



# 5 Traits of a Bad Leader

Emotional reactions and a lack of personal insight can undermine all of the hard work executives put into building relationships. Here, a range of leaders reveal the traits they've seen can let others down



Often, it's the simplest behaviours that can embitter and drive away employees from an organisation. Criticaleye spoke to range of executive and non-executive directors to reveal the most insufferable leadership traits they've encountered and their advice to overcome them.

"Leadership is changing and it's being driven by many factors, such as increased transparency and new technology," says **Charlie Wagstaff**, Managing Director

at Criticaleye. "You have to look at everything you're doing and assume that what you did before is no longer relevant. Leadership is no longer about what you do, but why, otherwise it has no purpose."

At our recent [HR Director Retreat](#) we surveyed attendees, 96 per cent of which agreed that the requirements for leadership are changing, while 86 per cent believe that a lack of leadership capability could be a potential barrier to company growth.

"It's extremely important for leaders to learn from one another because you are required to adjust and adapt; you can't do it all at once.

By observing others and hearing about their experiences you will uncover best practice at speed," **Charlie** adds.

Now over to those leaders for their behavioural bugbears and how to avoid them:



**Bill Caplan**  
Criticaleye Board Mentor

## 1. Being too Controlling

**Bill Caplan**, Criticaleye Board Mentor and Chairman of Weldex International and CSH Surrey, says it's vital to let go of the reigns.

"If you're a micro-managing leader and have very tight controls over people they will not grow or develop. Good leaders allow people to stretch themselves, make decisions and a series of mistakes that they can learn from. They should encourage an environment of learning and examination.

The better leaders I've worked for have given me that space to make decisions, supporting my business case proposals and succession plans for key members of my team. Those have been my best opportunities to develop as a leader.

The same applies in my current role as Chairman; if I'm making too many day-to-day decisions I'm either an ineffective Chairman or I have the wrong CEO. I liken it to the conductor of an orchestra.

The conductor doesn't play an instrument, yet wants the best and most collaborative musicians. It's up to the conductor to draw out – through a leader-follower relationship – the best possible music from them."

*“If you're a micro-managing leader and have very tight controls over people they will not grow or develop”*



**Romana Abdin**  
CEO, Simplyhealth

## 2. Thinking You Have All the Answers

**Romana Abdin**, CEO at Simplyhealth, reflects why leaders should learn from their mistakes.

"It's so easy to think that you have the answers and to stop listening and learning, which is actually what you need to do most as a leader.

We've spoken to thousands of customers and corporate clients, practitioners and staff to help shape our future and strategy. Now continual listening is just something we do as the norm. We have a panel of 2,000 customers who we talk and listen to on a monthly basis.

As a leader if you're not capable of being coached and coaching, or of learning with your teams, then how can you be successful?

For me, part of learning is sharing where I fell over, mistakes I've made and what I've learnt from them. Many organisations do a 'lessons learnt' assessment after a big project but how many of us actually share those across the organisation?

We fool ourselves as leaders if we think people don't see everything. Our people see our strengths and weaknesses, they know what we're about – there's no point trying to kid them."



**Michelle Scrimgeour**  
Chief Risk Officer, M&G Investments

## 3. Tunnel Vision

**Michelle Scrimgeour**, Chief Risk Officer at M&G Investments, explains why it's good to look at every angle.

"Good judgement is a really important leadership trait; you need to be able to balance what you're hearing and seeing, and then make a call.

As a leader you need to be able to filter out what's important and sometimes make decisions without all of the facts – some of it is gut feel.

The need for wise assessment and decision making can play out in many ways, particularly in a market crisis when tough decisions are required. I have seen poor decisions being made because they were the easy choices; leaders sometimes need to be brave enough to back a strategy for the long term.

It's important to ensure that you're really staying in touch with the organisation and judge the quality of the information you're receiving – some of it will be biased. At the end of the day, good leaders listen well, but it doesn't mean they'll necessarily be swayed by opinion."

**“For me, part of learning is sharing where I fell over, mistakes I’ve made and what I’ve learnt from them”**



**John Allbrook**  
Criticaleye Board Mentor

## 4. Shying Away from Tough Calls

**John Allbrook**, Criticaleye Board Mentor and Chairman at Franchise Finance and Cellesce, tells us why leaders must be confident decision makers.

“Leaders are there to make decisions. They don’t always get it right, but it’s easier to deal with those who make decisions with confidence and based on the available information.

In a previous role, the CEO before me was perceived to be weak and indecisive on the tough calls and was losing the confidence of his leadership team, the shareholders and the employees. Those calls related to cutting back

the cost base of the company and had major implications on headcount. The uncertainty created an unproductive working environment.

Leaders need to be confident but also self-aware. It’s about striking the right balance and not second guessing yourself. It’s important to remain true to yourself.

I’ve worked for lots of leaders with many different styles and I think you naturally gravitate towards people who you believe are doing it the right way; who are genuine.”



**Charlie Wagstaff**  
Managing Director, Criticaleye

## 5. Trying to be Something You’re Not

**Charlie Wagstaff**, Managing Director at Criticaleye, discusses the value of being authentic.

“Leadership is hard work. While you’ll find many words of wisdom, tools, techniques and practical applications that focus on improving leadership skills, all are empty if not implemented with both substance and passion.

To determine whether you are truly ‘fit for purpose’ – transparent, energised and confident – your leadership style must be consistent with who you are. This means being authentic and honest.

You should constantly challenge what success looks like, and know the difference between managing by influence and managing by authority. Don’t build more followers, build more leaders and ensure the success of those around you.

As Gandhi said: ‘Be the change you seek.’ You should understand what it is that you are passionate about. After all, when you look at your organisation, you are really looking at a reflection of yourself.”

**“Your leadership style must be consistent with who you are. This means being authentic and honest”**