



Are You a Dysfunctional Leader?

Following these tips will help turn dysfunctional leaders into functional leaders.

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Few things are as damaging to an organization as a dysfunctional leader. Left unaddressed, the corrosive impact will show up in low morale, stifled development and poor results. Sadly, most toxic leaders are blithely oblivious of the damage they create. If the slackers would just do their jobs, they think, performance would go up.

Leaders come in all kinds of styles and dispositions ranging from tyrants to wimps. What follows are five signs of a dysfunctional leader and tips any leader can use to become more functional.

1. **Your desk is a mess.** People follow leaders who portray confidence and provide structure. If the stacks of paper on your desk look like a small city, it will be hard for people to have confidence in your leadership. Why would anyone want to follow a leader who's a mess?
2. **You travel without a north star.** People are goal-striving creatures. If you value time-at-work more than actual results, if you haven't shared explicit goals with your team, and if people have no sense of forward progress, you're floundering as a leader.
3. **You lead with your moods.** People want leaders who are reasonable and biorhythmically consistent. If instead of communicating in an honest, diplomatic and straight-forward way, you prefer crossing your arms, furrowing your brow and letting out a big sigh, people won't feel safe around you.
4. **You're your parent.** People want to follow leaders who are confident in their own skin, and who has an authentic leadership style. If your leadership style basically just

mimics one of your parents, you're just a puppet to the past. If your parent was a heavy-handed tyrant, and you now lead like you were parented, you aren't you — you're your parent.

5. **You stoke fear.** People value leaders who help inspire their courage. Conversely, using fear to get people to do what you want is cheap leadership. It takes no effort, thought or finesse, and any weak leader can resort to stoking fears. In the end, leaders who motivate through fear won't have any loyalty among their followers.

To become a more functional leader:

- **Know your values.** Identify what you stand for, and what you stand against. Strong, effective leadership starts with principles and values. Develop your character first.
- **Get organized.** Clean your desk. Put your life in order, and people will gain confidence in you. Further, you'll gain confidence in yourself.
- **Answer the holy question.** Here are the four most important words you'll ever learn in the English language: What do you want? Answering that question will help you identify meaningful goals that you can then share with your team. Unless you can answer that question with specificity, you'll never get what you want.
- **Be authentic.** People want to follow leaders who are comfortable in their own skin, not who are wearing a mask. Instead of adopting the style of your predecessor bosses, or one of your parents, trust your own inclinations and preferences. Close the gap between who you are today and who you aim to be as a leader. Be real, be true, and be yourself.
- **Put courage inside of people.** People don't care what keeps you awake at night. Stop showcasing your fears, or stoking theirs. Talk about what gets you up in the morning. Put courage inside of people — encourage them. Stretch them toward meaningful and worthwhile challenges. Develop their courage so they can apply that courage in ways that best serve the organization — and their careers.

Always remember, leadership is not about the leader. It's about those being led. The healthier and well-adjusted you are as a leader, the better off everyone you're leading will be.

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