

Too Busy to Win? 3 Factors that Contribute to CEO Success or Derailment

by
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In 2011 Antonio Horta-Osorio, CEO of Britain's Lloyds Banking Group, was forced to take an extended enforced break due to stress and overwork. Horta-Osorio had become CEO in March. By the fall he was suffering from such acute insomnia that he remained awake for five straight days. With increasing stress and mental exhaustion, he was forced to seek medical help. The results were dramatic; shares in Lloyds shares fell 4.4 percent, a whopping \$1.5 billion reduction in market capitalization. Horta-Osario eventually returned to the bank in late December, but he forfeited his bonus and was forced to radically alter his work and personal habits.

We all have moments when we slip from *good leader* to *bad leader*. More often than not, these slip-ups stem from the three most common but resolvable professional derailleurs:

- Too busy to win
- Too proud to see
- Too afraid to lose

Each has its own signs and symptoms:

1. Too busy to win. This speaks to the constant battle most of us face in this intensely wired world. We tend to ignore stress, pile on work, and then start to snap at others as our mood sags. There are many warning signs before we turn from good boss to bad boss. We easily lose our temper, feel increasingly anxious, procrastinate, forget things, lose concentration, and find ourselves forever writing to-do lists. You can't be a great leader when overwhelmed. Recognizing the symptoms and taking care of them, and yourself, is a sign of a good leader.

2. Too proud to see. It's easy to spot this person. They are so tied to an idea that they won't let it go; they refuse to heed the advice of others; and they rely on their past successes at the expense of

considering new solutions. When you are *too proud to see*, you let all the funky (yet natural) cognitive biases take over and interfere with effective leadership.

3. Too afraid to lose. This is when we equate failure and/or mistakes with weakness and incompetence. This condition could stem from a real experience that happened in the past or something we fear could happen in the future. The signs that someone is too afraid to lose include excessive worry about failing to get the right result, retaining an idea or person well past its expiration point, second-guessing every step along the way, avoiding decisions that might cause mistakes; and senseless micro-managing (particularly as deadlines loom). All of these symptoms influence our *self-efficacy, the strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals*.

Self-awareness begins with admitting that you are human and fallible. As leaders we cope with huge pressures and crazy demands every day; thus, it's easy to lose your cool and lose sight of the big picture. We often fall into the natural pattern of hearing and seeing what we want to hear and see—even at the expense of reality. Sometimes we start to succumb to self-doubt and feel powerless and inadequate.

Mess-ups, however, need not mire you in the quicksand of self-destruction. The rocky path back to the status of a great leader is paved with self-awareness. Just pausing to cast an objective eye on your maladaptive or unproductive behavior or asking a trusted ally to tell you the honest truth about how you've been acting lately can get you back on track. But, when you *have* ventured into *bad leader* territory, you need to make amends and acknowledge your behavior with the people around you. The worst thing you can do is pretend like it didn't happen. Sometimes a slice of humble pie is the best medicine.