



Step Up to Success!

From the Office of Dr. Linda Burr

Leaders Behaving Badly

As a personal and professional coach, so much of what I have been hearing about lately has to do with leaders behaving badly. It seems time to address this issue from the perspective of millions of employees who continue to suffer injustices by these bad behaving leaders. It seems the positive *aura of light* surrounding leadership overall is going dim in many instances. Perhaps it is time to give voice to the many who work for leaders behaving badly.

Implications suggested by the title of this article are philosophically impossible. True leaders do not behave badly. Great leaders understand that leadership is about inspiring creativity and shared values. Leadership is about releasing the inherent motivational energy found in every person and instilling inspiration for others to reach the seeming impossible. Leadership is future facing and is concerned with what will be . . . not just what is right now.

Leaders who yell at, put down, do nothing, marginalize, discourage, and ignore employees are not real leaders. Leaders and managers who fail to engage followers or fail to create a vision for others to follow are not leading either. These *leaders* (in title only) are generally in the way of progress and are often seen by their employees as obstructionists to moving forward. Additionally, emotionally immature leaders destroy positive motivation; erode unity, performance and productivity eventually to the point of significant economic loss to the organization.

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In contrast, real leaders don't just say they value employees. They live it. They value and embrace trusting relationships; visibly demonstrate fairness, principled decision-making and appropriate behaviors. These leaders encourage employees to be their best and help prepare them for future leadership roles. Genuine leaders understand that doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do creates strong organizational values and encourages good corporate citizenship. Having these strong organizationally sustaining principles are the foundations upon which great leaders excel in every way.

Leaders, more than any other group in an organization are in a position to make the type of difference they often say they want to achieve. The game to play is not *Simon Says* . . . the game is *Follow the Leader*. In general, people don't do what leaders say to do; they do what leaders actually do. Leaders and managers who are genuinely committed to making a difference might consider how important it is to understand how valuable their followers are in the competitive race. The efforts of employees are what give an organization even the ability to compete and certainly to win. Valuing employees often begins with making a difference in how leaders and managers treat their followers and employees. Leadership is not about touting an ideal leadership style because there is no one best style. Leadership is about positively influencing others to get something done. For many leaders this is no small task.

One example of changing how things are done in organizations may be to change how employee performance reviews are conducted. Way too often employees are subjected to performance reviews by ill-prepared managers who have not been trained in the art of giving feedback or in conducting reviews. Perhaps the evaluation process should be the other way around. Research suggests when employees have a say in their manager's performance, leader behaviors change for the better. One way to assess whether leaders are behaving badly is through an evaluation of the leader's ability to lead in several areas which include the

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leader's ability to develop all of their employees, release motivational energy, and encourage engagement in shared values for the mission ahead. In other words, are your organizational leaders preparing themselves, employees, and the organization for the future?

If anyone wants to know whether a leader is being effective, one way would be to take a look at what is going on around a particular manager/leader. **Stop** and take a moment to observe managers and employees in their work environment. Conduct manager and employee assimilations. **Look** how leaders are relating (or not) to their employees in areas of development, motivation, and knowledge sharing. **Listen** to the stories going on around the organization about particular managers and leaders. Do these stories support the values the organization espouses to represent to stockholders, the community, and customers? If the answer is no, then perhaps leader development in the form of coaching for leaders and training is necessary to ensure there is consistency between what the organization says it values and leader behavior.

Change is always a choice. Since we cannot change anyone but ourselves, every opportunity must be made to understand all options available and make the best choice for personal growth at all levels within the organization. Coaching is a viable option for leaders to discover what their strengths really are and how to negate or make areas for growth opportunities for change. As effective as the coaching process might be, coaching alone is **no** guarantee a change in behaviors will occur, but it is a great place to start.

Ultimately, the responsibility and accountability for *leaders behaving badly* are the work of those at the highest level of the organization. When cultural norms, processes, and accountability for results are established and training for the desired behaviors takes place, behaviors will change. Other benefits that will be seen as a result of improved leader behavior could be an increase in productivity, higher retention rates, follower commitment will

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be stronger, and organizational energy will be higher. Everyone wins when leaders are held accountable for their actions and how they behave.

Leaders are no different than any of the rest of us. We **all** fail at something at one time or another. We all experience loss and make poor decisions at some time in our lives. If we can look at these encounters as opportunities to learn and grow and evolve, we are the better for the experience. One of the best gifts a leader can give them selves is to take time to become aware of, understand, and then accept their authentic self. Leaders behaving badly are often a symptom of an unknown or un discussed problem lying just beneath the surface. Hiding behind the authority that comes with a title is not an answer to solving a problem.

Facing the realities of what is actually going on is how the process of changing behaviors begins. We cannot change what we cannot acknowledge. Leaders, like anyone else, must face his or her behaviors and fears and then do something. Einstein said nothing changes until something moves. So move. If you are a leader, take the first step and acknowledge you need help . . . not just for yourself, but also for helping your employees, your organization, and your customers get what they need.

About Dr. Linda Burrs and Step Up To Success!

Step Up to Success! is a consulting firm that focuses on organizational strategies for leaders, teams and individuals resulting in highly committed, highly energized, and high performing teams. For more than 20 years, Dr. Linda Burrs has brought her rich dynamic approach to the corporate and professional coaching and training arena. The breadth of her experience crosses all walks of social and organizational life including law firms, technology organizations, educators, business professionals, leadership groups and non-profit groups.

Dr. Burrs designs and delivers targeted and successful coaching interventions and programs designed to *measurably improve personal, leadership and organizational performance*. Her experience, enthusiasm, and high energy provide the foundation for your memorable, life-changing, inspirational experience. When you attend a Step Up To Success! Program, you walk away with improved communication skills, better self-management skills, enhanced interpersonal skills and a clearer understanding of your individual strengths and how they contribute to your success both organizationally, professionally, and personally.

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