5 Leadership Misconceptions That Hinder Success



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Leadership is a muscle that requires consistent training and development. While some people may find they fall into leadership roles more naturally, no one is born ready to be a CEO.

In fact, many misconceptions about leadership exist, and the reality of what it means to actually lead is often far from what new CEOs expect when they first take on the role.

Over the course of my career, I have frequently heard some of the following common misconceptions about leadership. But with the wisdom that comes from experience, I've also seen great CEOs learn how to reframe their thinking and carve out their own leadership principles on their unique paths to becoming

better leaders.

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Misconception 1: Leaders can’t make mistakes

A common misconception is that leaders must be infallible, with an innate ability to make flawless decisions. This assumption often leads to the notion that leaders must project unwavering strength. In reality, effective leadership is more nuanced. Top leaders recognize the strength in vulnerability and acknowledge that making well-informed decisions is a continuous learning process. Creating an environment where everyone can learn from mistakes and failures allows leaders to connect authentically with their teams and cultivate a sense of trust and openness.

When I first became a CEO, I made the mistake of isolating myself from my team, thinking I needed to have all the answers. But that couldn’t have been further from the truth. At some point, every leader is going to make a decision that didn’t quite turn out as planned. Great leaders show that they are resilient, adaptable and open to change amid new information. When an organization is operating at its best, it’s well understood that everyone is learning and improving together.

Misconception 2: Leadership is about giving orders

There is a misconception that a leader’s role is to dictate orders, perpetuating a command-and-control mentality. Leadership requires action, and leaders are the ultimate decision-makers in a company. However, command-and-control

leadership stifles creativity and discourages open communication. Great leaders establish an inclusive working environment where collaboration flourishes, innovative ideas are shared freely, and team members are empowered to contribute their expertise – even if it means challenging preconceived notions.

A leader's role is not just to give orders but to inspire, guide and facilitate the success of the team. By delegating and relinquishing the need for absolute control, leaders can tap into the diverse skills and perspectives within their teams. Great leadership isn't just about top-down communication of the strategy. It is also about listening to your team and creating space for them to share ideas, challenge thinking and honestly discuss problems.

Misconception 3: There is one best leadership methodology

There is no single "best way" to lead. Many great leaders and coaches have completely different leadership styles. Some people think that all great leaders have to be extroverted. However, introverted leaders often excel by leveraging their listening skills to engage in thoughtful decision-making. Similarly, I've heard from many CEOs who have quickly realized the downsides of hiring a team of executives who think exactly like they do.

But there are two characteristics that most great leaders do have in common: emotional intelligence and empathy. Regardless of leadership style, they show their team that they really care about them as individuals. This empathetic approach builds trust, enhances communication and creates a positive environment.

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Misconception 4: Leaders should only share good news

Some leaders think they need to insulate their employees from bad news so the team doesn't get deflated by business challenges. But when leaders shut off communication, the team ends up making up their own stories to fill in the gaps, and the leader ends up isolated. As Jim Collins says, "Face the brutal facts." Great leaders respect their team, win their hearts and minds when they are transparent and see them as partners in overcoming challenges. Transparent communication also creates shared accountability.

Misconception 5: Leadership is solitary

While it may seem isolating at the top, leadership is not a solo pursuit. Great leaders intentionally select a diverse team of executives who think differently from them. They also consistently seek out CEO peers facing similar challenges. Every leader has their biases based on their past decisions and life experiences. Hearing other perspectives helps leaders to separate the facts from their personal stories or opinions about what is really going on. This opens the channels for constructive feedback and course correction.

Spending time with other leaders who are outside your company creates room for honest conversations about strengths, weaknesses and struggles. These types of candid exchanges reveal a crucial universal truth – no leader has everything figured out. Embracing this reality not only strengthens leadership skills but also builds a supportive community where shared insights propel growth.

Moving beyond these leadership misconceptions is a critical milestone for personal and organizational success. Embracing

vulnerability, communicating transparently and encouraging collaboration, while rejecting a command-and-control mentality, are key to becoming a more effective leader. Great leaders know leadership is not a destination; it is a unique and dynamic journey, requiring a lifetime commitment to continuous growth, adaptability and learning.

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