

Be Wary of These Four Leadership Derailers

Following in our series of articles on leadership and leadership development, this month I'll be discussing an often ignored side of effective leadership - "derailers." What exactly are leadership derailers? According to the Center for Creative Leadership, a derail is a "weakness that requires improvement if the leader is to realize his or her potential" and "cannot be compensated for by a strength" (McCarthy, 2008). At the same time, Hogan and Hogan (Hogan, Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2007) note that these are "behavioral tendencies that can 'derail' or interrupt a person's career success."

Over the past six years, E·A·S·I·Consult® has identified four key "behavioral tendencies" that often interrupt or end a leader's career. These four derailing behavioral tendencies include:

1. **Integrity Issues.** Although it may seem obvious, a lack of integrity has derailed numerous high-profile leaders. Think back to the accounting scandals and financial "meltdown" of the 1990s through 2000s. Major companies such as Enron, WorldCom, Lehman Brothers and Arthur Andersen were destroyed due to leaders or executives who acted dishonestly. Needless to say, the careers of the leaders of these companies, along with their employees, were derailed. And in certain cases, these leaders were fined, imprisoned or both. Leaders must always act in an honest and transparent manner to achieve long-term success.
2. **Behaving as a Loner (Lack of Communication).** A second tendency that can often lead to the downfall of a leader is staying isolated instead of communicating effectively and often. Coupled with an inability to read other people, these leaders also seem insensitive to others around them (such as their team or staff), and unconcerned with the impression that they make on other people. Demonstrating this type of leadership approach results in a leader who has no followers. To succeed in today's globally oriented and interconnected world, leaders must always remember to be involved and invested in their team.
3. **Acting in an Impulsive or Unreliable Manner.** Although leaders who tend to act impulsively often make a good first impression, their impulsive - and often risky - actions result in outcomes that can have very detrimental effects on the organization. In addition, members of the leader's team cannot depend on their leader due to his or her impulsive and unreliable behaviors. Needless to say, people who demonstrate this type of leadership can quickly see their careers end. It is important for an organization to ensure that each of their leaders exhibit a focused and dependable leadership style, coupled with calculated risk taking.

4. **Being Resistant to Feedback.** A final tendency that often derails a career is being resistant to feedback. This type of leader can be perceived as assertive and very confident in his or her abilities. However, since no one is perfect, being closed-minded regarding feedback - and not making necessary adjustments or improvements in related behavior - can lead to major errors and the inability to foster and develop a sense of teamwork among associates. Therefore, it is critical that all leaders and potential leaders remain open to feedback, and then accurately apply the new information and adjust their behavior accordingly.

Contrary to articles in previous *Perspectives* that detailed the capabilities underlying *superior* leaders, these derailers are what often lead to leadership failure. It is imperative that organizations understand - and remain vigilant - for these four debilitating tendencies *before* a leader derails. It is also extremely important during succession planning activities to be aware of each person's potential for derailing behaviors before making any final decisions.

Fortunately, E·A·S·I-Consult has assisted many organizations to identify persons who are likely to demonstrate various derailers. Using a proven leadership assessment process - the EAQ® - our consultants are able to help organizations better understand the capabilities and potential derailers of each of their leaders and potential leaders.

Earlier this year, we also began offering the Burke Learning Agility Inventory™. This inventory measures a person's ability to adapt to new business strategies, learn quickly, shift his or her learning style, and obtain and incorporate feedback. With the addition of the Burke inventory, the EAQ is now a highly comprehensive process that allows companies to identify and develop people who are likely to be *superior* leaders, while avoiding derailers.

About the Author

Dr. Joseph Gier is vice president for consulting services for E·A·S·I-Consult®. As a licensed psychologist, Gier has identified and developed hundreds of leaders throughout the world. E·A·S·I-Consult works with Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and mid-sized corporations to provide customized Talent Management solutions. E·A·S·I-Consult specialties include individual assessment, online employment testing, survey research, competency modeling, leadership development, executive coaching, 360-degree feedback, online structured interviews, and EEO hiring compliance. The company is a leader in the field of providing accurate information about people through professional assessment. To learn more about E·A·S·I-Consult, visit <https://easiconsult.com> or email ContactUs@easiconsult.com or call 800.922.EASI.