

GUIDE FOR BUILDING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP



A Resource for Leaders and Founders



| **MIKE KRUPIT**



The Trajectory team has learned a lot about leadership throughout our own journeys to executive management. We've learned even more over the last ten years as we've coached, mentored and advised hundreds of growth-stage leaders.

Many in our careers or businesses don't specifically set out to become leaders. We're driven by a desire to create something meaningful, to solve big problems — not necessarily to lead a team of people or an organization.

And even those who do seek out leadership may find themselves at some point in their career scrambling from one emergency to the next, watching employees underperform, dreading conflict with their management team or wondering if there is any method to the madness.

Effective leaders face the reality that they are no longer managing tasks or projects - they are guiding the teams who are responsible for those tasks or projects. Oftentimes, the tactical "know how" is what has accelerated a person to a leadership role. It takes a new skill set to transition to a position of leadership, one that is often not taught or is easily teachable.

Becoming a better leader isn't something that happens in a day, or even in a week. Building that set of skills requires intentional thought and effort.

what you'll learn

STYLES OF
LEADERSHIP AND TO
UNDERSTAND YOURS

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN
EFFECTIVE LEADER

WAYS TO BUILD A HIGH
PERFORMANCE
LEADERSHIP TEAM

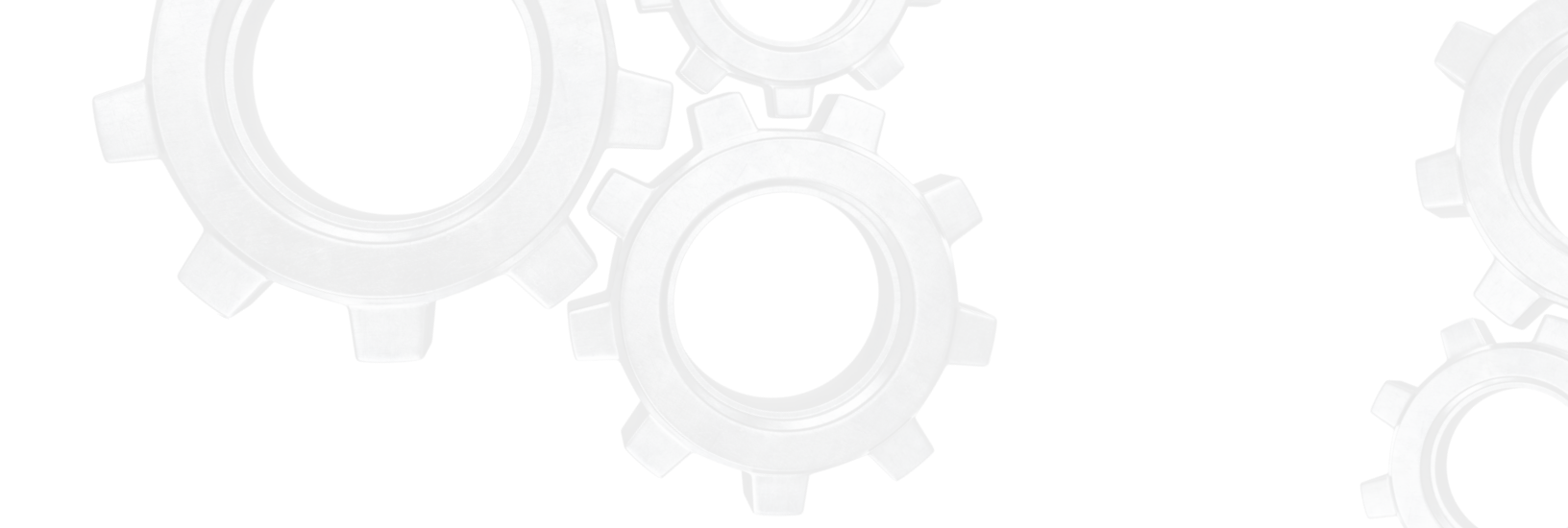
QUALITIES OF POOR
LEADERSHIP AND
HOW TO ADDRESS THEM





WHAT TYPE OF LEADER ARE YOU?

Understanding your leadership style can help determine where to start and how to embody the characteristics of an effective leader. Once you've made an honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses, you can begin to make changes by playing to your strengths and minimizing or mitigating your weaknesses (i). Most people will find that they have a dominant style mixed in with a secondary style or two.



THE COLLABORATOR

Collaborators prefer a consultative style of leadership, seeking input from their teams and delegating some of their decision-making authority. These leaders often engender a sense of belonging and purpose among their team members, who appreciate feeling like an integral part of the organization.

They generally have a great reputation among their staff and are often held up as models of good leadership. However, collaborators can have difficulty taking decisive action, especially when conflicts exist among their team or when they have to act quickly and without significant input from others.

THE DICTATOR

Dictators lead with authority and tend to make decisions on their own. While the word “dictator” sometimes has a negative connotation, these leaders are not necessarily tyrants. In fact, many leaders who prefer to lead as a dictator are benevolent and provide a sense of focus and security that can be appealing to employees that appreciate the clarity that often comes from unquestioned authority.

Even a benevolent dictator can experience poor employee morale if team members feel excluded from the decision-making process. For example, it can be frustrating for employees to diligently work on projects they believe to be important only to be told to stop in the middle and work on something else, without much explanation.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

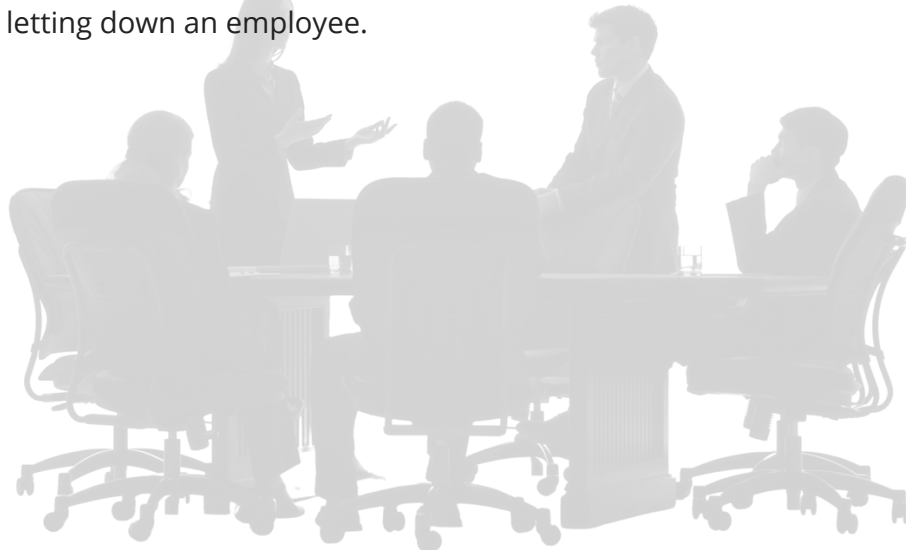
Balance your openness to consultation with a readiness for definitive steps when necessary. Some collaborators may need someone on their team that can act as a foil to their own receptivity.

Self awareness and clear channels for feedback are critical for dictators. Without a recognition of your leadership style, you are in danger of missing obvious signs of employee frustration. Opportunities for feedback ensure that your decisions are not made in a vacuum.

THE PATRON

Patrons focus on getting to know their individual team members and helping each one meet their personal and professional goals. They're also skilled at identifying team members whose talents and roles work well together to create complementary teams. They often build loyal, cohesive workforces.

The danger for patrons lies in the delicate balance between serving the needs of employees and serving the needs of a business. In many ways, happy and effective employees create a happy and effective business. There will be times when business objectives must be placed above a particular employee, and patrons can sometimes struggle to take an action they believe is letting down an employee.



KEYS TO SUCCESS

You must be able to set clear boundaries for yourself and for your employees. Documenting business goals and remaining accountable for them to help avoid conflict between employee and business needs.

THE DELEGATOR

Many people in positions of authority struggle to relinquish control over even small tasks — but not delegators. Like collaborators, delegators appreciate group decision making, but they're also happy to hand the process over entirely. They place a great deal of trust in their teams and their employees and are willing to cede control of large projects and decision-making authority.

But delegators can sometimes be at risk of becoming too hands-off. When these leaders don't give enough direction, team members can have a too-limited or unclear understanding of their roles or expectations. Lack of oversight can also lead to missed benchmarks and unnecessarily long project timelines.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Develop a structure for managing top-down goals and measurement systems that are clearly designed. You need teams that are highly motivated to succeed. Otherwise, you must have the ability to give great inspiration and resources to less motivated teams.

THE VISIONARY

Pushing people outside their comfort zones is the hallmark of a visionary leader. They see great value in setting ambitious goals — for their business, their employees and themselves — and doing whatever it takes to achieve them. Visionaries often lead growth-minded companies to results that seemed unthinkable mere months before. They are usually highly skilled at inspiring and motivating their team.

Some employees can be overwhelmed by the pace of transformation, especially if everyone on the team isn't operating from the same learning curve. Visionary leaders might need to get help providing individualized goals or coaching employees. They may also struggle to "operationalize" their vision, sometimes to the point of creating chaos.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

You succeed when you partner with someone who has operational strengths and integrates your ideas with priorities, plans and metrics. Strategy planning on aggressive goals can help find balance between what is "realistic" and what you know you can push your team to achieve (ii).

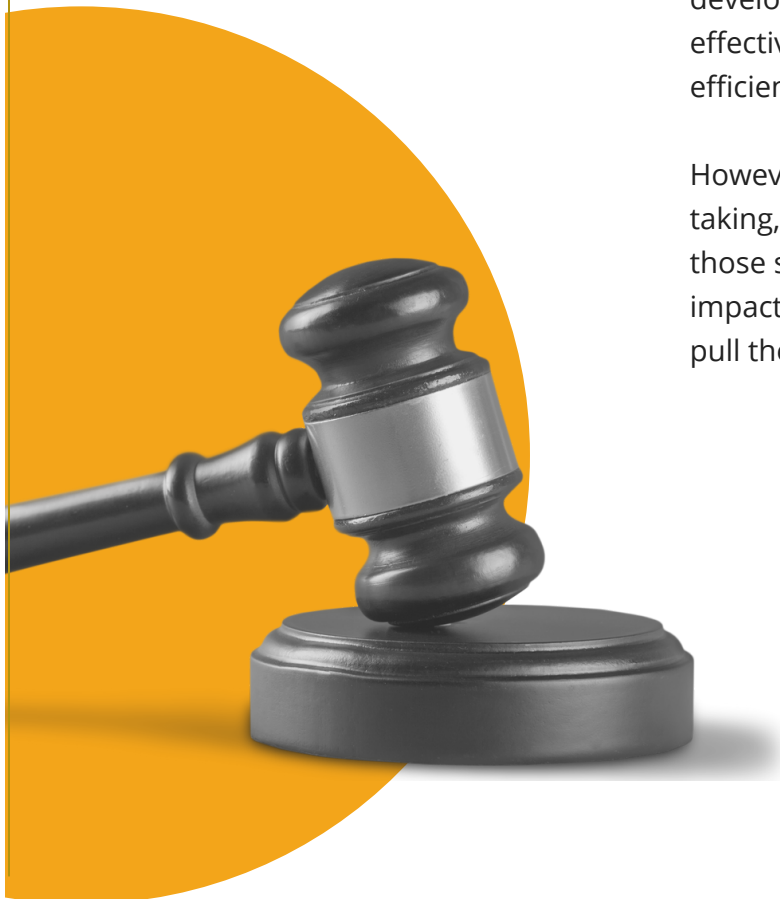
THE STICKLER

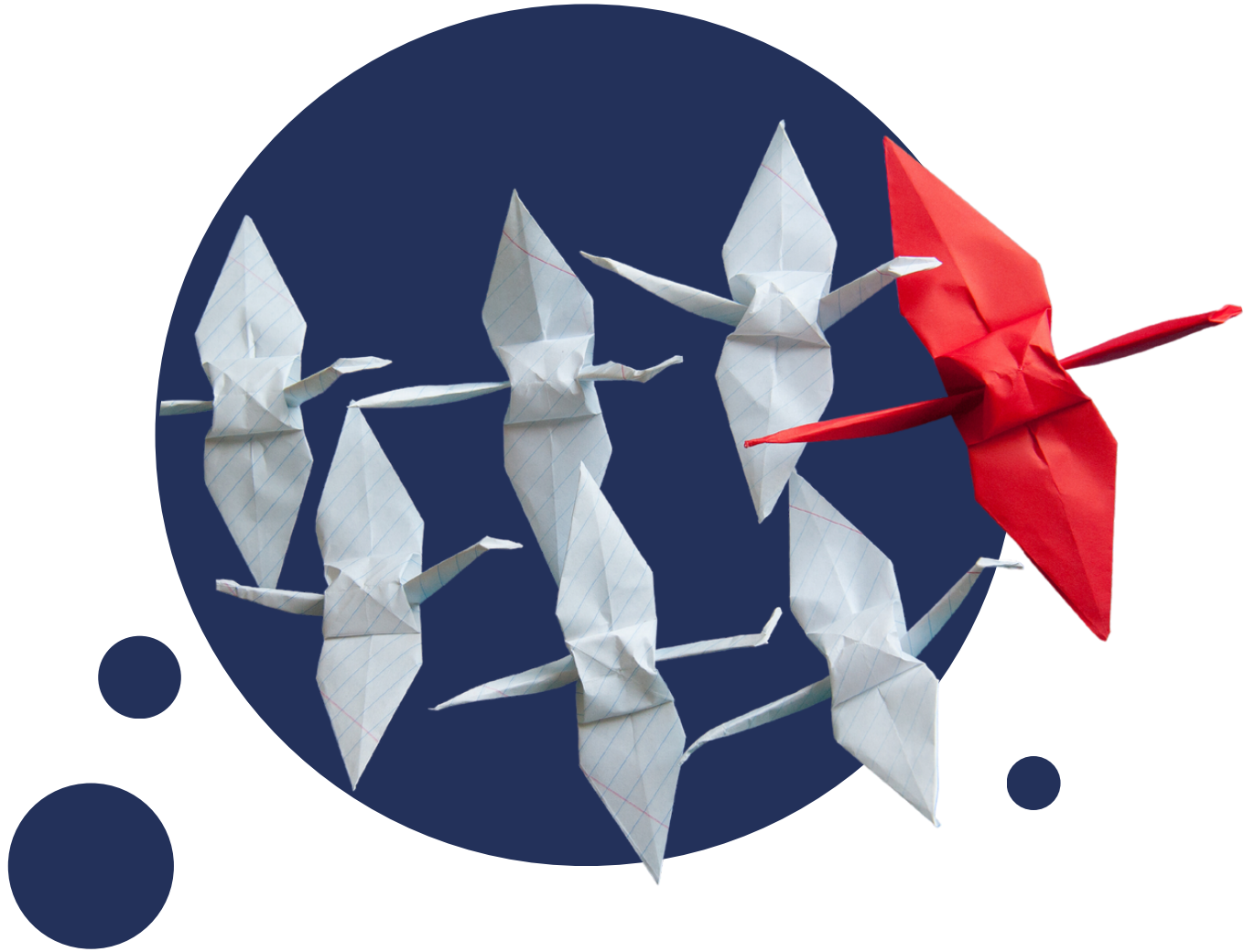
Sticklers value doing things by the book and often strive for perfection. They can sometimes get a bad rap, but sticklers are excellent at defining clear roles and responsibilities and developing task-based incentives. They have often developed effective systems and processes that provide continuity and efficiency.

However, their rule-oriented behavior can discourage risk-taking, especially if they're seen as closed to new ideas. In those situations, a stickler may limit innovation and negatively impact employee morale. Their attention to detail can also pull them into the weeds when making decisions.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Like visionaries, if you are a stickler, you will benefit from partnering with or hiring someone who can provide balance to this leadership style (iii). Find someone who operates effectively outside of their comfort zone and can be decisive.





CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERS

What does it take to be an effective leader? There are consistent characteristics in every successful leader no matter the type or style. The most effective leaders are intentional about their leadership, working to develop the skills and characteristics that will make them better able to reach their own goals and to help their teams identify and reach theirs. The best leaders do the following things.



FOCUS ON LONG-TERM GOALS

The hallmark of any great leader is a compelling vision for the future. It's not that they ignore the details or the actions that must occur right now. They're simply able to see and focus on both the immediate measures as well as the bigger picture.

During difficult times, a less effective leader might go for an easy win that ultimately impacts the organization's reputation or positioning in ways that don't support its long-term goals. In comparison, a leader that's focused on the long game may choose to stay the course during a rough patch, knowing that they're continuing to set the building blocks in place for a successful future.

GIVE DIRECTION

In a study (v) of 550 executives by Harvard Business Review, 70% of respondents said employee engagement increases when senior leadership continually communicates and updates their strategy. The same percentage said employees are more engaged when individuals have a clear understanding of how their job contributes to the overall strategy.

An effective leader is able to communicate their vision and give direction. If their team has gotten off course or isn't performing well, an effective leader can provide the feedback needed to help teams understand how to modify their actions to reach goals.

MANAGE CONFLICT

An effective leader is a great mediator and faces conflict head on. One might think that embracing conflict creates hostile work environments, but conflict and happy employees are not mutually inclusive. Often, a sole focus on happy and engaged employees can have the unintended consequence of conflict avoidance.

When leaders avoid conflict, they create more difficult work situations. An atmosphere that allows for respectful disagreements and constructive feedback provides team members with the confidence to set and honor each others' boundaries, to identify areas for growth and to effectively manage their own conflicts (iv).

ADAPT TO CHANGE

Charles Darwin famously said, "The most important factor in survival is neither intelligence nor strength but adaptability." The same is true for leaders and their organizations. Both internal and external circumstances will evolve during any leader's tenure. The ability to modify plans or change course entirely can be the difference between an organization thriving or going under (vi).

This flexibility should not be confused with a lack of focus or a tendency to jump from project to project. Effective leaders are agile when they need to be — and they know how to remain steady and committed to their goals.

SHOW CONSISTENCY

A goal is only as meaningful as the consistent actions taken to achieve it. Flexibility without stability creates disorganized activity that fails to move an organization or team in any meaningful direction. Consistency in vision and expectations instills confidence in leadership and establishes individual accountability to the clear goals of the organization.

Teams need consistency to understand and achieve their goals. If a leader constantly moves the goalpost or behaves in ways that create uncertainty team members struggle with both productivity and morale.

ACT DECISIVELY

Seeing all sides of a given situation is valuable. Ruminating endlessly on the consequences of a decision can slow down momentum and lead to missed opportunities. There are times when a leader must act decisively—either because time is of the essence or because their team needs to know that someone in leadership is able to take the helm.

As a leader, you must always be decisive. You'll be right 90% of the time. When you make the wrong choice, your job is to admit you are wrong and move on. A good leader understands themselves - their skills and where they need to bring in others - as well as the circumstances around them. Their ability to take decisive action inspires confidence in their teams.

TOLERATE STRESS

Almost every trait we've talked about, when put into action, has the potential to create significant stress. Setting and meeting goals, handling conflict and change, taking decisive actions that will impact your organization and employees — all are inherently stressful (vii).

Effective leaders aren't immune to stress. They're simply able to tolerate high levels of it, and they don't shy away from the feeling. They continue to challenge themselves and others in the midst of stressful situations because they know that stress, like conflict, is an inevitable part of any work that's worth doing.





BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

The characteristics of an effective leader should be present top-down through all leadership levels within an organization. In a 2019 study of employees (viii) , one-third of respondents said the thing they disliked the most about their job was upper management. As the common saying goes: people don't quit jobs, they quit bosses. Poor leadership costs companies revenue, time, staff and customers. And the leaders at the very top aren't the only ones that have an impact.

Every supervisory role has the capacity to exceed goals and inspire stellar performances or to miss the mark and impede productivity. Building a leadership team that can help you achieve your goals requires careful and purposeful planning. These steps will help you create a leadership team that will grow with your organization.



LEADERS MUST EMBRACE DELEGATION

This is a mindset shift rather than any particular actions. Leaders are often quite comfortable doing — taking on and completing tasks themselves. What they're frequently not accustomed to: delegating.

Delegation is what ultimately creates scale. Every leader will reach their physical or mental capacity at some point. If they haven't learned to hand over tasks and responsibilities — no matter what teams they build — they are going to wind up with a business that can't grow (ix). Create a “don't do” list. What are the tasks that must get done but are not an effective use of your expertise and skill set? This can be your starting point for delegating.

ACCOUNTABILITY IS CRITICAL FOR LEADERSHIP

Effective delegation requires clarity about roles, responsibilities and accountability. One of the best places to start is with an accountability chart. Identify precisely who is responsible for what — not only for tasks but also for decisions and communication (x).

If you embark on this task before you've compiled a team, the process will provide you with useful information about the skills and attributes you'll need in new hires. From a clear accountability chart, detail the responsibilities of each person on your team. These job descriptions will guide hiring or promotions and help develop metrics for success.

CLEAR GOALS AND METRICS DRIVE SUCCESS

Top-down goals with defined metrics provide necessary structure so teams and individuals know how to measure their success. The company has goals, the executive has goals, and the team that reports to the executive has goals — all of which are aligned and even overlap so that team members collaborate effectively to meet them (xi).

Organizations that grow haphazardly — perhaps identifying someone internally who “could probably take that job on” — don't serve themselves or their employees. A leadership team made up of individuals that don't know what it would mean to be successful won't be effective, and poor morale among team members could lead to attrition and mediocre performance.

LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT TAKES TIME

Hiring for leadership positions should never be an accelerated process. The ramifications of a poor hire can be significant. Focus on values and skills, not knowledge. Someone who shares your organization's values and is armed with the necessary skills can adapt and grow as the environment changes.

If you're searching outside the organization, be forthright about your values and the type of candidates you're looking for to limit the time spent on those that won't be a good fit. If the right candidate is already in your organization, you have the double benefit of hiring someone that has a deep understanding of the infrastructure and culture and skipping a more substantial recruitment process. Internal hiring is often successful, but consider the impact if a promotion doesn't work out — is there a backup plan?



KEYS TO SUCCESS

No one has a 100% success rate building leadership teams. We can all find ourselves guilty of overestimating someone's potential or being unclear about certain roles or responsibilities. The key is to keep refining your processes and learning from your mistakes. It gets more intuitive with experience.

It's helpful to surround yourself with others who have done it like peers, advisors, coaches and mentors - all with an outside-in perspective.



POOR LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

and how to address them

One of the difficult things about being a leader is that there are few easy decisions, and you will never please everyone. Making the wrong choice doesn't make you a poor leader. Being unable to make any choice because you're trying to please everyone? That could.

There are dozens of qualities that interfere with the ability to lead effectively. Some seen most frequently in leaders and their leadership teams: a lack of visibility, being inauthentic, being inflexible and indecisiveness. Let's talk about them.



NOT SHOWING UP

One of the qualities that most negatively impacts leaders is a failure to be visible to their team. There are a variety of reasons a leader may have a lack of visibility. They may have anxiety about that type of interaction, they may not have carved out time in their schedule, or they may not realize that visibility is important.

Fact is, a leader that only sees their employees at a monthly all-hands meeting isn't providing the inspiration or guidance that a team needs to stay engaged and on track. Showing up, whether eating lunch with the team or having one-on-ones, means keeping a pulse on the workings of your organization and fostering loyalty and mutual respect.

HOW TO FIX IT

The key is to create frequent, meaningful opportunities to connect with employees. A mix of one-on-one and group meetings helps provide the support employees need. If you are an introverted leader you need to overcome tendencies to stay in the background.

A note about visibility: As a leader, you are always on — in the cafeteria, on a Zoom call, at a holiday party. Even if you view a conversation as a casual discussion between colleagues, they take your opinions as gospel. If you say something, they will act on it.



LACK OF AUTHENTICITY

We've all heard this advice: *when you say you're going to do something, do it.*

It's an excellent rule of thumb — and it's not quite enough. Authenticity involves both self-awareness and transparency. A sense of being inauthentic can crop up in ways that aren't so straightforward.

For instance, say one of your core values is transparency. You consistently reinforce that value with your team. You brief employees monthly on the company's successes and failures, including sharing revenue numbers, but not the profitability numbers. You worry that they won't understand the ups and downs of business profitability. You're not intending to be inauthentic, but in your team's perception, that transparency value only goes so far.

HOW TO FIX IT

Most people need a partner to help become self-aware when their behaviors don't align with their intentions and to develop a constructive way to receive this feedback (xii). Consider an accountability partner within your organization.

Another suggestion is to journal regularly, at least daily. By capturing our thoughts and recollections frequently, we're more easily able to compare them with our behaviors, and look for consistency and alignment.



LACK OF FLEXIBILITY

A lack of flexibility can show up for a leader in a number of ways. New leaders sometimes try to compensate for their lack of experience in leadership positions by taking a “My Way is the Right Way” stance. It rarely serves them well. They don’t delegate effectively — by letting people do their jobs in their own way. Delegating a task but then micromanaging every element of it turns off employees.

Inflexibility can also show up as risk aversion. A leader is only looking at their business from the inside out (instead of the outside in), and they’re missing out on business opportunities because they’re not being open minded. They’ve pulled back on the visionary elements of what they do and are, as they say, stuck in a rut.

HOW TO FIX IT

Consider delegating accountabilities instead of tasks so the oversight is in someone else’s purview. Of course, there are some accountabilities that you’ll always keep because you’re in charge, but for some, delegating allows you to hand that off to someone who is better qualified to manage it or simply wired differently.

Revisit the “don’t do” list we talked about earlier - writing out those tasks that aren’t a good use of your skills or time. This can help remind you that certain things don’t need to be given your stamp of approval.

INDECISIVENESS

You may battle with the fear of making “the wrong” decision. The truth is, many decisions aren’t clearly right or wrong. No matter what you decide, you will not make everyone happy. The ability to decide and then lead a team with conviction is more important than the quality of the decision. Constant deliberation or becoming paralyzed by the decision-making process can have real consequences — employee confusion, missed chances and failure to scale.

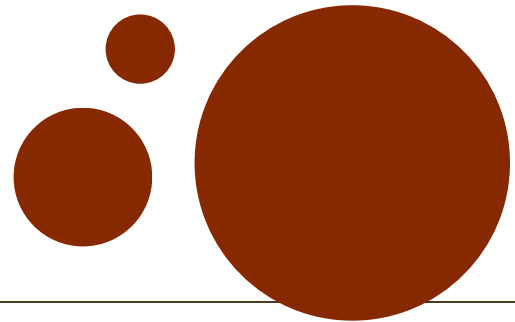
As Steve Jobs famously said, “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward.” You’ll never have all the information to make the 100% perfect decision. But you can pick the next dot on the path.

HOW TO FIX IT

Ask yourself what goal actually needs to be accomplished right now. That question may help push you into action. Also consider setting deadlines for making decisions (xiii).

Pull up our calendar and set a “decision deadline”. Share it with colleagues that may be impacted. Create accountability to make decisions, knowing actions are dependent on having done so.

This list could have been pages long. Just as there are dozens of qualities that make a great leader, there are many qualities that make a poor one. For those of us who want to be effective leaders, the key is to stay committed to practicing greater levels of self-awareness. It's always the first step toward making a change in your behavior.



WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

There are times in business when you experience confusion, a lack of confidence or a sense of conflict about decision-making. Maybe you aren't sure about either your direction or about the steps to get there. Maybe you are in the beginning stages of building awareness of your own leadership style.

The difference between leadership and management is distinguishable ever so slightly. A leader holds the beacon of an organization's vision and long term goals while developing and inspiring others. A manager is operational and reactive, often curbing opportunities for culture building in order to preserve procedure.

Both leading and managing are skills that people mistake as being innate. You would never send a kid out onto a soccer field and say, "Go play!" without explaining the rules

and coaching them through the game. Yet we often expect someone to move from being a sales rep, an engineer, a programmer to a management position and suddenly know how to manage people. Or we expect an entrepreneur to be a natural leader as soon as they choose to embark on a new business venture.

Stepping into any new leadership role will involve new skills, new opportunities for development and new challenges.

Hiring a leadership coach is something to consider when you're feeling uncertainty, or when your organization is not performing as well as expected. Or perhaps you're getting constructive feedback that you're not being effective, that you're creating more conflict than resolving or that there's a lack of clarity around the directions.

COACHING

You don't need to have identified your leadership type, or your strengths and weaknesses, as a prerequisite to get coaching. Like we said, these skills are rarely innate. Athletes and entertainers surround themselves with coaches so that they can consistently perform at their top capacity, at every stage of their career. Similarly, every leader at any stage benefits from growth that could dramatically improve their effectiveness.

Coaching is a process of discovery, skill and confidence development that takes time and mental investment. Yet, you don't have to invest a huge chunk of time up front. We help new, seasoned and potential leaders through a process:



*All of that occurs alongside the work of leading your business,
with you becoming more effective along the way.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mike founded Trajectory, an executive coaching firm, in 2013 and has coached dozens of companies, leaders and entrepreneurs. He is the veteran of growing eight companies, from tech to telecom to food to automotive, both products and services from pre-revenue to \$150M+.

Trajectory has developed coaching programs to deliver experienced, outside-in perspective: www.trajectory.com/contact-us

Linked Resources

- i. *Tech Entrepreneurs Can't Do Everything*, Mike Krupit
- ii. *How to Develop Your Leadership Team*, Mike Krupit
- iii. *What Percentage of Profits Should You Reinvest in Your Business*, Mike Krupit
- iv. *When to Hire Your First Employee*, Mike Krupit
- v. *Harness Workplace Conflict to Help Your Organization Thrive*, Mike Krupit
- vi. *The Impact of Employee Engagement on Performance*, Harvard Business Review Analytic Services
- vii. *Your Growth Strategy Stopped Working, Now What?*, Mike Krupit
- viii. *How to Lead During Times of Uncertainty*, Mike Krupit
- ix. *Why Leadership Matters*, Published by Crain's New York Business, Study conducted by Rymex Marketing Services
- x. *The Best Growth Strategy Is To Make Yourself Dispensable*, Mike Krupit
- xi. *Clarity, Transparency, Focus: Critical Differentiators Between High Performers and the Rest*, Lauren Kaplan
- xii. *What If You're The Problem With Your Team?*, Chuck Hall
- xiii. *Time Management Tips for Entrepreneurs*, Mike Krupit

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