’t do what he was asked. He wanted freedom, and he wanted to be free range. He wanted to be given a salary and benefits but did not want any expectations placed upon him that he felt were confining. His unwillingness to listen to guidance and his desire for freedom ultimately caused him to step beyond the appropriate professional boundaries, resulting in his termination. Now he is truly free range!

Free range leaders don't like boundaries. Sometimes gifted free range leaders become successful entrepreneurs, business owners, and church planters. But even in these cases, if a free range leader does not have boundaries, he will fail. Failures may include sexual violations, financial mismanagement, misuse of employee time, or not fulfilling job responsibilities. The consequences of such an undisciplined and uncontrolled spirit can be catastrophic with terrible collateral damage to family, co-workers, and the organization.

THE NARCISSIST LEADER



I'm special, and I
know it.



8. The Narcissist Leader

A number of people who worked with Steve found him to have some real talent, but when describing him, they often used terms such as “self-centered,” “has a high view of himself,” “entitled,” and “likes to draw



attention to himself.” Even though he was a relatively young leader, he was known to use his assistant to screen his calls and email and spend an excessive amount of time outside of work (and sometimes inside) preparing for speaking and writing engagements. Steve’s low self-awareness and high view of himself was a nasty combination which eventually led to his self-destruction.

Narcissists are people who have an extraordinarily high view of themselves and an exaggerated view of their uniqueness and strengths which results in extraordinary self-centeredness. Pride and narcissism are symbiotically connected and result in devastating outcomes for the leader and those around him. In an interesting study, narcissism was identified as one of the top two reasons of why very intelligent people make dumb choices (Feinberg and Tarrant, *Why Smart People Do Dumb Things*). Some of the common signs of narcissistic leaders include:

- Assuming their vision is correct
- Having a sense of entitlement
- Blaming others for failure
- Withholding information to accomplish their goals
- Depending upon rhetorical skills to cover problems
- Transferring focus from God to themselves

In his book *Leaders, Fools, and Impostors*, Manfred F. R. Kets De Vries notes, “Narcissistic personalities . . . are frequently encountered in top management positions. Indeed, it is only to be expected that many narcissistic people, with their need for power, prestige, and glamour, eventually end up in leadership positions. Their sense of drama, their ability to manipulate others, and their knack for establishing quick, superficial relationships serve them well in organizational life”... but only for a season.

THE SOCIALLY CLUELESS LEADER



I’m not dysfunctional.
I’m just not a people person.



9. The Socially Clueless Leader

Mark is a classic example of a leader who repels people rather than attracts them. He was hired as the new director of a mid-sized non-profit organization. During his first year, significant conflict arose between Mark



and most of the other staff and board members. While liked by some, an increasing number of people were experiencing Mark as short-tempered, autocratic, and relationally aloof. Some colleagues began to avoid any contact with Mark, resist his leadership, and talk among themselves about how much they hated working in this new environment. While his associates had their own deficits that contributed to this situation, Mark had developed an approach to leadership that was dissonant in its nature. He lacked self-awareness and did not wisely manage his relationships with those he served. When confronted with the perceptions of others, Mark was shocked and angry, justifying and viewing himself as a victim rather than the victimizer. Similar to most socially clueless leaders, Mark just didn't get it!

It is easy to assume that those who are good relaters are the people who are extroverts, gregarious, and always working the room. However, that would be a mistake. While some relaters do show these traits, there are many who are equally influential but more reserved and less comfortable up in front of the crowd. Whether you are an introvert or extrovert is not the key. Healthy leaders may not always be the smartest in the academic arena, but they are often the smartest in managing relationships.

Dr. Daniel Goleman is one of the most visible academic leaders in the field of Emotional Intelligence (EQ). He defines people who attract others as “resonant leaders” and those who repel others as “dissonant leaders.” From our experience, people who are highly influential have a greater ability to attract others. The more a person is dissonant, the less likely they are to be able to influence others. Resonant leaders understand unspoken relational cues that others send and are more likely to use those cues in managing their behaviors and in seeking feedback from those around them. However, dissonant leaders have a pattern of behavior that includes at least some of the following:

- Missing social cues
- Verbal vomiting



- Absence of social capital
- Being socially awkward
- Lack of empathy and emotion
- Combative behaviors

Research has consistently shown that building strong relationships at work and at home is more about having the right ratio of interactions than it is about having no negative interactions. This ratio is ensuring you have five positive interactions for every negative. The socially clueless leader may count an interaction as positive, but to the other person, it was neutral at best. While most of us don't carry an interaction tracker in our pocket that technically monitors this, leaders would be wise to monitor it with intentional self-awareness.

THE DISTRACTIBLE LEADER



I have a really great idea, again!



10. The Distractible Leader

Stan had some really good strengths. He was outgoing and creative and had high energy. His brain also moved at 15,000 RPM (if you don't know what that means – it's really fast!). He loved listening to podcasts, reading books, going to seminars, and trying new ideas, and a lot of them. Many of his employees started to refer to him as "Stan the idea man." Some of the ideas were good, but the volume of them, as well as the fact that some of the ideas seemed to conflict with other ideas he had proposed, made it challenging for the staff. There were times when one idea was not even successfully implemented before he was proposing the next idea. People became increasingly cynical and frustrated with Stan, not so much by the ideas but by the amount and lack of clear strategy or implementation. But since he was the boss, they endured it, at least for a while.

There are three phases of innovation: idea generation, evaluation, and implementation. Distractible leaders like Stan are often better at the generation phase but sometimes slip when it comes to either evaluation or implementation. The real challenge of this type of leader is their inability to focus. In his book *Focus*, Daniel Goleman makes the research-based case of the connection between focus and excellence. People have limited capacity



for processing an overabundance of information and distractions. Some researchers believe we actually only have the capacity for managing about four chunks of information at a time. Economist Herbert Simon said, "A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention." When you combine the uniqueness of people's personalities and brain functions with technology, an overabundance of information, and emotional distractions, it is amazing that anyone can focus! But we have seen firsthand that leaders can and do learn to be disciplined and focused, and subsequently experience the rewards.

THE NON-RESILIENT LEADER



When the going gets tough, run!



11. The Non-Resilient Leader

Tom was such a nice guy. He was married, had three children, and was a vice president in a mid-sized company. Many admired Tom for his gifted leadership and commitment to family. But he had one crack in his armor. He was easily defeated. When Tom's wife was diagnosed with cancer and he experienced pressure from a major project at work, he felt so overwhelmed that he began looking for escape routes. He searched the internet for new jobs (one with less stress) and spent time at the bar to dampen the pain of his wife's illness and treatments. Most people can understand how overwhelmed Tom must have felt. Many people have experienced suffering and disappointment and even a number of them at the same time. The difference is that Tom struggled with a lack of resiliency. In other words, he did not have the ability to bounce back from difficulty. His first and only coping strategy was to escape it, not endure it.

One of the differentiating disciplines of successful leaders is that they consistently manifest a resolve to show grit and not easily quit. Grit is a term being used by psychologist Angela Lee Duckworth of The University of Pennsylvania and others to creatively describe a character trait commonly known as self-discipline. Such discipline seems to have been more prevalent among the WWII and older generations and appears less with each new generation. Today, we increasingly see people sign up but not show up,



start but not finish, and promise but not deliver. This is true in education (starting but not finishing college), volunteerism (signing up but not following through), employment (making a commitment but then leaving for another opportunity), health care (beginning a diet and exercise routine but bailing after a few months), and marriage (saying “I do” but living like “I do, for now”). Grit can often become the determining factor of those who finish well and those who do not.

THE INTENTIONALLY DEAF LEADER



I can hear you. I just
choose not to listen to
you.



12. The Intentionally Deaf Leader

Nancy was a talented leader who was well liked and successful. Sometimes she would seek advice and listen. Other times however, she would either not see the need to seek input on an important decision or would ask for advice but not listen to it. On a few occasions, she ignored some very important and wise counsel and the consequences were devastating. For example, her friends advised her to not marry the guy she was dating, but she went ahead with it anyway. After a lot of lawyer’s fees, tears, and loss of money, she acknowledged she should have listened. On another occasion, a supervisor advised her to start spending more time with her colleagues in order to build trust. However, she didn't listen and was deeply hurt and angered when some of them began talking about her in unflattering ways. Nancy was experiencing the side-effects of the intentionally deaf leader.

Listening is hard work even for the most disciplined. Our personalities, the speed at which our brains process information, and the number of distractions that cause interference all contribute to the challenge. However, that is not an excuse for failing to listen, especially when it relates to important relationships and serious decisions. Few people acknowledge they are intentionally not listening, but rather, they rationalize their dismissal of information as being justified. In the end, the intentionally deaf leader will pay the price by trying to correct the bad decisions that could have been prevented more easily in the first place.



In their exceptional book, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me)*, social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson explain that when faced with perceptions or data different from our own, we have a strong propensity to dismiss, discredit, or distort both the perceptions and those who hold to them. They note, “Most people, when directly confronted by evidence that they are wrong, do not change their point of view or course of action, but justify it even more tenaciously. Even irrefutable evidence is rarely enough to pierce the mental armor of self-justification.”

THE NO CAN DO LEADER



I'm sorry, but the
answer is NO.



13. The NO Can Do Leader

Hank was a department manager of a non-profit organization. He had been with the organization for over 20 years in a number of different roles. Although he was friendly, creative, and possessed good critical thinking skills, he had one particularly annoying habit – leading with NO. When people would ask him for project assistance, he would share why it cannot be done. When new ideas were floated, he would often note why they may not work. When asked why a project was not completed, he always had a reason or an excuse depending upon who he was talking with. In spite of being well liked, Hank experienced the common consequences of the NO can do leader. He lost his credibility and people bypassed him to get to a YES!

Hank is not alone. There are many “NO can do leaders.” Whether it was from their upbringing, personal insecurity, issues of control, the nature of their unique personality wiring, or some combination, the outcome is unfortunate. They quench the creative thinking of others, train others to also lead with NO, create a culture of excuse-making, and cause others to work around them. We have never seen a leader experience long-term success or have a significant impact by leading with NO. This is not to say that NO is never a legitimate answer. On the contrary, wise leaders must know when to say NO, but it is the exception, seldom the rule. Effective



leaders do not make excuses, they make results. As a rule, they do not lead with NO; instead they lead with YES!

THE SILENT SUFFERING LEADER



If you only knew how I
am really feeling!



14. The Silent Suffering Leader

When Sue joined the board of the local non-profit rescue mission, she was a highly esteemed business leader and active in her local church. She was friendly, hard-working, and family oriented, and she added great value to the board and mission with her leadership experience and vision. Sue often spoke in positive ways about her children and her husband, telling stories about vacations and weekend activities. They appeared to be a picture of a perfect family – one others admired and aspired to be like.

Therefore, Sue’s announcement came as a major shock when she told the board chair that she was stepping down from her role as a board member because she was leaving her husband. Her friends and colleagues couldn’t believe it. Confused would be an understatement. Even her husband didn’t know how much she was struggling inside. Over the next few weeks, Sue shared with a few close friends that she was lonely, no longer loved her husband, and needed “out.” This had been building for a few years, but she had never told anyone, not even her closest friends. Later on, it was discovered that she had been romantically involved with another man. Sue is just one example of a leader who was struggling in her private world but chose not to share her struggles with anyone else who could have helped her.

Silent suffering is not unique to Sue. Many people fear disclosing what they are struggling with on the inside. These struggles include dealing with pornography, substance addiction, infidelity, job discontentment, financial problems, difficulty with a child, or mental or emotional health issues. Those suffering fear sharing these struggles because they are embarrassing and can result in a damaged career, loss of friendships, or being accused of sharing too much about their personal life (emotional vomiting!). The higher



up a person is in positions of leadership and influence, the harder it can be for the silent sufferer to invite others into his or her private world. While the fears and risks of disclosure are real, there are also consequences to withholding information that will impact this person's life and also impact the organization and those with whom they serve. After all, by not disclosing her struggle to a close friend or counselor, Silent Suffering Sue ended up bruising her reputation as well as her family and the rescue mission. Those around her felt violated by this unfortunate surprise, and she became more embarrassed and isolated by the awkwardness that resulted. When it comes to silent suffering of this kind, it is fair to say everyone loses.

What's A Leader Behaving Badly to Do?

If you are like most leaders, you can uncomfortably resonate with at least one or two of the bad behaviors. Just because you are a leader behaving badly, that does not mean you are a bad leader. You can change by addressing these behaviors. It would take a very thick book to begin to describe what is needed to better manage and grow out of each behavior. However, here are some common steps that we have seen work successfully.

1. Face reality

One of the first and most difficult steps for a leader who is behaving badly is to face reality. This means courageously examining yourself and acknowledging your shortcomings and their effects on those around you. You may need to acknowledge these faults to your team and express a desire to change. You may also need to ask forgiveness and pursue reconciliation in some relationships.

2. Humble yourself and be teachable

So often, our natural bent is in the direction of arrogance and entitlement. One of the true signs of spiritual transformation is how we submit to those around us which is not a popular concept in an age of growing cynicism with



authority. Such submission requires humility. Signs of humility include listening, flexibility, sacrificing our own desires and will, and trusting the wisdom of others. Do you have a “truth teller” in your life who tells you the truth no matter if you are going to like it or not?

3. Be hopeful

Let’s be realistic, no human leader is perfect or flawless. While this is stating the obvious, we often forget it and start to believe that other leaders really have it all together. While some leaders may have learned to manage their bad behaviors more effectively than others, most leaders will struggle with one or more of them. Any honest and self-aware leader will tell you just that. While we are all a bit broken in how we think and function, there is hope. People can change. We can change! But most often, change comes with the help of others, not alone.

4. Reframe your thinking

How you think about your life and circumstances has a powerful effect on you and those around you. Highly anxious leaders can easily produce highly anxious families, workers, and organizations. Highly influential leaders also experience the pains and disappointments common in life. What sets them apart is not that they never think about their problems in an unhealthy way, but rather it is how effective they are at catching the thoughts early. They put off old and unhealthy thoughts, and put on new accurate thoughts. The Bible calls this renewing our minds by putting off our old self and being made new in the attitude of our minds (Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:22-23, Philippians 4:8).

5. Seek feedback

We highly recommend that leaders who want to grow arrange an externally facilitated Leader 360 Feedback Process. A 360 feedback process includes gathering anonymous perspectives of how others see you as a leader. These perspectives include your own view of yourself and also the views of your



supervisor(s), your peers, and those who report to you. Such feedback is one of the most accurate ways to identify strengths, bad behaviors, and possible blind spots. We cannot grow without feedback.

6. Manage your defensiveness

It is common for people to respond with defensive routines when given feedback they may not believe or want to hear. Defensive routines often hinder the recipient from learning and may influence the giver to choose to withhold feedback. As stated earlier, some of the most common defensive routines include blaming, attacking, denying, withdrawing, and spiritualizing. While such internal responses are common at first, a wise leader takes hold of them and manages them rather than letting the defensiveness manage him/her. Managing your defensiveness will help to create a safe environment for both you and those you lead.

7. Get a coach or mentor

Coaching from an experienced third party can help you become more open and flexible. Let's face it; feedback can be scary and threatening to even the most secure leader. A coach can help you make sense of what you are experiencing and what others are seeing in you. In addition, they can guide you through change and provide accountability and encouragement.

Conclusion

Remember Jake and Sarah from the introduction? Where you able to identify which behaviors differentiated Jake from Sarah? Jake exhibited characteristics of #3 The Proud Leader, #5 The Defensive Leader, #7 The Free Range Leader, and #8 The Narcissist Leader. His behaviors made it impossible for him to achieve long-term success in any leadership position and caused each organization under him to fail in reaching its fullest potential.



Sarah's ability to make tough decisions could have easily grown into #4 The Control Freak Leader, and her positive reputation could have developed into #3 The Proud Leader. However, the difference came because she was able to humble herself, seek the feedback of those around her, and respond with a willingness to learn. We genuinely desire that you are able to identify any hints of these behaviors in your own life and that you can work on eradicating them out of your life so you and your organization can achieve optimal health.





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If you are a leader of a church, nonprofit or business and would like to further advance the effectiveness and health of yourself or your organization, we can assist you through our proven guidance and relational approach. We provide customized solutions for your complex problems. Our solutions include coaching, assessment, communications, crisis guidance, planning, staffing & HR, succession planning, and personalized coaching retreats. For more information, call our office at 215-723-2325 or visit our website centerconsulting.org.



Self-Reflection Exercise

Mark the top 2-3 behaviors you have seen in your own life:	Steps towards changing this behavior:
<input type="checkbox"/>  1. The Toxic Leader If people can't get along with me, that's their problem!	
<input type="checkbox"/>  2. The Conflict Avoiding Leader Jesus was a peacemaker, and so am I.	
<input type="checkbox"/>  3. The Proud Leader I'm not arrogant. I'm just confident.	
<input type="checkbox"/>  4. The Control Freak Leader I cannot, not be in charge!	
<input type="checkbox"/>  5. The Defensive Leader You made this mistake, not me!	
<input type="checkbox"/>  6. The Lukewarm Leader I'm not unmotivated. I'm just content.	
<input type="checkbox"/>  7. The Free Range Leader I don't like boundaries. I need freedom!	
<input type="checkbox"/>  8. The Narcissist Leader I'm special, and I know it.	
<input type="checkbox"/>  9. The Socially Clueless Leader I'm not dysfunctional. I'm just not a people person.	
<input type="checkbox"/>  10. The Distractible Leader I have a really great idea, again!	
<input type="checkbox"/>  11. The Non-Resilient Leader When the going gets tough, run!	
<input type="checkbox"/>  12. The Intentionally Deaf Leader I can hear you. I just choose not to listen to you.	
<input type="checkbox"/>  13. The NO Can Do Leader I'm sorry, but the answer is NO.	
<input type="checkbox"/>  14. The Silent Suffering Leader If you only knew how I am really feeling!	

