



12 Ways to Spot Ineffective Leadership

We have been asked on many occasions “is there a simple test that can quickly determine an executive’s leadership ability?” The short answer is yes, but keep in mind, simple and fast aren’t always the same thing as effective. There are a plethora of diagnostic tests, profiles, evaluations, and assessments that offer insights into leadership ability, or a lack thereof. The problem with these efforts is they are overly analytical, very theoretical, and subject to bias. That said, they are fast, easy, and relatively inexpensive. The good news is, there is a better way. If you really want to determine someone’s leadership ability, give them some responsibility and see what they do with it. Leaders produce results. It’s not always pretty, especially in the case of inexperienced leaders, but good leaders will find a way to get the job done.

One of the primary responsibilities of leadership is to create more and better leaders. John Maxwell said, “There is no success without a successor.”

It’s important to realise that just because someone is in a leadership position, doesn’t necessarily mean they should be. Put another way, not all leaders are created equal. The problem many organisations are suffering from is a recognition problem – they can’t seem to recognise good leaders from bad ones. Here’s how to spot ineffective leaders pointing out a few things that should be obvious, but apparently aren’t:

1. **Poor Character:** A leader who lacks character or integrity will not endure the test of time. It doesn’t matter how intelligent, affable, persuasive, or savvy a person is, if they are prone to rationalising unethical behavior based upon current or future needs they will eventually fall prey to their own undoing.
2. **Lack of Performance:** Nobody is perfect, but leaders who consistently fail are not leaders, no matter how much you wish they were. While past performance is not always a certain indicator of future events, a long-term track record of success should not be taken lightly. Someone who has consistently experienced success in leadership roles has a much better chance of success than someone who has not. It’s important to remember unproven leaders come with a high risk premium.
3. **Poor Communication Skills:** Show me a leader with poor communication skills and I’ll show you someone who will be short-lived in their position. Great leaders can communicate effectively across mediums, constituencies, and environments. They are active listeners, fluid thinkers, and know when to dial it up, down, or off.
4. **Self-Serving Nature:** If a leader doesn’t understand the concept of “service above self” they will not engender the trust, confidence, and loyalty of those they lead. Any leader is only as good as his or her team’s desire to be led by them. An over abundance of ego, pride, and arrogance are not positive leadership traits. Long story short; if a leader receives a vote of non-confidence from their subordinates it’s game over.

5. **One Size Fits All Leadership Style:** Great leaders are fluid and flexible in their approach. They understand the power of, and necessity for contextual leadership. “My way or the highway” leadership styles don’t play well in today’s world, will result in a fractured culture, and ultimately a non-productive organisation. Only those leaders who can quickly recognise and adapt their methods to the situation at hand will be successful over the long haul.
6. **Lack of Focus and Follow-Through:** Those leaders who lack the focus and attention to detail needed to apply leverage and resources in an aggressive and committed fashion will perish. Leaders who do not possess a bias toward action, or who cannot deliver on their obligations will not be successful. Leadership is about performance...Intentions must be aligned with results for leaders to be effective.
7. **Not Forward Looking:** No vision equals no leadership. Leaders satisfied with the status quo, or who tend to be more concerned about survival than growth won’t do well over the long-run. The best leaders are focused on leading change and innovation to keep their organizations fresh, dynamic and growing. Bottom line – leaders who build a static business doom themselves to failure.
8. **Disconnected from the Market:** Leaders not attuned to the needs of the market will fail. As the old saying goes, if you’re not taking care of your customers, someone else will be more than happy to. Successful leaders focus on customer satisfaction and loyalty. They find ways to consistently engage them and incorporate them into their innovation and planning initiatives. If you ignore, mistreat, or otherwise don’t value your customer base, your days as a leader are most certainly numbered.
9. **Not Invested:** Leaders are fully committed to investing in those they lead. They support their team, build into their team, mentor and coach their team, and they truly care for their team. A leader not fully invested in their team won’t have a team – at least not an effective one.
10. **Not Accountable:** Real leaders are accountable. They don’t blame others, don’t claim credit for the success of their team, but always accept responsibility for failures that occur on their watch. Most of all, leaders are accountable to their team. It’s been said that leaders not accountable **to** their people will eventually be held accountable **by** their people.
11. **Not Focused:** Leaders who are not intentional and are not focused, will fail themselves and their team. Leaders who lack discipline will model the wrong behaviors and will inevitably spread themselves too thin. Organisations are at the greatest risk when leaders lose their focus.
12. **Lacking Vision:** Poor vision, tunnel vision, vision that is fickle, or a non-existent vision will cause leaders to fail. A leader’s job is to align the organisation around a clear and achievable vision. This cannot occur when the blind lead the blind.

The moral of this story is leaders need to be honest, have a demonstrated track record of success, be excellent communicators, place an emphasis on serving those they lead, be fluid in approach, have laser focus, and a bias toward action. If these traits are not possessed by your current leadership team, or your up and coming leaders, you will be in for a rocky road ahead.

Which of these traits stand out to you? Do you have any other signs of ineffective leaders worthy of mention?