

11 Enemies of Effective Leadership

Leadership is never so important as it is in times of difficulty and stress. For many of us in the hospitality business facing declining business levels, belt-tightening budgets, and the insistent clamor for high quality service, that time is now. And while we all like to think of ourselves as effective leaders, it may be a good time for a brief leadership reality check.

The following list includes some things that can destroy anyone's effectiveness as a leader:

Lack of Values. In order to lead others, you must have a grounding or center of moral and ethical values that you hold to regardless of situation. This center is who you truly are and will see you through any difficulty. With a strong center, your integrity is intact and you can be trusted by your constituencies to do the right thing. A person without bedrock values is frequently seen as an opportunist—doing this or that or whatever serves the interests of the moment.

Lack of Integrity. Your integrity is dependent upon the values you hold and your steadfastness in maintaining those values in the face of challenge and adversity. Integrity also means that you are whole, sound, and true. Lacking this, you cannot be counted on by others.

Personal Insecurity. Insecure people are fearful, defensive, and sometimes paranoid. They assume the worst and look for every piece of evidence to support their fears. Consciously or unconsciously their fearful actions damage their relationships with others. Being fearful, they do not trust. In not trusting they are quick to blame and act defensively, which causes offense to others. Their words and actions destroy the very trust that underlies any meaningful relationship.

Lack of Vision. Without an understanding of where you're taking your followers, they will not be inclined to join you on your journey.

Poor Communicator. Even with a profound vision, you must be able to communicate it to your followers. They want to know where they are going and how they will get there. But you don't necessarily have to be a great orator to communicate effectively—you just have to communicate often and thoroughly.

Lack of Competence. Your followers will never trust you if you can't demonstrate competence in your field of endeavor. Without trust in your abilities, they won't follow you. Some "leaders" have been able to mask their incompetence with bluff, arrogance, and braggadocio and gain a following, but in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "You cannot fool all the people all the time."

Lack of Initiative. Leading isn't just about talking, it's about doing. Ultimately, you will be judged as a leader by what you successfully accomplish. Initiative is taking your thoughts and words into the realm of action.

Lack of Organization. Leadership is a group activity. You are required to motivate your followers to accomplish some goal or mission. To do this effectively you have to be able to organize their efforts. Your followers will lose heart if your efforts and theirs are chaotic.

Lack of Standards. Just as you have values, a leader must have standards—for herself as well as her followers. An ill-disciplined army can win a battle but lose the war for failing to maintain basic standards of human behavior. As a leader, you will be judged by the actions of your followers. Therefore, they must understand the high standards that you have and hold dear.

Lack of Personal Accountability. Harry Truman said, “The buck stops here.” Every true leader must be prepared to accept the responsibility he assumes. Dodging responsibility will quickly cost the trust of your followers. Be a “stand up” person and recognize that not everything you do will be right. Your followers will readily understand that if you simply hold yourself to the same high standards you expect of them.

Failure to Value Followers. You cannot “use” people. They will gladly follow a trusted leader with a compelling vision, but will become cynical and alienated when they know they are being manipulated for your purposes alone.

Bottom Line. Effective leadership is never easy, particularly in changing times and circumstances, but the best leaders seem to rise from the challenge of the moment. In the words of one hospitality executive, “The longer I’m in this business, the more I realize it’s all about leadership.” With this thought in mind put your time and emphasis where it will have the greatest impact and do the most good.

Ed Rehkopf, Hospitality Resources International