

Five tell-tale signs leadership is slipping

The Globe and Mail Metro (Ontario Edition) · 19 Mar 2018 · MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

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Exceptional leaders understand that there is a difference between management and leadership. They have learned that organizational success is accomplished not just by getting things done (management), but by getting remarkable things done through a large number of people (leadership).

And not just by any people, but employees who are inspired, motivated and self-driven.

Nevertheless, despite this essential wisdom, almost all leaders also go through rough patches, stressful periods when it's easier to focus on management rather than leadership – when it's simpler, and often crucial, to concentrate on tasks rather than invest in the building and nurturing of high-performing employees.

When this happens, the predicament is that the situation usually spirals downward. Employees get frustrated and make errors, patience dwindles and tempers fray. Team members become less engaged, and the leader feels trapped and exasperated. The pattern continues as the state of affairs worsens.

The only way out of this deteriorating dilemma is for a leader to recognize the signs and act decisively to break the cycle. So, what are the clues a leader should watch for? Here are five.

YOU THINK AN EMPLOYEE “SHOULD ALREADY KNOW THAT”

If you find yourself consistently thinking that an employee “should already know that,” then perhaps your employees aren't the problem. Have you given them the information they need in order to be productive? In times of organizational crisis, consistent communication doesn't always happen. So don't assume your employees know everything you do. Instead, honestly question why your employee “doesn't know” and take ownership and responsibility for the deficiency.

YOU ASSUME YOUR EMPLOYEES WILL RAISE ISSUES OR PROBLEMS WITHOUT BEING ASKED

When priorities are shifting rapidly, your hope is that your employees will highlight problems on the horizon. If there is a risk of negative repercussions, they will often omit or filter the information they give you. Good leaders know to ask direct questions to uncover problems and issues.

YOU BELIEVE IT'S EASIER TO DO IT YOURSELF

If you increasingly find yourself taking on more tasks because, let's face it, the only way to get things done right is to do it yourself, then you have a problem! Your reluctance to delegate responsibilities to your team members is a clear signal that you're slipping back into management mode. If you can't trust your people to do the job well, then you obviously haven't put the right staff in place.

YOU FOCUS MORE ON WHAT'S NOT WORKING THAN CELEBRATING WHAT IS WORKING

Sure, when you're in crisis management mode, dealing with challenges takes priority. But, be mindful that you don't get sucked into the negativity vortex. For every problem that surfaces, remember your staff are investing energy in solving it, or at least expending significant effort to mitigate the

damage. In the heat of the moment, it's easy to forget to acknowledge and appreciate their hard work.

YOU START TELLING PEOPLE WHAT TO DO RATHER THAN ASKING THEM WHAT THEY THINK

It's tempting to tell your people what to do, particularly when the ship is straying off course. But good leaders know that employees who are able to share their insights and offer their own solutions are much more invested and engaged in both the process and outcomes. So, fight the urge to bark orders and issue commands; that's what managers do. Instead, be a leader: Remind yourself that you put good people in place, so let them do what they do best.

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