

Four Interpersonal Behaviour Flaws That Derail Careers

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Have you ever experienced a situation where you were confident that a promotion was yours, only to learn that someone else was the successful candidate? You felt slighted, angry, confused and downright dumbfounded. Why were you not successful? After all, you've been a success junkie all your life! In fact, you've had a straight upward track to senior leadership throughout your career.

So, how could this sudden change of events happen? Where have you gone wrong?

Being passed over for a coveted executive role is a very humbling experience. Yet, part of the challenge for senior leaders is that they may be delusional with respect to their current success and the career path that has taken them there. My experience has shown that a particularly big personal fault a candidate experiences is that they often don't absorb the reality of their weaknesses even when they have been deftly identified through psychometric assessments. They remain blind to areas of personal weakness that are now starting to hold them back in the next steps of their career. They are simply not self-aware.

What are those areas of personal challenge or "bad habits"? Typically, these so called bad habits have nothing to do with skill nor do they have anything to do with personality and/or intelligence. What I am referring to are interpersonal behaviour and interpersonal leadership issues.

In my view, one of the most challenging areas for highly successful leaders is arrogance and the need to always be right. Take the Lord Conrad Black saga for instance. Back on British soil, in an attempt to restore his reputation, Black continues to insist that he did nothing wrong and that the legal system is corrupt. His interpersonal strategy is to be argumentative, to bully the program hosts and to throw a rapid volley of sixteen syllable words in an effort to demonstrate his brilliance. Frankly, I don't believe this supreme arrogance will win him any friends.

Another interpersonal behaviour flaw is the constant need to win at all costs. It's one thing to be competitive, but it's another to trample everyone and everything in your path. Leaders who are obsessed with winning often spend time, energy and money on issues that aren't worth their effort; they simply need to win. In some cases, these individuals tarnish their own reputation by constantly attacking their competitors in ruthless, unethical ways.

One trait or particularly annoying bad habit is a leader's belief that they are the only individuals with a good idea. You'll encounter this bad habit in a conversation where good ideas are presented, but are continually discounted by the leader because he/she has "been there, done that" or they refer to the proverbial "yes, but" phrase in order to discount the idea under

discussion. These leaders are still engaged in the “top-down” style of management rather than building a team of strong performers with valuable new ideas.

Being overly judgemental and being too quick to judge are also habits that can stall someone’s next career step. Individuals who engage in this bad habit typically fail to view issues and/or people from a balanced perspective. They may make their judgement too quickly and on very little fact or evidence. Not only that, judgemental individuals are often too stubborn to change their mind.

Any one of the four interpersonal behaviours I’ve described above can easily become a fatal flaw, preventing a senior leader from reaching that top rung of the coveted career ladder. Part of the reason is that there’s no strength I know of that will compensate for these flaws. The only solution is to become truly self-aware by undertaking a psychometric self-assessment and working with a coach who can help develop a long-term improvement plan. While a fatal flaw may never go away, they can indeed be tempered and softened through hard work and continuous self development.

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