

# High road or low road? It's your call

As a leader, you have a choice: Take the high road or the low road.

High-road leaders face an exhausting task. In addition to making smart decisions to guide the organization, they need to inspire employees to believe in a collective vision.

Such admirable leaders radiate integrity. They don't just talk about it; they act in ways that convey their commitment to honest business dealings. For example, they refuse to break even the most minor rules—or look away while underlings cut corners—because they want to signal to everyone the non-negotiable need to abide by the law.

Similarly, high-road leaders invest in employees' professional development. They don't just tell people to "get trained." Instead, they provide tools and resources that enable staffers to grow and learn on the job.

When it comes to building teams, these leaders encourage employees to focus their attention on external competitors rather than jockeying for power inside the organization. By shining the spotlight on market rivals, high-road leaders cultivate trust and teamwork and thus minimize internal political squabbles.

Low-road leaders, by contrast, rarely appeal to a shared purpose. Rejecting a "we're all in the same boat" mentality of team support, these tyrants prefer to instill fear.

They will castigate people for making innocent errors. And they will issue threats to underperformers such as, "Shape up or you're gone."

As a result, low-road leaders oversee toxic environments rife with office politics. Such behavior takes its toll, as besieged employees in these dysfunctional organizations consume almost \$190 billion in annual health care costs, according to Jeffrey Pfeffer, a Stanford Business School professor.

—Adapted from "[Don't Always Follow the Leader](#)," David Brodwin, [www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com).