

WHEN POSITIVE INTENT FAILS TO MATCH PERCEPTION: 12 CHARACTER TRAITS THAT CAN DERAIL EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Analysing your leadership style can help you modify your behavior, build your reputation and inspire staff and stakeholders, says a leadership coach and author.

There is a strong case, which I support, for focusing on strengths in leadership development. And yet the harsh reality is that leadership derailers usually driven by positive intentions can get in the way, and prevent us from using our strengths to full advantage.

One way to derail your leadership fast is to allow one of these 12 derailers to block your leadership effectiveness. Which one are you guilty of?

Recognising the 12 leadership derailers

1. Staller – analysis paralysis

Your positive intention: High quality solid outcome.

What others experience: You take too long to take action, often miss key deadlines or opportunities. You are perceived as a blocker to progress.

2. Controller – command and control

Your positive intention: Control a quality outcome.

What others experience: You are overly directive, and stifle initiative and innovation.

3. Cyclone – bull at a gate



Courtesy of SC Cunningham, Flickr

Your positive intention: Get results quickly.

What others experience: You are in a hurry to achieve results, and often leave a wake of destruction and disengagement behind you.

4. Doer – can't delegate

Your positive intention: Produce a high quality outcome.

What others experience: You hoard work and responsibility, to the detriment of yourself and your team.

5. Avoider – conflict averse

Your positive intention: Keep the peace and protect relationships.

What others experience: You are reluctant to face tough conversations and situations, often create challenging team dynamics as a result.

6. Fence-sitter – indecisive leader

Your positive intention: Get the right outcome.

What others experience: You provide a lack of leadership and direction, creating bottlenecks in progress and frustration for others.

7. Know-it-all – closed to other ideas

Your positive intention: Back your strengths and deliver quality

What others experience: You are reluctant to take feedback, or to consider new ideas or input from others.

8. Guardian – inability to innovate

Your positive intention: Guaranteeing consistent quality results.

What others experience: You prefer the status quo, are reluctant to change, can't think laterally, and put a low focus on innovation.

9. Micromanager – management on a leash

Your positive intention: Raise the standard through quality output.

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What others experience: Your supervision is excessive, and you are often perceived as stifling and untrusting.

10. **Poker face – showing no emotion**

Your positive intention: Accurate communication.

What others experience: Your non-expressive communication style is hard to read, and/or your direct verbal communication style can be damaging. You struggle to read between the lines.

11. **People burner – poor people skills**

Your positive intention: Get results.

What others experience: You lack people skills, put people offside and may even be at risk of a bullying claim by the way you prioritise achieving tasks over people and building relationships.

12. **Tactician – poor strategic thinker**

Your positive intention: Delivering outcomes now.

What others experience: You are reactive to daily pressures, buried in the day to day, and are unable to take a broader, strategic view.

Bringing it to life

Let's go behind one derailer the cyclone to see how this can happen, despite the best possible intentions. If you are a cyclone, slow down for a few minutes and reflect on this. It will help you build your influence as a leader. And if you work with a cyclone, here are a few ideas about how you could help them.

If you are a cyclone, a 360-degree feedback about you will include comments like these:

- 'He rushes into things without seeking input, then wonders why we don't support the plan.'
- 'She didn't plan for what could go wrong; afterwards, we were forced into repair mode.'
- 'She changes her mind so fast, and we're expected to make it happen it's exhausting.'
- 'Love his energy but wish he had a volume control.'
- 'Not sure who will burn out first... her or us!'

Your intention: Perhaps your feedback surprises or even enrages you? After all, you work hard, your intention is good, and you're aiming for results ... now! You're determined to seize all opportunities, and action precedes clarity. You probably learn best on the go. Maybe you experience FOMO: fear of missing out?

The problem: You know your (inner) intention. Unfortunately others only see your (external) behaviour.

While you just want things to happen (now!), you could be developing a reputation for action without consideration running like a bull at a gate. While you may be admired for your action focus, you could be leaving your team behind, and your

stakeholders may be concerned about what they perceive is a lack of due diligence leading to rework.

So if you are a cyclone, the next time you say 'let's just make this happen', here are a few suggestions to encourage followers:

- **Reduce an overly strong goal focus** – Imagine your success depended on working with your team to find five potential problems with the plan. Do that now.
- **Pause before taking action** – If creating immediate action would set off a serious allergy, what would you do instead?
- **Decide rigorously** – Canvas the opinions of others, and consider the new perspectives before finalising your decision.

If you are a cyclone, it's time to slow down and get more stuff done, and have it stick. And if you work with a cyclone, look beyond their behavior to the intention, using the ideas above as a guide.

Shifting behavior once you recognise a derailer

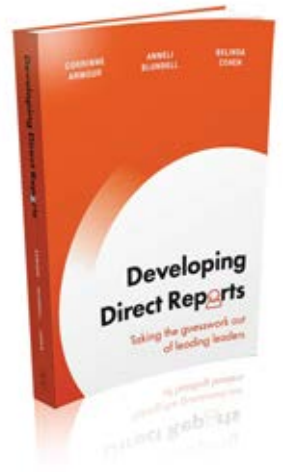
Remember, while you know your good intentions, others only see your behavior and are making judgments on that.

To avoid derailing your leadership:

- **Decode** – build awareness of the problem.
- **Discover** – better understand the drivers motivating your behavior.
- **Develop** – determine a pathway forward to build your behavioural flexibility.

Increase your impact as a leader by aligning your behaviour with your intention.

*These derailers come from my latest book **Developing Direct Reports: Taking the guesswork out of leading leaders.** ■*



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Corinne Armour is a leadership speaker, trainer and coach. This is an excerpt from her keynote address at the recent LASA NSW Conference, 'Risk, uncertainty, chance... improve your odds for the road ahead'.