
The Top 10 Habits of Bad Managers

By Kate Carruthers

In recent years the idea of good management has become somewhat unfashionable. Instead, writers and researchers have focused on leadership. This has led to a serious dearth of good management in our organisations. Thus, while managers are poncing about being 'leaders', our businesses and our people are suffering from plain old-fashioned bad management. These bad management habits can be disastrous, not only for the staff, but also for customers and the company over the long term. It is hard to run a good customer service organisation when there is a lack of good management habits. Bad management habits can even impact badly on the bottom line.

Many managers exhibit behaviours in the workplace that they would not display in any other place (such as at home). We must ask ourselves why this is so. Why does it seem okay to behave at work in ways we would not consider as appropriate in any other environment? For example, rarely do we see someone being discourteous to others in a social situation. So why does it seem appropriate in the workplace? Why is there incongruence in behaviour between work, home and social situations?

Each of the habits listed below can be seen either alone or in combination in many workplaces today. These habits create stress for both the manager and their staff, and this is often passed on to customers as well. The tragedy is that this is unnecessary suffering. Many of these habits exist in complexes thus a manager who has poor communication may also; as a result, have no trust in staff because they do not always carry out instructions 'properly'. Or a manager who is disorganised may also be indecisive. A few simple remedies can be effected to make life much better, and these are discussed below. The top 10 bad habits managers can exhibit are:

- 1) Bullying
- 2) Poor Communication
- 3) No Trust
- 4) Disorganisation and Indecision
- 5) Not 'Walking the Talk'
- 6) Discourtesy
- 7) Politics and Inequity
- 8) Avoidance
- 9) Pride
- 10) Lying

Bad Management Habits

1) Bullying

Bullying can range from verbal to physical, and it always has the threat of violence inherent in it. I have worked in organisations with very serious bullying problems. Generally the bullying is either acted out explicitly by managers down the chain of command or at very least tolerated at all levels of senior management. Very rarely is bullying seen only at the lower levels of the workplace. The critical thing to note is that bullying puts all staff, not just those who are being directly bullied, into a state of fear.

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Once a person is in that state they are not able to be positive or creative. Thus bullying is perhaps the most demotivating, demoralising and debilitating of all the bad habits.

2) Poor Communication

This category includes those managers who fail to provide feedback on staff performance including praise and constructive criticism, that discipline subordinates openly, or who are unable to effectively communicate task requirements or who falsely assume that subordinates understand their requirements. It also includes managers who do not know how to communicate the importance of good process in the organisation to optimal functioning, and managers who do not know how to listen to their people.

3) No Trust

When managers demonstrate that they do not trust their employees this often becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. Managers who fail to trust employees to do good work, or allow them the latitude to accept increasingly more difficult tasks are a roadblock to employee growth and good performance. This lack of confidence leads to a reluctance to delegate on behalf of managers, which in turn may lead to employees withdrawing their involvement from the workplace. Another symptom of this is the manager who micromanages staff and completely disempowers them.

4) Disorganisation and Indecision

Reactive managers, who run from crisis to crisis, or who are constantly reacting to crisis, rather than being proactive are viewed as ineffective by employees. This type of behaviour puts significant amounts of stress on both the manager and their staff, and ultimately upon their customers. This type of manager rarely works with their people to identify the root cause of the problem and solving that, instead they continually treat the symptoms.

Part of a manager's job is to make decisions; this is one of the reasons that they earn more money than other staff. Managers who are either afraid to accept responsibility or are afraid of the consequences of decision making are viewed as ineffectual by employees.

5) Not 'Walking the Talk'

There is nothing more demoralising for staff to see a manager who has all the best rhetoric in the world about the corporate values, but who does not act out those same values. Managers who fail to model appropriate behaviour in the workplace make it difficult for employees to maintain these same high standards even when they want to. If managers want staff to act in certain ways then they must first model the desired behaviours.

6) Discourtesy

Managers who fail to treat employees as human beings by offering simple courtesies can completely destabilise an entire department, and sometimes an entire company. When

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managers do not treat employees with common dignity and respect their staff often see this type behaviour as acceptable. The staff then start to act discourteously to each other, thus setting up a chain reaction. Again, the bad habit is passed from the manager to the staff and then ultimately the customers suffer.

7) Politics and Inequity

Work place 'politics' which is engendered or fostered by managers is demotivating and disruptive to employees. Unequal treatment of employees is especially demoralising, people see this unfairness and react against it.

8) Avoidance

Many managers with this habit will do anything to duck out of dealing with the difficult issue. Generally these issues are related to people and performance management, which are almost universally problematic for managers to deal with. Managers who are unwilling to confront issues and who avoid difficult conversations and situations generally just make the issue harder to deal with in the future.

9) Pride

There are managers who will not admit that they do not know something, who do not ask questions, or attempt to bluff their way through a situations, or base decisions on something they know new very little about. This habit is about pride. In my experience, managers with this habit are also prone to avoidance.

10) Lying

Many managers lie to people in the workplace. Rarely is this the result of a sociopathy, instead it is often associated with avoidance of difficult issues - for example, reluctance to impart bad news. It could be the 'social' type of lie, such as not answering truthfully when asked a difficult question, or more serious such as not telling someone why they missed out on a promotion.

It is important to note that this is different to withholding information. Managers are often privy to information that cannot be shared with staff for various reasons. However, instead of lying when asked about such information, it is better so simply advise that it is not possible to disclose information about that issue at present.

Remedies for Bad Management Habits

The remedies for these bad management habits are simple. Managers should:

- Reflect on their behaviour to check if there is congruence between their behaviour in non-work and work situations. If there is incongruence then this needs to be explored.
- Check if their behaviour at work models the corporate values and their own personal values.

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- Ask people for honest feedback on their behaviour and management style (NB: if you have been a bully it is likely nobody will tell you the truth because they are scared of you).
- If senior managers see other managers exhibiting these behaviours then they should counsel them and help them to change their behaviours in a positive way (here the idea is that of manager as coach) - call people on bad behaviour, if you let it happen on your watch you are complicit.
- Stop avoiding difficult issues, just get on with it - if you deal with the issue early it often easier to resolve than after a delay (often it is good to get some support from inside the organisation, HR or another manager may be able to provide both support and useful ideas on how to manage the situation).
- Be courteous to everyone, even if this does not come naturally at first, over time it becomes a habit.
- Just tell the truth, or if speaking the truth openly is not appropriate say that you are unable to comment on the matter (this makes life much simpler).

Most of these remedies are focused on aligning personal non-work behaviours and values with those demonstrated in the workplace. It is up to senior management within organisations to analyse themselves to see if they exhibit these bad habits, and they must also speak out when they see these bad habits in colleagues and staff. These behaviours are only common because we accept them. For example, if a senior manager notices another manager throwing things at their staff; it is likely that they would ask the manager to stop that behaviour. It should be no different if the senior manager sees someone bullying a staff member. Too often senior managers avoid confronting these bad habits and they multiply across all levels of the organisation.

These remedies may sound hard to do or unnecessary, however I have found that if you adopt them life becomes simpler and less stressful. Work should not be an unpleasant place; it should be a place of passion and commitment to common goals. It is the responsibility of management to make the workplace productive and efficient, and the bad habits listed above do not help in that regard. Remember the old saying "the fish rots from the head". Each person holding management responsibility ought to reflect upon their own behaviour so as to ensure that that behaviour is congruent with personal and corporate values.