



Ten Behaviors Sabotaging Your Leadership Skills

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Have you ever been in a situation at work where you felt like you lost your cool? Maybe not in that wildly out of control way, but enough to where you felt bad about what you said or did and wished you'd handled yourself differently? You got hooked or upset and before you knew it, you were doing something that you wouldn't necessarily do if you were in your right mind.

What happened? You probably went on auto-pilot — no thought involved. Later on, you might have stopped to think about what you did or didn't do and maybe wish you had handled things differently.

No matter what your job or level, every one of us goes on auto-pilot from time to time. We get heads down, blinders on, and don't notice the effect we're having on others. The higher up you are as a leader, though, the more people you impact, and the more your being on auto-pilot reverberates throughout the organization.

One CEO I worked with years ago had been known for being sarcastic, poking fun and belittling others in his previous role as CFO. Not great at any level, but the impact was compounded when he became CEO. Yet he was completely unaware of the effect his sarcasm had on people. In an important meeting with the board of directors, he was sarcastic with one of his senior team members and rattled that person's confidence.

The CEO was blind to this whole dynamic. As his coach, I literally had to tell him directly that sarcasm doesn't cut it anymore—not in the top job. A sarcastic CEO has a much more negative impact on key people than that same behavior coming from the CFO.

Whether you're the CEO or not, leadership is about staying awake and aware of your automatic ways of responding and reacting, and then course-correcting quickly. It's about seeing yourself clearly so you can learn what's working and what's not. It's about figuring out what behaviors of yours might be in the way and what you can do differently to remove barriers to others' success.

The challenge of leadership is to be more accountable. To listen to feedback. To stay open and curious. And to say yes to change, especially the changes you might not know how to make.

Think about one thing you do at work that doesn't work—a bad habit or something you're on auto-pilot about. You know what it is. Most leaders know what they need to stop doing.

Here are the ten auto-pilot behaviors we see most frequently used at work:

1. **"I'll do it myself":** The internal dialogue might sound something like, "It's all up to me," or "I'm the only one who really cares about doing this the right way."
2. **Self-Righteousness:** When you are upset you look for someone or something to blame, condemn, or criticize.
3. **Self-Sabotage:** This is about being hard on yourself and obsessing over your failings. Rather than share the blame for something that went wrong — you assume it is 100% your fault.
4. **Acting Politically:** This is about censoring your behavior and only presenting what's socially acceptable or "politically correct."
5. **Cynicism:** You can always see how something or someone might go wrong. You can point out the flaws and errors in every scenario.
6. **Sarcasm:** You use cutting remarks to lighten a situation or put someone in their place. People are likely to think you're funny, but the laughter is always at the expense of another.
7. **Intellectualization:** You have an argument for everything and you challenge most people and ideas.
8. **Domination:** You use your position and authority to demand that people do what you tell them to do. You might even become a bully or shout or curse when you're upset.
9. **Coalition-Building:** You find others who agree with how "right" you are. You may gossip or share with others about how upset you are.
10. **Withdrawal:** You disengage when you're upset—disappearing behind the screen when conflict is happening or refusing to talk directly to the people you are upset with.

What's your auto-pilot?

Before you lose your cool again, take a moment and figure out what you do when you go on auto-pilot. Then, take a deep breath, count to ten, and step back into leadership and choice. You will naturally find a more empowering response to what is in front of you. This is an act of leadership and self-mastery.

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