

Strategies for Dealing with a “Problem Leader”

A Blueprint for Success



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INTRODUCTION

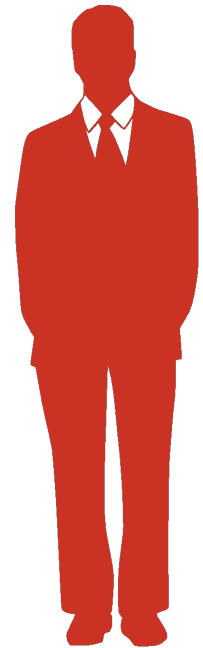
It seems like almost every company has one. A “Problem Child” leader. It’s a leader who is intelligent, has years of experience, and comes up with good ideas, but regularly causes conflict within their team and throughout the organization.

The issue is their way of dealing with people and the way they try to get them to do what he or she wants them to do. And the way they interact with people causes a cascade of problems.

Although they may be able to get people to do what they want them to do, the problem is they only get compliance. And when a team is compliant but not committed, the results are mediocre. Great results require a committed team.

Additionally, tolerating their behavior communicates that acting the way they do is acceptable, and that causes two additional problems. It creates a dysfunctional corporate culture, and it encourages the same bad behavior in others. A culture that tolerates poor communication and a lack of mutual respect erodes morale and engagement. And a culture that tolerates emotional outbursts suggests that the company finds that behavior acceptable.

And last, but certainly not least, is that *no one wants to work for that kind of boss*. Working for that kind of leader is unpleasant. And, as we noted above, their behavior erodes morale and causes disengagement. As a consequence, their behavior causes excessive turnover. And we’re all familiar with the problems *that* creates.



Firing the leader would certainly remove the problem. And it would communicate that the company finds those behaviors unacceptable. *But then you end up losing a strong asset and a valuable resource.* Besides, firing that leader can be as disruptive as keeping them.

Alternatively, you could give them an ultimatum:

“Either change your ways or get fired!”

This approach almost always appears to work. They’ll agree to change. Maybe they’ll even ask for suggestions. But then, behind the scenes, they’ll immediately start looking for a new job. *You still end up losing a valuable resource.*

Over my 20+ years as an Executive Strategist, I've worked with senior executives around the country. I've groomed leaders for advancement, and I've helped good leaders become even more effective.

But I've also been brought in to help save problem leaders. And with each engagement, I refined my approach to successfully turn things around. I'm able to shift their perspective, which then opens them up to change. All of which allows me to help them implement new approaches that are more effective.



As you might suspect, getting someone to change their behavior is a process. You can't simply have one or two conversations and expect to get meaningful results. It requires a series of one-on-one conversations that help them shift their perspective, and allow them to adopt more effective ways to lead, influence, and gain buy-in.

This whitepaper outlines the steps you'll need to take in order to successfully transform a "problem child" into an effective leader. The first phase is all about striving to understand them and the issues as they see them. The process, if done correctly, builds rapport and empathy, which in turn, opens them up to adopting new approaches for dealing with people. The second phase is about introducing them to ways of dealing with people that are more effective, and then coaching them on when and how to implement those strategies.

Although the process generally takes 3-6 months, you and others within the organization should start to see noticeable changes within the first 3 months.

PHASE 1: SETTING THE STAGE

The process starts with striving to understand why they do what they do. Unless you know what triggers them and why it triggers them, it will be almost impossible to get them to change.



As I said in the introduction, successfully turning around a problem leader is a process, not simply one or two conversations. The art of helping this kind of leader is in keeping them from becoming defensive. You need to bring them to a place where they view you as an ally rather than an adversary.

Start with having one or more conversations with them to uncover what causes them to get angry or frustrated or upset or impatient. There are always things people do or don't do that set them off. Asking good questions can give you the insights you'll need to shift their behavior without putting them on the defensive.

Once you've uncovered *what* triggers their behavior, start discovering *why* those things trigger them. If you've built up sufficient rapport, they'll be willing to open up about why they feel the way they do. You'll then be able to understand why they act the way they do. And once you know *why* they get upset, you'll have the insights needed to change their perspective.

Now that you've been able to uncover what causes them to act the way they do along with why they act that way, you'll be able to empathize with them. This sets the stage for having collaborative conversations, rather than confrontational ones. They'll be more open to suggestions and won't become defensive. They'll see that you're striving to help them, rather than "correct" them.



This is when the magic starts to happen...

PHASE 2: MAKING MAGIC HAPPEN

If you've gotten them to this point in the process, then they view you as a collaborator and not an adversary. This will allow you to help them understand why the approach they're using is ineffective. They already understand that their approach isn't working well, they just don't know what to do instead. In this phase, we're going to help them see why what they're doing is ineffective and coach them on better ways to lead and influence. By shifting their perspective, you open them up to considering new ideas and new ways to be more effective.

This is the point in the process where change starts to happen. They're open to hearing about and implementing different ways to present their ideas and gain buy-in from others, along with strategies for becoming more influential with people.

Coach them on what those strategies look like so they can see how and why they work. Once you show them a strategy, send them off to implement the new approach as situations arise in their work life. Have them share their experiences with you in your next conversations. This process repeats itself as you introduce each idea. The whole process spans numerous conversations. The speed of progress and transformation will be dependent upon when and how often they get the opportunity to try (and refine) these new approaches.



Of course, even if someone has a good idea and presents it well, there will occasionally be people who still won't get on board. In situations like that, you don't want your leader getting frustrated and slipping back into old patterns of behavior. As these situations arise, coach them on how to overcome objections. Provide them with strategies to persuade and align people. Additionally, strategize with them about how to deal with objections that can't be overcome.



The last piece of the puzzle is focused on helping them better collaborate with others and avoid confrontations to begin with. Coach them on the values and behaviors that build trust and respect. Help them better understand why fostering collaboration is in their interest and why it will help them avoid confrontations and stonewalling.

Coach them on when and how to start the collaborative process. Help them understand that by building a more collaborative environment, there will be fewer conflicts, faster implementation, and better results.

IN SUMMARY



Helping a problem leader become more effective can save a valuable resource and reduce turnover. Although the process generally takes 3-6 months, you and others within the organization should start to see noticeable changes within the first 3 months. The return on that investment is worth it. Start by working to understand them, get them to a place where they are open to changing, and then coach them on the changes they need to make. You'll end up with less drama, a more effective leader, and improved results.

By the way, if you'd like to strategize about a particular situation, or would like my help with one of your leaders, just visit my website and schedule a mutually convenient time for us to talk.



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