



Poor Management: A systems approach

When I first entered the workplace, I had the dubious distinction of having truly horrible bosses. They were petty, harsh, immature, and in many cases, unethical towards their employees. Intimidation and sexual harassment were more about power and putting people in their place, a humorous sport. As an employee on the other end of the relationship, I could not only feel my own spirit being crushed on a regular basis, but I witnessed the same in my colleagues as well. These were employees willing and ready to be a part of ‘the team’ and something greater than their individual selves, but a poor leader would quickly remind them of their status (for not filling out the TPS report cover page).

Watching them, I knew that if I ever went into management, I would *not* be using them as role models. I couldn’t understand how a manager who you might be your friend outside of work could transform into a tyrant on Monday. Were these managers cruel by nature and through their title, sanctioned to act on those tendencies?

Over the years however, I came to see the *systemic* problem with poor management. While not completely absolving these leaders for their faults, I began to recognize the organization’s role in developing their leaders. When a person is placed into a leadership role, they are suddenly put into a place where the rules change, their ability to affect people is greater (both good and bad), and they impact the team culture by setting the tone for behavioral norms. They are the biggest factor in the organization’s performance.

I noticed that some organizations, usually larger ones, invest heavily in leadership development. They recognize that culture, performance, retention, succession planning and talent management cannot be left to chance. They are real performance factors for the organization. Other organizations struggle for years until they figure it out.

In some respects, my curiosity about *why* leadership was so systematically deficient later turned into an interest and passion for trying to improve this dynamic. While designing and developing leadership programs early in my career as a consultant, I was also working to complete my doctorate of Management in Organizational Leadership. These two concurrent paths enabled me meld the best of what academic literature and theory had to offer into the practical application of leadership program design.

New leaders and hi-potential non-supervisory candidates for leadership are naturally curious about the leadership role. I believe that they want to be great leaders, but it is a learning process; not six topics and a certificate. While ‘journey’ is an overused metaphor for leadership development, it is the best way to describe it. It is a journey for which there is no end, a journey of becoming better.



Over 20+ years, I have been designing leadership programs. Sometimes the programs are wrapped closely around an organization's strategic plan and objectives. For a more consortium-based program however, we can remain focused on a fundamental competency set that is universal to all supervisors.

Organizations simply cannot be oblivious to the relationship between leadership development and the organization's performance. They must have a strategic approach to investing in their leaders. The SLDP provides a low-cost, highly effective option to give supervisors a path to becoming better versions of their leadership selves.