

4 signs that fear may be sabotaging your leadership potential

Courage has been called one of the most important leadership virtues, but it usually requires that you make peace with the discomfort that comes with being uncertain.

While learning to manage without fear is easier said than done, it may be the one critical element that separates an acceptable manager from a true leader that others want to follow.

If you identify with any of these four scenarios, it could be a sign that fear is sabotaging your leadership potential.

1. You think being a manager is about you

It's not a coincidence that you could spell "team" from the word "management." (Or that it doesn't include the word "I.")

Effective management requires selflessness. The lens through which you view challenges, opportunities and successes should have everything to do with the people you manage and aspire to lead—and little to nothing about the impact it will have on you.

Have you ever failed to give team members credit for their work or blamed them for a misstep? Do you talk more than you listen in team meetings and employee one-on-one sessions? Do you know each of your employee's professional backgrounds before they joined your team? Could you rattle off their long-term professional interests and goals?

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," your fear of protecting your own self-interests is standing in between you and your ability to lead.

2. You struggle to make decisions

Every decision you make sets new events into motion; this includes not making decisions. Do you find yourself frequently caught up in a sort of analysis paralysis? Do you constantly review metrics but rarely apply those findings to inform new strategic approaches? Do you struggle to provide clear and action-based direction for your team or in cross-functional meetings with peers? You may be sabotaging yourself with a fear-based mentality.

Not only does the inability to make a decision or choose a direction and stick to it create organizational bottlenecks, you may be frustrating employees and presenting yourself as weak or incapable in the process.

3. You don't share information with your team

Shielding information from employees often stems from a misguided attempt at preserving a sense of power. But as the experts at Gallup explain, "real change occurs at the local workgroup level, but happens only when

company leaders set the tone from the top.”

When you’re secretive about corporate happenings, key priorities and strategic initiatives, employees don’t feel like they’re a part of the organizational culture or mission.

Yet, as the “boots on the ground,” they’re likely dealing with the very issues that leadership is trying to address.

Instead of withholding what problems or competitive threats leadership is trying to solve, share what you know with employees, and invite their insights.

The more perspective you gain from the people doing the job and engaging with other teams, vendors and customers, the more clarity you can share with executive leadership about the real challenges and opportunities that exist.

4. You focus on your image with higher ups above all else

Everyone has a boss, and it’s natural to want to stay in the good graces of those to whom you ultimately answer. But if you arrive at decisions based primarily on how it will be looked upon by higher ups, you’re missing opportunities to bloom as a leader.

Not only are the most effective leaders focused on how to collaborate throughout the organization for maximum influence, they know that building trusting relationships with their own subordinates is as critical as their image with executives. When you lead from a place of lifting others up rather than building your own image, success will naturally follow.

Fear is a natural reaction to any type of change or uncertainty, but it doesn’t have to hold you back from being the best manager you can be.