

The Manager as Superhero

If you're a superhero manager, you imagine yourself as the person with the answers. People come to you when they don't know what to do. You watch what people on your team are doing closely. You expect them to do what you tell them to do.

The Team Death Spiral

There's one big problem with superhero managers. The teams they lead, and the lives they live, get worse instead of better.

The problem is that the superhero managers are playing the game with only one brain. Superhero managers think they have only good ideas. They shoot down or ignore everyone else's thoughts. Guess what? Teammates quit bringing ideas. Superheroes micromanage everyone. Guess what? Teammates quit showing initiative and wait for instructions.

The result is exactly what you'd expect. Productivity drops. Morale tanks. The best people leave for more pleasant surroundings.

The team members suffer from this. The organization suffers, too. But the person who suffers most is the superhero leader.

Superhero Manager Is A Path to Burnout

As teammates stop showing initiative and sharing ideas, the superhero managers need to do more and more. That leads to long hours at work.

As productivity drops and top performers bail, stress goes way up for a superhero manager. There's lots and lots of frustration.

Longer hours and more stress take their toll at home, too. The superhero managers spend less and less time with their families. To make things worse, the superhero manager brings home frustrations from work and makes the few hours with family less than pleasant.

The Leader as Human Being

If you want to lead like a human being instead of a superhero, here are some things to think about.

You can't do it all, so don't try. Instead, lead like the fallible human being you are. Understand that you aren't perfect, and you have limited capacity.

That's the bad news. The good news is, as many people have said, "None of us is as smart as all of us." If your teammates' brains are in the game, you have a much greater possibility of success.

Work at using your behavior to influence the behavior and performance of others. It's simple, really. Command requires you to know everything. Influence frees you to use all the brains around you.

If you're a human being with the job of leading, your job is to create an environment (you can call it a culture) where people want to do good work. Then, your job is to help them do it. Here's more good news. We know how to do that.

Give the People What They Want

This is not about giving them anything they want, balloons and birthday cake. Instead, provide the people with what we know helps make a great place to work.

People want to have the maximum control possible over their work life. They want to make as many decisions as they can about how and where, and when they work. Let them have as much control as you can.

People want to do meaningful work. They want to know that what they do all day makes a difference somehow. Tell them why the work they do is essential. Help them understand whose life is better because of what they do.

People want a safe and friendly place to work. Your job is to create a team culture that gives them that. You must be fair and consistent in the way you treat team members. You must be hyper-alert to intra-team conflicts. When you become aware of one, do what you can to make it go away.

People want to make progress. They want to be in a better place today than they were yesterday. They want next year to be even better. Coach them. Help them succeed and grow, and the progress will come.

The Path to A Better Life

When you lead like a human being and create a place where people can do good work and do meaningful work with people they like, many things get better.

People pitch in, and productivity increases. Good people stay. You help people on your team succeed. You hear the friendly laughter that's characteristic of a great working environment.

The good things don't stop there. You can go home at night and not take the stress with you. You have more time for your family and personal interests. You'll probably sleep better.

Takeaways

- You can try to be the superhero manager or the human leader.
- Superhero managers have only one brain in the game.
- Superhero managers send teams into a death spiral.
- Leaders use their behavior to influence the behavior and performance of others.
- Leaders give people what they want at work.
- Leaders create productive teams with high morale.
- Leaders have less stress and a better life.