

# 3 ways coercive leaders can change their ways

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



\n[toc title="Table of Contents"]\n

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1. [1. Get inspiration from within.](#) \n \t
2. [2. Get inspiration from others.](#) \n \t
3. [3. Get inspiration from the organization.](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Leaders with coercive personalities are plentiful and destructive.

Toshiba's CEO Hisao Tanaka quit over the . Volkswagen's CEO Martin Winterkorn resigned in the . And Third Avenue Management's CEO David Barse was escorted from the building over a .

Each of these CEOs had forceful personalities, which intimidated coworkers. Coercive leadership behavior deters transparency; kills self-reliance and innovation; delays decision-making; creates unnecessary bottlenecks; sets the tone for micromanaging; and decreases motivation and productivity. All of this leads to a drain of key talent from the organization.

I work closely with such leaders, and the irony is that they are knowledgeable about the principles of effective leadership and are aware of the negative impact their command-and-control leadership has on organizational performance and morale.

When I am asked to coach coercive leaders, I ask them upfront to list the characteristics of an effective twenty-first century leader.

They have no problem regurgitating best practices. They've attended leadership programs; read the latest books and blog posts; and have watched documentaries on Steve Jobs, yet feedback from their employees, peers and bosses tells a different story and indicates that they are not doing any of it.

It is not a knowledge gap that is an issue, but an inability to transfer knowledge and learning into a sustained behavior.

This is backed up by that shows two out of five new CEOs fail in their first 18 months on the job which “ has nothing to do with competence, knowledge, or experience, but rather with hubris and ego and a leadership style out of touch with modern times.”

Here are three sources of inspiration that coercive leaders can draw upon to help them convert their leadership knowledge into an effective habit.

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## **1. Get inspiration from within.**

Joe Jaworski once said, “ Before you can lead others... you have to discover yourself.”

One of the pathways to continuous leadership effectiveness is through self-mastery. Peter Senge, author of , defines this as “ continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience and of seeing reality objectively.”

Effective leaders are supremely self-aware. They have high emotional intelligence (EI). They adapt their leadership approach to suit the situation. They continually challenge the built-up of assumptions in themselves and others, and they have the confidence to let go and let others deliver results. These are learnable attributes that require a willingness to change, dedicated self-reflection time, a personal leadership vision, and self-discipline.

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## **2. Get inspiration from others.**

Followers can help coercive leaders change their habits. One way is to stop idolizing the leader. Followers - ever hungry for good performance reviews, promotions, salary increases, interesting assignments and more -- may glorify their leaders.

According to , glorifying a leader can leave her free to act irresponsibly, unethically or to the organization's detriment. It also means subordinates are unlikely to question decisions or assert their own talents and insights, which can in turn damage a company's innovative potential and development.

Leaders need to help their followers break the collusive habit of hero-worshipping, and encourage a climate of healthy challenge and feedback at all levels of the organization. By soliciting and internalizing feedback from co-workers, leaders can discover their behavioral blindspots, and co-workers can collude in more positive ways by ensuring that the leader is not

pedestalled and wielding unfettered positional power. This ensures better listening and collaborating with others.

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### **3. Get inspiration from the organization.**

More can be done at the organizational level to help emerging leaders focus on embedding leadership behaviors.

First, organizations need to debunk the myth that management is a good preparation for leadership because it isn't. Management and leadership are two very different entities. The word manager comes from the Latin word, *Manus*, meaning hands on, whereas the Indo-European root of the word leadership denotes pathway. Organizations need to prepare their leaders outside of traditional management succession structures.

Second, organizations should ensure that good leadership is formally recognized and rewarded. Often appraisals are task and results driven. Leaders should not be promoted if they cannot demonstrate effective leadership behaviors. Third, formal leadership development should be blended with workplace experience, including early leadership responsibility with dedicated coaching.

Despite nearly 40 years of organizational and personal transformational journeys and for leadership development, there are still examples of leaders with coercive behaviors.

A coercive leadership style may work in a burning platform scenario, but it is destructive in most other modern leadership scenarios - resulting in a loss of reputation, revenue and top-tier talent. It's never too late to work on these dissonant behaviors. But simply learning about leadership is not enough, leaders need to start applying it.