

The Ego: The Biggest Barrier to Success & Leadership | BPM, Lean Six Sigma & Continuous Process Improvement

"The ego is one of the biggest barriers to people working together effectively. When people get caught up in their egos, it erodes their effectiveness," writes new PEX Network columnist, Tristan Boutros, SVP & Chief Transformation Officer at the Warner Music Group...

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That's because the combination of false pride and self-doubt created by an overactive ego gives people a distorted image of their own importance. When that happens, people see themselves as the center of the universe and begin to put their own agenda, safety, status, and gratification ahead of those affected by their thoughts and actions.

Whenever an individual allows pride, envy or hurt feelings to influence his or her judgment, he or she is likely to make decisions that hurt themselves, their team or their organization. Ego-driven behavior can then trickle down to other peers and employees, making it difficult to get anything productive accomplished.

Signs of Ego Barrier Behavior

There are two primary ways in which Ego manifests itself. The first is false pride, which is when you think more of yourself than you should, often pushing others around for credit or spending most of your day promoting yourself. The second is fear or self-doubt, which is when you think less of yourself than you should and are consumed with your own shortcomings.

When managers are addicted to ego affliction, it can significantly erode their effectiveness or the effectiveness of their departments. Managers dominated by false pride are often called controllers. Even when they don't know what they are doing, they have a high need for power and control. When it's clear to everyone they are wrong, they will insist they are right nonetheless. These individuals are also known for not supporting their teams. They often support their leader or other individuals of power over their direct reports because they want to climb the corporate ladder.

At the other end of the spectrum are the fear-driven managers, who are often characterized as do-nothing bosses. They are described as never around, always avoiding conflict and not very helpful. They often leave their team members alone, even when these individuals are insecure and need help. Do-nothing bosses don't believe in themselves or trust their own judgment. They value others' thoughts more than their own, especially thoughts from those to whom they report. As a result, they rarely speak out and support their own team members.

Signs of Ego Affliction

- **Spending more time promoting yourself, than discussing other people's ideas:** You might insist on being given credit for ideas in meetings, try to poke holes in other people's ideas, ridicule others in your organization or complain that nobody takes your ideas seriously. If your focus is on who was behind a great idea instead of which ideas your company should choose, the ego barrier is probably to blame.
- **Being fearful of mistakes:** Either you don't make suggestions at all for fear of being wrong or you're very hard on yourself when something doesn't go right. Managers are also susceptible to passing on perfectionism to their employees by punishing them severely for mistakes or pointing out the flaws in every one of an employee's plans.
- **Avoiding certain members of your team:** When operating from ego, managers may try to avoid interacting with employees who they fear are particularly smart and talented, more popular or otherwise

likely to show them up.

- **Refusing to accept evidence that you're wrong:** Perhaps you blow up at your marketing director when she gives you metrics that demonstrate the campaign you spearheaded isn't working or delete emails suggesting your sales goals aren't being met.

Common Outcomes

The major problem with the ego barrier is that it leads to self-sabotage, or in the case of organizations, sabotage of business interests. When managers give in to their egos, they insist on using ideas that haven't worked in the past, refuse to consider suggestions from others, ignore the contributions of people they don't like or do nothing because they fear being wrong. There may be high turnover rates if employees don't enjoy dealing with a manager because of his ego-based behavior, and day-to-day operations of a company may suffer if the business doesn't change course as soon as behaviors demonstrate a problem.

How to Overcome the Ego Barrier

Managers need to learn to put their egos aside to resolve these problems. There are several ways to do that:

- **Give Praise:** Practice giving credit to others. Whenever you're happy with the way things are going in your business, find ways to praise others in your organization for their contributions. Giving credit to others helps break your habit of taking credit for everything.
- **Seek Mentorship:** Find three people you trust to serve as mentors. Choose mentors you can trust to tell you the truth even when it hurts. Make a commitment to listen to their opinions with an open mind.
- **Learn:** Ask your employees and peers to teach you different tasks. Focus on skills you'd like to learn from each of your employees and make a commitment to learn those skills from them. If you think you've got all the answers and don't need any help, you're not likely to be interested in collaborating.
- **Recognize Behavior :** One of the best ways to recalibrate an overactive ego is through humility. In organizations, humility means recognizing that work is not all about you; it's about the people you serve and what they need. For leaders, this means seeing your job as creating and maintaining a motivating work environment that engages employees so they can engage customers.
- **Create A Vision:** Finally, the fifth way to achieving healthy organizational collaboration and minimizing individual ego is to rally people around a shared vision. When everyone shares a clear sense of purpose, process, and practice, it's amazing what can be accomplished.

So why don't more managers take action to overcome their ego barrier? The main reason is that they may not be aware of what they are doing. The other reason managers sometimes continue to operate from ego even when they can see it is not benefiting them is that it can be painful. Nobody wants to admit that they've been acting irrationally or given into emotions that they may consider "petty." That's why it's important to choose people to consult with whom you trust and who are not afraid to tell you what they really think.

A side benefit to doing the hard work of dissolving ego barriers is that it will allow for your team to admire your leadership more. Employees don't respect managers that they are afraid of; if you operate from ego, your employees will be resentful and will do the bare minimum to avoid upsetting you. Once you become willing to put your own feelings aside to do what's best for your company, everybody wins. Although it may seem paradoxical, your employees will see you as fearless and confident because you allow room for your

own mistakes and for others' ideas. This improves morale and makes it more likely that your employees will do their best work.

Conclusion

In today's increasingly collaborative business environment, ego is most certainly a liability. While there's nothing wrong with competitive drive and excellent skills, you cannot reach your full potential by relying solely on these traits. To achieve your goals, you are going to need the cooperation and talents of other individuals. So, by practicing humility, being open to honest feedback, and ensuring you are constantly learning from others, you can help eliminate your blind spots, and increase your value as a leader.

Thank you, for your interest in The Ego: The Biggest Barrier to Success & Leadership.

