

Let's Talk Leadership with Coach Paul

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Good Boss, Bad Boss: 20 Bad Habits Leaders Should Stop Doing Now

“We spend a lot of time teaching leaders what to do. We don’t spend enough time teaching leaders what to stop. Half the leaders I have met don’t need to learn what to do. They need to learn what to stop.” — Peter Drucker, Management Expert

It can be challenging for high-level leaders to improve their interpersonal skills. We tend to believe the habits that have helped us rack up achievements in the past will continue to foster success in the future. But when it comes to changing the way we interact with our peers and direct reports, we often fail to recognize that not all habits are created equal. There are some habits that have the potential to disastrously derail our careers if we continue to practice them.

Discovering What’s Wrong

Ask anyone about their bosses, and you’ll hear ready recollections of the two types they’ve worked for: the ones they’ve loved and the ones they couldn’t wait to escape. When asked for a list of defining qualities, most people identify the following attributes:

Good Boss	Bad Boss
Great Listener	Blank Wall
Encourager	Doubter
Communicator	Secretive
Courageous	Intimidating
Sense of Humor	Bad Temper
Empathetic	Self-Centered
Decisive	Indecisive
Takes Responsibility	Blames
Humble	Arrogant
Shares Authority	Mistrusts

According to *Social Intelligence* author Daniel Goleman, followers universally believe that the best bosses are those who are trustworthy, empathic and who connect with us. They make us feel calm, appreciated and inspired. The worst bosses are distant, difficult and arrogant. They make us feel uneasy, at best, and resentful, at worst.

Edward Professional Advisors

8333 Foothill Blvd, Suite 106 | Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730

888-858-9510

www.EdwardPA.com

Habits That We Need to Break

The most common bad leadership habits aren't personality flaws—although it may sometimes appear so. They're challenges in interpersonal behaviors—those egregious annoyances that make the workplace substantially more noxious than necessary.

Goldsmith compiled the following list of negative habits after years of working with top Fortune 500 executives. Even though they may not appear to be harmful on the surface; in reality, they're bona fide detriments to the performance and reputation of any leader.

1. **Winning Too Much.** The need to win at all costs and in all situations—when it matters and even when it doesn't, when it's totally beside the point.
2. **Adding Too Much Value.** The overwhelming desire to add our two cents to every discussion.
3. **Passing Judgment.** The need to rate others and impose our standards on them.
4. **Making Destructive Comments.** The needless sarcasm and cutting remarks that we think make us sound sharp and witty.
5. **Starting With “No,” “But” or “However.”** The overuse of these negative qualifiers, which secretly convey to everyone, “I'm right. You're wrong.”
6. **Telling the World How Smart We Are.** The need to show people we're smarter than they think we are.
7. **Speaking When Angry.** Using emotional volatility as a management tool.
8. **Negativity** (“Let me explain why that won't work.”). The need to share our negative thoughts, even when we haven't been asked to do so.
9. **Withholding Information.** The refusal to share information so we can maintain an advantage over others.
10. **Failing to Give Proper Recognition.** The inability to praise and reward.
11. **Claiming Credit We Do Not Deserve.** The most annoying way to overestimate our contribution to any success.
12. **Making Excuses.** The need to reposition our annoying behaviors as permanent fixtures so people will excuse us for them.
13. **Clinging to the Past.** The need to deflect blame away from ourselves and onto events and people from our pasts; a subset of blaming everyone else.
14. **Playing Favorites.** Failing to see that we are treating someone unfairly.
15. **Refusing to Express Regret.** The inability to take responsibility for our actions, admit we're wrong or recognize how our actions affect others.
16. **Not Listening.** The most passive-aggressive form of disrespect toward our colleagues.
17. **Failing to Express Gratitude.** The most basic form of bad manners.
18. **Punishing the Messenger.** The misguided need to attack the innocent who, usually, are only trying to help us.
19. **Passing the Buck.** The need to blame everyone but ourselves.
20. **An Excessive Need to Be “Me.”** Exalting our faults as virtues, simply because they embody who we are.

How to Change a Bad Habit

If you recognize yourself on the list of 20 bad habits, you can do something about it. Although it can be difficult to let go of firmly ingrained behaviors, *it is possible*. Working with a qualified executive coach can provide you with valuable, objective insights into your habits and then help you develop and implement an action plan to strengthen your good ones and get rid of the bad.