



You Might Be a Weak Leader If...

I use an activity in some of my classes called the “*Best/Worst Leader Traits*” where small groups are asked to think of the best and worst leader they ever had and list traits of each. I’m amazed at how often the groups race to complete the list of traits of the worst leader first (and usually with more zeal)! They often tell me that these come to mind much more quickly because they have so many more examples to choose from! Indeed, those strong, widely admired leaders are typically few and far between and unfortunately the moderate to horrendous ones are much more commonplace. Although most of us acknowledge that most leaders aren’t that great, I’ve found that rarely do the leaders themselves think that they are among them ☺

As a corporate trainer/team development consultant, I’ve observed many leaders – mostly less than stellar. As a trainer, I’ve found that the first step to personal or professional improvement is honest self assessment and acknowledgement of weaknesses – not “improvement opportunities”, “undiscovered strengths”, or “underutilized skills” – but good, old fashioned weaknesses. I’m not sure when it became out of style to actually acknowledge weaknesses and work on them, but ironically, I find that the very best leaders do just that. They have an amazing ability to self assess and course correct frequently and this ability is indeed an undervalued skill in the workplace. I’ve found that many leaders fail to see their weaknesses in part because they lack this self assessment skill, and it’s often exacerbated by an overly positive view of themselves projected by less than candid subordinates. As such, I’ve compiled a simple listing of traits of these all too common weak leaders, admittedly non scientific but based on anecdotal experiences.

You Might Be a Weak Leader If...

- ❖ No one on your team has criticized one of your ideas in the past month (or offered you a breath mint ever).
- ❖ You spend more time planning your own career progression than planning that of your team members.
- ❖ You don’t know the names of one child or spouse/partner/parent for 90% of your team members (for teams < 35) or 50% for teams >35).
- ❖ You haven’t had at least three completely non work related conversations with a team member weekly.
- ❖ Different team members would provide different answers if asked your top 3 priorities for the year.
- ❖ Team members are afraid to fail.
- ❖ You ask team members to work harder than you do.
- ❖ You tend not to hire people smarter than you.
- ❖ You couldn’t explain in some detail what your team members do.
- ❖ Conversation changes when you walk into the break room or join the conference call.
- ❖ Rarely do team members proactively ask for your coaching, feedback, or mentoring.
- ❖ Your team has no vehicle for honest feedback (on what’s working and what’s not) on a regular basis.
- ❖ You talk about your accomplishments more than your team members’.
- ❖ Team members (more than one or two) are surprised at their appraisal ratings at the end of the year.
- ❖ You haven’t admitted a failure to your team in the past six months.
- ❖ You haven’t proactively taken a professional development course in the past twelve months.



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- ❖ You couldn't name a couple key accomplishments for each team member each year.
- ❖ You haven't truly asked a favor of someone on your team or shared something that made you vulnerable in the past three months.
- ❖ You haven't covered/taken the blame for someone on your team making a mistake in the past six months (but only once ☺).

Strong leaders are rare and there's a reason for it. Strong leaders embody a seemingly paradoxical combination of confidence and humility, authenticity and political savvy, candor and empathy, work ethic and work-life balance. This balance is difficult to find and even more difficult to achieve personally. The first step towards becoming an amazing anything is being humble enough to acknowledge deficiencies and work on them. Indeed, the best leaders I've found don't stumble into it, they work at it – every day.

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