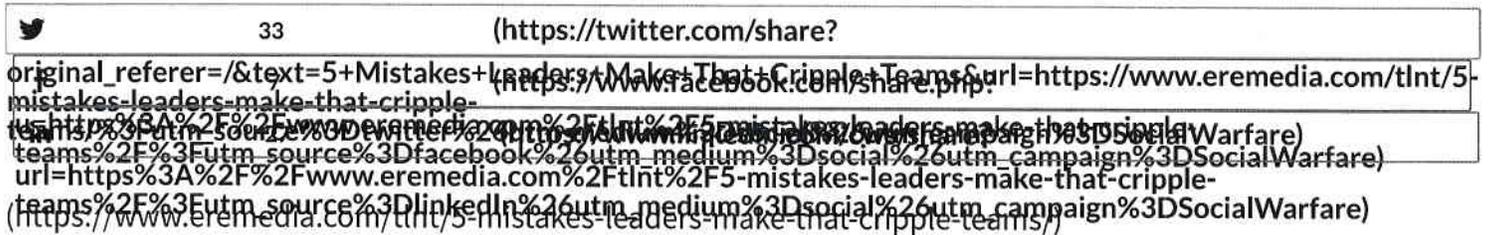


5 Mistakes Leaders Make That Cripple Teams



Leaders create the culture that helps their teams thrive -- or barely survive. Of course, no leader *intentionally* stymies or stalls a team. But even the strongest leaders may make mistakes that freeze their people rather than free them to be their best. Here's how:

Mistake #1: Spoon-feeding solutions rather than growing innovators

Great leaders develop their people (<https://www.eremedia.com/tlnt/6-essential-leadership-responsibilities-that-build-effective-teams/>). They do that by presenting them with challenging situations and new opportunities and by coaching them to innovate with new products and services. By always hovering in the background with “the answers,” leaders turn creative thinkers into disengaged robots.

On the other hand, when employees seek solutions themselves, they take ownership, feel accountable for results, engage with the process and each other, and feel that their work matters in the big picture.

As a result of letting them struggle for solutions and feed themselves, they benefit, the leader benefits, and the organization benefits long-term.

Mistake #2: Promising rather than asking

Many managers hold meetings primarily for output. That is, they focus on communicating information: “Here’s what the executive team thinks, wants, or needs you to do.”

Then the leader turns to vague promises: “In second quarter, we’re going to be doing X.” “During Q3, we hope to have completed Y, which will improve our earnings considerably.” “Toward the end of the year, we hope to be able to increase our profit-sharing percentages—that is, if our sales team continues to meet its projections.”

Yes, of course, great leaders keep their teams informed. But primarily they use meetings to coach (<https://www.eremedia.com/tlnt/youll-improve-engagement-if-you-develop-a-coaching-culture/>) rather than make vague promises. They plan around guiding questions: What are you working on? What help do you need from me and

your colleagues in the room? In what way can we be a sounding board for you on the project? Where have you run into a roadblock?

Employees prefer coaches to commentators.

Mistake #3: Focusing on change rather than improvement

“You need to change your diet.” “You need to change your work habits.” “We need to change how we deliver customer service in this department.” These sound like big changes that might take weeks, months, or even years to put into practice—even if you wanted to change. And even if you make the change, the results might be negligible.

How much easier do these changes sound? “You need to add more vegetables to you diet.” “I’d like to see you adopt some project management scheduling tools. Using this scheduling software should save at least 5-10 hours a week.” Or: “We need to improve our customer service. What are your ideas?”

Words shape thoughts. *Improving* something sounds much easier than *eliminating* it, *rebuilding* it, or *redoing* it.

Mistake #4: Identifying problems rather than opportunities

“Problems” put people on high alert and create tension. Be the kind of leader who sees the glass half-full, not half-empty. Help your team see the opportunity to “broaden their expertise,” “build camaraderie” while working with different cross-functional teams, or “gain higher visibility” in the organization.

Mistake #5: Giving feedback before flashbacks

Feedback is far more welcome after you’ve built trust. The best way to build trust (<https://www.eremedia.com/tlnt/7-ways-managers-can-build-trust-in-the-workplace/>) is before you need it.

Think like Hollywood scriptwriters: The movie opens at a dramatic scene. The heroine stalks into the boardroom, pulls a gun from her briefcase, accuses the company of fraud, and demands the executives release her from the contract. The chairman tells her to sit down, that she has things all wrong.

The scene fades. A graphic appears on the screen: “Three years earlier.” The next scene shows the heroine and the chairman of the board back-packing with two toddlers on vacation.

You as viewer immediately think, “Oh, wait, let me rethink this situation. Maybe I’ve misunderstood this relationship and what’s going on here. Let me consider who’s the trustworthy character here with the good intentions.”

If leaders plan to give feedback, they need first to have deposited a reservoir of trust. When negative things happen, the typical reaction is resistance. To overcome that resistance, people need to be able to flashback and recall your good intentions toward them.

Establish connection and build trust before an occasion calls for negative feedback.

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