

The Hidden Messages Leaders Send

12 COMMON LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS THAT UNINTENTIONALLY INCREASE BURNOUT RISK,
AND WHAT TO DO INSTEAD TO DRIVE HIGH PERFORMANCE

SITUATION	COMMON RESPONSE	BETTER RESPONSE
 Working Longer A team member regularly sends emails or messages after hours.	 <i>"Thanks for your hard work"</i> The Team Learns: Long hours are expected and appreciated.	 <i>"What is creating the need to work these hours?"</i> Better Signal: Sustainable performance matters here.
 The 'Go-To' Person A team member is always the one who steps up and helps out.	 <i>"Keep giving them work because they're reliable"</i> The Team Learns: The reward for being capable is more work.	 <i>"If you're going to take this on, what needs redistributing?"</i> Better Signal: Capacity matters as much as capability.
 Skipping Lunch You notice a team member constantly eating lunch at their desk while working.	 <i>"Leaving them to it. 'You're so dedicated!'"</i> The Team Learns: Recovery comes second to productivity.	 <i>"You haven't stopped all day! Take a break"</i> Better Signal: Recovery supports high-performance
 They're Struggling A team member says they're feeling really overwhelmed.	 <i>"Assuming rest alone will solve the problem."</i> The Team Learns: The workload isn't the issue.	 <i>"Let's look at what's driving the pressure right now"</i> Better Signal: It's safe to discuss capacity.
 Results Drop A high performer starts missing their targets.	 <i>"This isn't like you, let's turn it around this month"</i> The Team Learns: My value comes from my performance.	 <i>"I've noticed a shift. What's feeling harder than usual right now?"</i> Better Signal: People matter, even when results fluctuate.
 Leader Models Overwork You're a leader who regularly sends emails late at night.	 <i>"Assuming people will separte your habits from expectations."</i> The Team Learns: Availability equals commitment.	 <i>"Schedule send emails, or explicitly communicate boundaries."</i> Better Signal: Work can be done differently.

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 Extra Hours A team member regularly starts early and stays back late.	 Letting it happen. <i>"Love the commitment!"</i> The Team Learns: Working beyond capacity is normal here.	 <i>"I've noticed you're starting early a lot lately, what's driving that?"</i> Better Signal: Sustainable workloads matter.
 Making Mistakes A high performer starts missing deadlines and making mistakes.	 Assuming poor performance. <i>"I need you to step it up"</i> The Team Learns: Struggling isn't safe to talk about.	 <i>"You seem to be struggling right now, how are you?"</i> Better Signal: It's safe to ask for support.
 High Performer But... A team member is still performing well, but something feels off.	 Ignore the warning signs as results are still good The Team Learns: As long as I perform, no one will notice I'm struggling.	 <i>"You're performing great, but I've noticed your energy feels different. Are you ok?"</i> Better Signal: Wellbeing matters, even when results are strong.
 New Priority A new priority is added to the team member's workload.	 Assuming people will just fit it in The Team Learns: Everything is urgent.	 <i>"What should we stop, delay, or reprioritise?"</i> Better Signal: Capacity is not infinite.
 Meeting Overload A team member's calendar is back-to-back all day.	 Assuming they're just having a busy day The Team Learns: Being busy is a sign of productivity	 <i>"Where have you scheduled time to actually think and do the work?"</i> Better Signal: Deep work matters too.
 Recognition You're a leader who is giving praise when someone delivers a great result.	 Only recognising the outcome itself The Team Learns: The metrics and output are the only thing that matters.	 Recognise collaboration, ways of working, and positive behaviours. Better Signal: Results and wellbeing both matter.


Leadership Reflection Question:
If someone joined the team tomorrow, what would they conclude is truly valued here, based on what gets recognised, rewarded, and repeated?