LEAD

7 Leadership Habits That Are Demoralizing Your Team Without You Realizing It

By Martin Zwilling 🐦 @StartupPro

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Every business leader realizes their primary objective is to motivate people to do what is required, yet all of us with any experience in business tend to remember most those times when we felt highly demotivated by our leaders.

Since I can't imagine any leader demoralizing their team intentionally, I've concluded that the challenge must be how to see your own faults and fix them.

I'm sure there are a few leaders who are convinced they have no faults, so they don't look. For the rest, as a coach, I still struggle with definitively telling leaders what to look for in themselves, and how to change.

In that context, I just finished a new book, "Communicate Like A Leader," by Dianna Booher, who has long coached executives at some of the largest Fortune 500 companies.

I like her summary of seven habits that differentiate generally demoralizing managers from ones that are seen as highly motivating. With some of my own commentary, I see these habits characterizing leaders whose management style includes the following:

1. Dole out bits and pieces versus the big picture.

Business professionals don't want to be treated as "kids," by parents who parcel out only what they think their children can handle or need to know at the moment. They expect to be motivated by the "big picture," or higher purpose of your business or group.

Don't ever talk down to your team.

2. Focus on the "how" rather than the "why."

Only automatons need to be programmed with how to do something, without any understanding of why, and no human is motivated to be a robot.

Poor leaders often neglect to offer the why, perhaps because they don't understand it themselves, or fear they may get challenging questions or disagreement.

3. Discourage questions as a waste of time.

Great leaders actually seek insightful questions and even opposing views, as an avenue to engagement, innovation, and collaboration.

The best leaders love to learn, and they know they can't learn much while talking. Leaders must practice active listening to optimize learning and motivation.

4. Assign projects or tasks and then disappear.

A more motivational approach for leaders is to delegate projects or tasks at a reasonable pace, taking care with each to make sure the team understands the assignment, accepts responsibility, and has the resources to reach the goal.

Extra time spent in the beginning will save much time later.

5. Hire people perceived to be less capable than themselves.

Ineffective leaders tend to hire "helpers" rather than "help." Helpers take more time to manage and train, but won't challenge your boundaries.

If you hire people smarter than yourself, they will be motivated to complement your skills, and both you and your business will benefit.

6. Communicate indirectly and assume people understand.

This approach leaves staff guessing about their standards and expectations, introduces errors, and reduces motivation.

People are motivated to deliver if they clearly understand what is expected, with no surprises. Informal direct discussions are more productive than formal ones.

7. Tend to share mostly bad news or negative feedback.

No one is motivated by a leader who only seems to show up when things go wrong.

The best leaders communicate personally, regularly, and consistently in both good times and bad. They are quick to celebrate small wins, and give positive feedback more often than negative.

In my experience, the best assessment of where you fit in this spectrum is the amount of positive feedback you get directly from your team, and the number of people who lobby to join your team.

If you are hearing more negatives than positives, or your best people are always ready to leave, it may be time to take a hard look in the mirror. Only you can really change the person you see.

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