

BUSINESS INSIDER

8 Common Ego Traps That Could Be Holding You Back



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OCT. 11, 2013, 4:11 PM

It doesn't matter how smart you are. Having too much ego isn't good for you or anyone around you.

Two in five CEOs fail within their first 18 months of leading an organization, according to a study published in the Harvard Business Review. One-third of chief executives from Fortune 500 companies don't make it past three years.

The most successful leaders are aware that emotional intelligence is required in a business environment.

"No matter how open minded or easy to talk to you may be, having a top executive role requires that you use diligent, mindful effort to stay grounded and in touch with how the decisions you make effect the people on the assembly linemaking widgets for you every day," writes author Jen Shirvani in her book "EGO vs. EQ: How Top Leaders Beat 8 Ego Traps with Emotional Intelligence."

Below are eight of the most common ego traps that Shirvani says will destroy any leader's career:

Ego Trap #1: Ignoring feedback you don't like.

Every leader needs to hear the truth, even if they don't like the message. Shirvani says that executives and business owners need to ask themselves this question regularly: "How am I doing as a leader and how do I know I have an accurate answer?"



Flickr Senator Mark Warner

Here are some signs that you've fallen into this ego trap:

- You think that you're a good leader because you don't receive much negative or constructive feedback.
- You do not regularly ask for feedback and when people try to give it to you, you get offended and ignore or rebuff them.
- You secretly think to yourself: "If they don't like what I'm doing, they can go get a job somewhere else."

Ego Trap #2: Believing your technical skills are enough.

This ego trap "gets triggered any time a leader overvalues his technical skills, industry knowledge, or field expertise at the expense of other emotionally intelligent leadership attributes, such as flexibility, self control, and social skill," writes Shirvani.

Here are some signs that you've fallen into this ego trap:

- You consider yourself too great a leader to waste your time accommodating people.
- You are focused on catching others in a mistake rather than letting them work through the issue at their own pace and accepting their process, knowledge, and creativity.
- You take a lot of pride in hearing others tell you that you're great or a genius.

Ego trap #3: Only surrounding yourself with people like you.

You hate compromising or hearing other people's opinions if they don't agree with you. Therefore, you surround yourself with people who are just like you.

"When you hire others who live on your wavelength, you unintentionally create a support system of people who are not equipped to challenge you, to question your thinking, or to offer you a different perspective and direction," writes Shirvani.

Here are some signs that you've fallen into this ego trap:

- You don't have anyone in your inner circle who has a work or communication style opposite your own.
- Decisions are typically made among the executive team quickly and easily with minimal challenging viewpoints.
- Your executive leadership team lacks diversity.
- Challengers in the company are instantly seen as "not team players."

Ego trap #4: Not letting go of control.

Don't focus on the nitty-gritty activities that take away from the more high-level responsibilities the organization needs you to oversee, says Shirvani. At this point in your career, you need to learn how to let those tiny details go and focus your time on developing strategy, growing and engaging talent, and keeping an eye on the overall business landscape.

Here are some signs that you've fallen into this ego trap:

- You always get involved — even with seemingly minor details.
- You spend more time focused on company operations than you do looking outward at the industry or business landscape.
- When you are away from the office, nothing gets done. People don't know how to proceed without you around.
- You feel people need very detailed instructions in order to perform well at your company.

Ego trap #5: Being blind to your downstream impact.

Not knowing how your actions affect others is one of the biggest mistakes you can make as a leader.

"Shifting priorities arbitrarily, feeling hot about a project one day and cold the next, making everything a priority at once so that nothing is prioritized — all of these behaviors, and others, can get in the way of sustaining the organization's long-term goals and cloud the company's vision," says Shirvani.

Here are some signs that you've fallen into this ego trap:

- You routinely ask people to help you with a task even if it's not their job.
- You call last-minute meetings, assuming that everyone will clear their schedule for you.
- You allow things to fall completely off the grid, and then suddenly request an update.

Ego trap #6: Underestimating how much you are being watched.

Your employees are always paying attention to what you do, says Shirvani, and you should never underestimate this. "Whether it's the time you arrive at work, the way you sign your emails, or the accolades you give or neglect to give to the team members at the year-end party — in all these ways, and many more, your employees are watching you," she says.

Here are some signs that you've fallen into this ego trap:

- You think there are different rules for executives than everyone else.
- At company functions, you sit with your standard group of peers instead of using it as an opportunity to meet employees you don't know.
- You believe it's OK to behave like everyone else at meetings because you think you're just like them. At the end of the day, you are still their leader.

Ego trap #7: Losing touch with the frontline experience.

"As a senior executive, it is all too easy to become disconnected from the troops," writes Shirvani. "The contrast between the frontline environment and the physical surroundings of the average executive — large, private offices, dining-room-sized conference tables, and private gyms or private jets — is one reason."

Be sure to make time to check in with your subordinates and see how they're doing.

Here are some signs that you've fallen into this ego trap:

- You have employees working in locations you have never visited.
- You always fly first class or on the company jet, while your travel policy requires that all employees fly coach.

Ego trap #8: Relapsing back to your old ways.

If you're able to connect with your subordinates during certain occasions and completely alienate them in other situations, Shirvani says your employees will begin to think that you're not genuine or trustworthy.

Here are some signs that you've fallen into this ego trap:

- You find yourself operating on autopilot, not making mindful choices in interactions with others.
- You see certain audiences as worthy of your best efforts while others, in your view, are not.
- On good days, you demonstrate high EQ, but you feel justified letting it slide on bad days.

When you're at the top of an organization, it's easy to believe that skills and hard work are all that's needed to keep you at the top. Falling into one of these ego traps will result in employee disengagement, lowered morale, increased turnover, or decreased motivation, says Shirvani.