

THE THREE LEADERSHIP TRAPS *and* HOW TO AVOID THEM

By Deborah Henley



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As a leader, you are in a position to avoid or release the Leadership Traps and access the vast untapped potential within yourself and in others. When you know how to avoid the three big mistakes that keep you and your people from peak performance, flair and innovation your business and career can breakthrough to a new level of possibility.

The perils of previous success

When John joined a floundering FTSE 100 company as Director of Human Resources, extreme measures were called for to turn the business around. Working with the new CEO, they defined a radical new vision for the organisation which they communicated to senior leadership team. He reported that about 20% said they wanted no part of it and handed in their notice, another 20% said they were on board while actively undermining the new world order and a further 30% paid lip service but continued to do what they used to do. In the end, John got rid of 70% of the Senior Leadership team, brought in new faces and help transform the organisation to the global success it is today.

John knows a thing or two about leadership in diverse organisations and various cultures, so when we discussed the first Leadership Trap he said that this was the one that the majority of this former leadership team had fallen into it. They didn't respond to the new situation but just used precedents and old or lazy thinking.

We observed that this same trap has two different ways of getting caught out depending on whether they were experienced leaders or new, young hot shots. The experienced leaders tend to be like boiling frogs and the new leaders are one-hit wonders.

Boiling Frogs have had great successes in the past yet, as the world changes around them, they can't or don't adapt. They know what works and they refuse to change. Just like a frog who doesn't notice that the water is slowly getting hotter around them, instead of leaping out and taking action when things get too hot, they stay the same and get boiled alive.

One Hit Wonders are the newer leaders. They've been a hit before - met with great success and because what they did worked so well and they try to replicate their success in the same way but in the new environment and situation. They might persist even if their ways are no longer effective.

In both cases, these leaders take a cookie-cutter one-size-fits all approach to leadership. They have a rigid framework about how things are and how to be. They do not adapt to the new status quo but rely on processes and procedures that have worked for them in the past.

They need to stop and see the new world order and discover what matters in it and why the diverse values of the people and what would motivate them. They need a new vision. One that is compelling and aligned with to the new world order - and one that will motivate and gain the buy-in of their people.

The boiling frogs and the one-hit wonders have fallen into the first leadership trap. They are not great leaders. In fact they are not leading at all but following a stale tried and tested formula.

The difference it makes

When Richard Branson, CEO of Virgin Group, was asked, 'What makes a great leader?' he didn't hesitate, 'A great leader knows how to bring out the best in people'.*

The Leadership Traps prevent most leaders from being great and from bringing out the best in people. The difference between a leader caught in a trap and a great one is measurable.

The stats: What do you get when you swap an average leader for a great one?

A whopping 29% uplift in productivity for those in jobs requiring independent thought and a 12% increase in productivity in more repetitive roles*. Along with that come all the other benefits of engagement such as more impetus to collaborate, share ideas, innovate and build effective business relationships and networks - this all leads to better client and staff retention**.

*Lazear, Edward P., Shaw, Kathryn L. and Stanton, Christopher T. (2012). The Value of Bosses. National Bureau of Economic Research.

**Mollick, Ethan (2011). People and Process, Suits and Innovators: Individuals and Firm Performance. Wharton School of Management.

When leaders fall, they limit their own and others' potential effecting:

- Productivity and profitability - annual profits and productivity reduced by at least 20%**.
- Engagement and motivation - 85% employees describe themselves as 'disengaged' ***
- Personal well-being - Stress issues cost the UK economy an estimated £140 Billion in 2012 ****

But falling into the traps can happen quite unwittingly.

What are the Three Leadership Traps?

1. **Boiling Frogs or One-Hit Wonders:** Using same-old same-old processes and frameworks that have worked in the past. Sometimes the most successful leaders of the past can become the worst Boiling Frogs. The One Hit Wonder tries to replicate prior success using the same formula. Neither adapt to the changing needs of the environment and people, thereby stifling innovation, initiative and inspiration.

2. Megaphones: Instead of having a two way conversation and responding to the input of others, the Megaphone just expresses his or her own point of view without tempering it to the people around him or the nuances of the situation. Just as the world of advertising has had to learn to have a dialogue on social-media rather than simply broadcast their message and ignore the nay-sayers, so today's leader has to have a two-way communication. It's the move from authoritarian command and control leadership to a more inspirational form.

3. Cardboard Cut-Outs: Hiding behind a flawless, professional mask or trying to be someone you are not may mean you say and do all the right things on paper, but unless you show an authentic human face and are attuned to your own and others' state of mind, you will lose impact and influence.

The result of falling into one or more of the Leadership Traps is that you end up with a result that nobody wants and does you, your business and your general well-being any favours.

You end up **Murdering the Mojo.**

Murdering the Mojo: This is the result of misunderstanding others' motivation, what incentivises them and how to best measure and motivate performance. When there is no mojo, people start going through the motions, clock-watching and feeling like cogs in the machinery, doing just enough to make the right impression and tick the right boxes. They do not put in the discretionary extra effort and flair that leads to high performance. Misunderstanding motivation, incentives and performance measurement. When there is no mojo, people start going through the motions, clock-watching and feeling like cogs in the machinery, doing just enough to make the right impression and tick the right boxes. They do not put in the discretionary extra effort and flair that leads to high performance.

Why do leaders fall into the traps?

Leaders often misuse and dwindle their power inadvertently. Most leaders work hard to ensure the continued growth of their organisation, develop their people and create a high-performance environment, yet many are unaware that they may have fallen into a trap because they are busy looking only at the surface layer of the problem and using what they know or have experienced previously in trying to address that problem.

As Professor Graham Clarke observed, "Businesses fix symptoms not causes, often because they are baffled by what those causes are." The fact that they have fallen into a trap, and that this is contributing to being blind to the cause - remains unaddressed.

When they know how to avoid the Three Leadership Traps, all this wasted time, money and human potential can be avoided. Armed with a new understanding and equipped with the right tools, leaders can quickly turn things around so that they can fulfil more of their own potential and create high performing teams that are motivated and inspired. They can get amazing results without having to do very much differently at all.

The traps are not things we can rationalise or talk our way out of. We must inspire, encourage and understand the counter-motivations within ourselves and the people we lead. But most of all, we must bravely step forward to engage with these challenges in order to set ourselves free.

What happens when you avoid or release them?

When you avoid the three leadership traps, you unlock the potential in yourself, your people and your organisation

It's said we use only 10% of our brain's potential. If we are using only a fraction of our creative juice, energy, enthusiasm and natural talent within the workplace then we are caught in The Leadership Trap and are severely limiting our potential.

How do we avoid the trap and unleash the full potential inherent in ourselves and others?

REAL Leadership

The way to avoid or release the traps is by becoming a REAL Leader. The characteristics of a REAL leader are as follows

R is for Responsive and relational. Instead of being a one way broadcaster, such as in the case of the Megaphone, there is two communication. The ability to listen and to respond appropriately and differently each time.

E is for Emotional Intelligence or EQ. This has two aspects, the self and the other. Leaders with high emotional Intelligence (and thus can be developed) have good awareness of self and others, they understand how to manage their own and others' emotions appropriately and how to communicate and influence the dynamics between people, even on a large scale such as within an organisation or politically.

A is for Authentic and Aware. You are true to yourself. This is essential in leadership if you are to be trusted and believed. It's difficult to be loyal to someone who remains hidden behind a veneer or plays up to a persona however professional they may be. Without trust in the leadership then

L is for Leverage. You are able to leverage opportunities and new ideas as they are presented to you. You also understand how others operate and all the diverse benefits of your own experience and so, instead of using an old sequence of events you

When you are a REAL leader you no longer fall into **Boiling Frog or One-Hit Wonder** trap because you are Responsive to your environment, Emotionally Intelligent enough to understand all the dynamics at play and Authentic in how you respond to them. You also readily Leverage new opportunities and people in the right way around you.

You avoid becoming a **Megaphone** or **Cardboard Cut-Out** because your leadership is sourced from the inside-out, again fuelled by the four tenets of REAL leadership.

Three Steps to avoid or release the traps

It is a three step process:

1. **Self-leadership:** the REAL leader harnesses that potential in themselves through understanding self-leadership. It is that real human presence and the ability to connect, with its vagaries and vulnerabilities, that best connects us to other human-beings, and enables us to inspire others, build trust, and create a culture of collaboration, co-operation and loyalty. This requires **Emotional Intelligence** and the self-awareness to be **Authentic**.
2. **Leading Others:** the REAL leader defines what leading others means to themselves and understands how that meaning and purpose can be used to bring out the best in others. They know what actually motivates people and help develop and instil a sense of pride, self-efficacy, accomplishment and enthusiasm in their initiatives. They are **Responsive** and relational in their approach rather than didactic stick-in-the-muds.
3. **Creating a Success environment:** the leader creates an environment that sustains and enables potential and high performance to thrive. They create a 'winning habit'. This is the ability to **Leverage** all those around you - all the people, opportunities and approaches. You can optimise your success here when you have the other traits of **Responsivity, Emotional Intelligence** and **Authenticity** down.

Instead of **Murdering the Mojo** you create a culture that is exemplified by the 3 MS. One in which people feel a high degree of **Meaning, Motivation and Morale** in the workplace. It's a win for everybody.

Find out more about how Vivacity Consulting can help you from tell your story through our **REAL Leadership** programme, workshops and events.

Or have **Deborah Henley** speak at your next conference or leadership event.

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In my 15 years in the field of psychology and leadership coaching I've worked with top dogs at organisations like Accenture, Barclays Bank, Cisco and the Senior Civil Service to help them achieve their potential. I have also worked in clinical settings to facilitate deep-level change and personal transformation particularly in addiction recovery.

One of the fascinating things that I discovered in my work was that all types of leaders were accidentally making the same mistakes that lost them opportunities, de-motivated their teams and turned customers and colleagues away. It was all because they didn't get some simple yet fundamental things about the way people really think and act in business.

Whether they faced challenges to build key relationships, raise their profile in the market and enhance customer experience, or whether it was to enter new markets, win new business or create high-performance teams, I came to understand that there were some common threads about how they could have more success. In my talks, workshops and coaching, I help to shed light on these common Leadership Traps and offer practical suggestions for dealing with them.

Further Reading

Seth Godin's 'The Icarus Deception'

We have moved from an Industrial Revolution into an Information Technology age in which robotic administrative tasks can be done by computers or outsourced to parts of the world in which labour is cheaper. This means that there is a premium on those things a computer cannot do - be quirky, original, have unusual ideas, be creative, love, hate, feel jealousy, rage and passion, connect, have relationships. Be human.

Social Media is one huge area affecting work and personal life that thrives on originality and human interaction, and it is the human touch that transforms customer service. People want to deal with real people.

John Kay's 'Obliquity: Why our goals are best achieved indirectly'

The starting point is a vision. The workforce are inspired by more than profits and direct goals but instead by being inspired towards contributing to something greater. Rather than taking a linear road to goal we are more likely to achieve it, and in a more satisfying way, when we move towards it obliquely. 'The Leadership Trap' approach takes this notion as a starting point for the leader's repertoire - the creation of a compelling vision - and then develops beyond it.

Dan Pink's 'Drive: the surprising secrets of what really motivate people'

This book defines the concept of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. A key tenet for the second Big Mistake: Murdering the Mojo. Pink outlines the what and why of it. Deborah helps show leaders how to derive it within themselves and in others.

Robert Cialdini's 'Influence'

A study of six key influential traits with lots of research and studies to back it up. This mega-bestseller looks at the application of influence in all aspects of life.

At Vivacity, we focus on what influence means from a leadership perspective within the context of deriving high performance.

Thompson, Benedetto and Walter's 'It's my company too: how entangled companies move beyond employee engagement for remarkable results'

Looks at the keys to improve employee engagement and the business case for doing so. Vivacity helps define the role of leader to achieve these benefits.

Patrick Lencioni's 'The Advantage: why organizational health trumps everything else in business' as above

David Goldsmith's 'Paid to Think: A leaders toolkit for redefining your future'

This is a book for leaders about making good decisions about every aspect of culture. It does not focus on inspiration and influence to derive intrinsic motivation, action and performance.

Ed Fuller 'You can't lead with your feet on the desk: building relationships, breaking down barriers and delivering profits'

This book looks at the value of personal relationships as a bedrock for leadership success. Vivacity sees enhanced relationships as an important result of having the leader's mindset, it is not the starting point but it is an essential part of his/her repertoire.

Shirzad Chamine's 'Positive Intelligence: Why only 20% of teams and individuals achieve their full potential'

* Looks at measurements of potential and how our internal saboteurs stop us from achieving it. This book demonstrates an uplift of 20% profitability for organisations when we tap into more of our potential. The Leadership Trap approach is a more quantum and less linear approach to enabling people to tap into their potential which is informed by my background in hypnosis and releasing potential through the subconscious.