

Productive Leaders

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Are You a Confident or an Arrogant Leader?



There's a fine line between confidence and arrogance. When leaders are confident, they have a deep belief in their ability to help others and make a difference in the world. Confidence is an important competency in leadership, and it's critical to leadership success. Confidence is motivational and inspirational to others. It gives those around you the ability to take risks needed to stay innovative and push the team or organization further ahead.

Arrogance crosses the line of confidence. Arrogant people believe they no longer have a need to learn, grow, or change. They wholeheartedly believe they are right and that others are wrong.

If you have ever worked for an arrogant boss, you know they don't listen, they do not change their mind when they are wrong, and they are often disrespectful to those around them.

Arrogance destroys the valuable, and absolutely essential, relationships a leader has with other team members. Even more devastating is the feeling arrogant behavior creates in others. People have no desire to follow an arrogant leader. Sometimes the arrogance is so repugnant that people cheer when arrogant people fail, even if it means that the team suffers, too.

Arrogant leaders embody several traits and behaviors that are detrimental to their leadership success.

1. They believe they are smarter than everyone else

Arrogant individuals truly believe they are the smartest person in the organization.

Bernie Madoff, who orchestrated the largest financial fraud in history with his Ponzi scheme, defrauded his clients for over forty years. The Securities Investment Protection Corporation estimates the actual loss to investors was \$18 billion. Why did he do it? He didn't think he would be caught. He was so supremely arrogant he believed he was smarter than everyone in the SEC.

Some arrogant leaders believe they are smarter because of their formal education, their degrees, or their ability.

2. Everything is all about them

Arrogant people feel best when they talk about themselves. Let's face it, most of us do, but, arrogant people excel at taking normal human interaction into the truly narcissistic realm. They love to talk about their own dreams, goals, and accomplishments. They're not comfortable listening, asking questions, or holding a conversation about other topics.

Arrogant people are good at giving advice (whether solicited or not), but they are not good at accepting advice from others. In fact, if you do happen to broach a topic the arrogant person doesn't agree with or see value in, they're quite comfortable cutting you off mid-sentence so they can control the conversation once again.

3. They lack listening skills

Arrogant people take pride in multi-tasking. Instead of taking the time to stop what they're doing, make eye contact, and truly listen to the person talking to them, arrogant leaders continue responding to emails, working on their phone, texting, making notes, eating lunch, or completing other tasks.

They love looking at other things instead of you while you are speaking to them. They're obviously very busy thinking about other things, and they clearly demonstrate that they have far more important issues to attend to than you. Their body language lets you know that they are not interested in you or your concerns.

Note: Many well-intentioned people continue to type or answer emails while others stop by to provide an update or to talk. This is often perceived as being arrogant or uncaring. If someone is giving you an update, please look away from the keyboard and focus on them.

4. They are unwilling to admit when they are wrong

Arrogant managers have a very difficult time saying "I was wrong" or "I didn't handle that well." Instead, they feel a need to explain why *others* are wrong and how they are right. According to them, the whole team and organization is messed up, and that's why they need to take the actions they do.

5. Withholding praise and recognition

Arrogant leaders are quick to tell you how wonderful they are and all the great things they have accomplished, but they tend to withhold praise and recognition when others do great work or are successful. It's hard for them to believe others are worthy of attention and recognition. This is sometimes because they are afraid that they can be replaced, so they feel the need to hoard the spotlight.

6. Communicating Disrespectfully

Arrogant leaders might as well wear a sign proclaiming "I am arrogant!" Arrogant leaders are easy to identify by their communication style, both verbal and nonverbal. When things don't

go their way in a conversation, they raise their voices, swear for impact, or put people down in front of others.

Arrogance in the workplace is a serious problem, especially when it begins at the leadership level. It's also one of the most difficult vices to work with and overcome, and leads to a serious reputation problem. There are only two types of reputations: good reputations and bad reputations. Anything in the middle is leadership gray matter, not a reputation.

The good news is that, with focused effort and hard work, you can change your reputation from one of arrogance to one of servant leadership and humility.

My co-author, Peter Stark and I outline these steps in our latest book, *Why Leaders Fail*, along with 6 other reasons leaders fail, and how the strongest leaders succeed. You can find a copy on Amazon [here](#).

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