

How to Lead without the Leadership Title

Dealing with a bad boss? You're not alone. Throughout my travels across the country delivering keynotes and leading workshops, I have encountered plenty of people who are frustrated with dealing with a bad boss. I have heard countless stories about ineffective supervisors or poor performing managers who fail to motivate their staff, set clear expectations, or provide clear direction. Some employees are fed up with working for people in leadership positions who lack accountability and fail to hold poor performing employees accountable for their actions. I have heard stories about how bad leaders fail to confront problems in the workplace and instead sweep the issues under the rug. But to be fair to these types of leaders, it's not all their fault. Sometimes they are promoted into a leadership position based on doing their former job effectively well--but lack the skillset needed to lead people.

It reminds me of what my mentor told me when I got my first job out of college. What got you here won't get you there ...

It's true (and it's also the title of a fantastic book by executive coach Marshall Goldsmith). Most people promoted from technical, tactical roles into management need a new set of skills to lead people. They need to be trained to excel at their position.

But these bad leaders who lack the skillset needed to lead people sometimes force talented, hard-working employees to leave their job in search of a more satisfying place to work. You may have heard the old but still relevant saying, people don't leave companies, they leave bad bosses. But what's worse than employees leaving? The output from employees who stay! They remain in the toxic work environment dealing with the fallout of poor leadership: low morale, poor performance, and arguably worst of all, employee disengagement. Without effective leadership, these employees do the bare minimum in the workplace and are unwilling to go the extra mile to get stuff done. This has a real monetary impact on company growth and productivity. In fact, according to a Gallup poll, 60 percent of employees are disengaged, translating to over \$450B in lost productivity!

This lack of leadership leaves employees feeling hopeless, helpless, and powerless because their boss is unwilling or incapable of creating a more positive and productive work environment. But you don't have to feel this way. There is a solution. You don't have to be in a leadership position to invoke positive change in your work environment. You can lead without the title. I have provided the below tips to show you how you can fill the void of ineffective leadership, improve your engagement, and boost your morale.

- **Support/Mentor Others:** Take a step back and think about what it was like to be a new or struggling employee. What were some of your challenges? Did you have resources available to help you get acclimated to the job? What helped you improve? Identify ways you can support others so they can work independently. For example, provide resource guides and materials to help them get acclimated and become self-sufficient. Document a "best practices guide" to help others do their job more efficiently. This will help others understand they have a support system and lifeline to help them improve.
- **Create a Safe Environment:** Meet regularly with your colleagues to safely discuss problems, issues and courses of action for projects and assignments, and to prepare for upcoming meetings. A safe environment where employees are not judged or criticized causes more employee interaction and allows them to discuss challenges with work assignments and possible solutions to those challenges. It also helps the newer and struggling employees to better understand their roles and responsibilities.

- **Manage Up:** Provide recommendations to your boss about ways to create a more positive work environment where employees are more engaged and motivated to get stuff done. While I understand some may feel uncomfortable with this approach because it may appear as if you are giving orders to your boss, this is not the case. By tactfully and concisely getting your point across in a non-combative way, your boss may welcome receiving your feedback. Additionally, bosses don't like hearing problems, but they LOVE hearing solutions. And as a fellow employee, you are in the trenches and are uniquely qualified to understand your fellow employees' concerns, so your insight is golden. You can approach the situation by identifying a specific problem in the workplace, such as morale or engagement, and offer your boss a solution based on your observations. Your boss may appreciate your insight and recommendations because you have helped solve a problem that did not have a solution—until now.

Following these tips shows you are not powerless when it comes to dealing with a bad boss. You don't have to have a leadership title to improve your toxic work environment. You can solve problems without relying on a leader who is not up for the challenge. You can lead without the leadership title.



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