



5 Leadership Offenses by Omission

The silence of a leader can resonate as loudly as their words.

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Poor leadership is often quickly evident, as in the case of [Mark Zuckerberg's controversial strategy to "turn up the heat" on underperforming employees](#), which markedly deviates from the tenets of exemplary leadership. Yet, deficiencies in leadership are not just about questionable decisions, but also about the vital actions that leaders neglect to undertake. Through my work with leadership teams, I have identified these oversights as "leadership offenses by omission." This article presents five such offenses, each highlighting the imperative for leaders to take decisive action when it is crucially needed.

1. Failure to address unethical behavior

Some leaders fail to address unethical behavior, which erodes trust, damages company culture, and can foster a toxic environment when such behavior becomes the norm. Consider the critical instance of a leader becoming aware of a case of sexual harassment within their team. Failing to act--specifically, not terminating the offender--not only jeopardizes the safety and morale of the team but also implicitly condones the misconduct, potentially allowing a culture of harassment to take root within the team.

Highly effective leaders address such unethical acts immediately and resolutely, reinforcing a zero-tolerance stance, upholding the organization's integrity and the well-being of its members.

2. Ignoring diversity and inclusion

A critical leadership oversight that I frequently observe is the failure to cultivate a team composed of diverse backgrounds and inclusive practices. A prime example of the repercussions of this oversight is a leadership team comprised solely of individuals from homogenous racial, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Such uniformity inevitably leads to a limited ability to make well-rounded and informed decisions.

Therefore, effective leaders fully embrace the imperative of integrating diversity and fostering an inclusive environment. Their active efforts are directed toward building teams that reflect a vast tapestry of backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences. These leaders understand the value of diversity transcends mere quotas; it is about significantly enriching the organization's intellectual capital and enhancing the quality of decision making.

3. Not providing constructive feedback

At the heart of effective leadership is the ability to catalyze growth and development within a team. Essential to this process is the provision of constructive feedback. When a leader hesitates to provide such feedback, it can substantially inhibit both personal and professional advancement. Envision a leader who perpetually shies away from delivering critical appraisals of performance, opting instead for broad-stroke affirmation that lacks personal relevance. This approach not only thwarts individual advancement but may also undermine the team's overall dynamic and capacity to succeed.

Effective leaders, therefore, understand the importance of delivering both positive reinforcement and constructive criticism. They strive to establish a culture where feedback is encouraged and characterized by its transparency, consistency, and specificity. Such feedback is designed to prompt ongoing improvement and bolster constructive behaviors. In cultivating this environment, leaders ensure that their teams not only grow steadily but also contribute robustly to the organization's enduring success.

4. Neglecting employee engagement

An all-too-common leadership shortfall is the failure to engage deeply with team members. This often stems from a lack of emotional intelligence, particularly a leader's inability to set aside their ego and focus on what motivates and concerns their team members personally and professionally. Imagine a leader who interacts with their team only on a surface level, maintaining a safe but isolatingly professional distance. The consequences of such detachment are significant, as the leader's lack of knowledge about what intrinsically motivates team members can result in misaligned goals and waning enthusiasm.

Effective leaders forge genuine, authentic connections with their team members. They invest time and effort to deeply understand the unique challenges and aspirations that drive each individual. By leveraging this insight, they align team members with roles and projects that ignite their passions and play to their strengths, thereby fostering a high-performance culture buoyed by authentic motivation and commitment.

5. Neglecting continuous leadership development

It's not uncommon to encounter leaders who have been so immersed in perfecting their operational or technical skills that they've overlooked evolving their leadership abilities. Often, these individuals do not foresee the critical transition from specializing in an area like marketing or finance to the broader role of leading people. This oversight results in what I call

"[leadership debt](#)"--the longer these leaders wait to work on their leadership skills, the more leadership debt they incur.

Rectifying this oversight necessitates a dedication to lifelong learning in leadership. It's essential for leaders to engage in continual professional development. This means delving into the leadership literature, attending workshops and courses, and seeking guidance from mentors and coaches. Leadership is not a static achievement but a perpetual journey of improvement. By committing to enhance their leadership capabilities consistently, effective leaders can not only reduce their leadership debt but also empower their teams to achieve greater success.

Leadership isn't just about being present. Leadership is not delivered with a specific title, role, or position on an organization's hierarchy. Leadership is something to be earned. It is about taking action when it's needed most. Being a leader means getting involved, making tough decisions, and standing up for what's right. When leaders don't speak up or step up, it can hurt the team just as much as saying or doing the wrong thing. True leaders make a difference by facing problems head-on, staying true to their values, and leading by example. This is how they lead their teams to success and build a reputation that lasts.

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