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Road Blocks to Your Leadership Success: Five Boulders We Put in Our Own Path

What gets in the way of your leadership success? If you'd like more responsibility, more challenging projects, more leadership influence, what self imposed barriers do you place on the road in front of you?

It's time to take a look at the five most common boulders that researchers identify can block you on your journey, limit your effectiveness and ultimately your success. Anne Morriss, Robin Ely and Frances Frei have studied hundreds of leaders in various industries and sectors and have published these five barriers in the January/February 2011 **Harvard Business Review** article, *Stop Holding Yourself Back*.

Now honestly assess yourself. What barriers are holding you back?

Barrier 1—Overemphasizing Personal Goals

We all want to progress in our careers, achieving goals and milestones we set for ourselves. But when your focus is on your own goals to the detriment of your team or your organization, that's where you create a problem for yourself. "True leadership is about making *other* people better as a result of your presence-and making sure your impact endures in your absence." say the authors.

That is a leadership skill that many leaders don't realize until it's too late. Teams fall apart, clients leave and the self absorbed leader looks up and wonders why his career has stalled and his influence has gone. The author's solution (and a good one) is to **get over yourself**. Once you do and shift the focus to others, barrier 1 can safely and effectively be moved to the side of the road.

Barrier 2—Protecting Your Public Image

This barrier generates from your inability to shift from the image that you've created for yourself. For example if you're hung up on being the leader that's "intelligent," "likeable" or "decisive," you won't work on other approaches to leading, some that may involve using your intuition or being open to learning (Oh but I'm so smart!), making tough decisions when they are called for (But will they still like me?) or being open to receiving critical feedback (But my mind is made up.)



Great leadership is like a dance. You must make tough decisions yet be empathic to others. You must be decisive yet open to others ideas and feedback. You must learn more than one dance step. When you are stuck in the image you have created for yourself, you fail to move from your own desire of looking powerful to ultimately empowering others.

Barrier 3—Turning Competitors into Enemies

I've seen this barrier quite frequently both in my role as a business professional and now as an executive coach. Turning those you don't get along with into enemies and distorting their differences is described as "toxic" by the authors. Good descriptor. I've witnessed this barrier on numerous occasions. Creating an enemy because you don't look at the world the same way as someone else, can have severe leadership costs. Based on their research, the authors say, "As you turn others into caricatures, you risk becoming a caricature yourself."

This is where it's time to flex that empathy muscle. Challenge yourself to really get to know your "enemy." Be curious about who they are and their perspectives. You might be surprised. Once you get to know them, sometimes your "enemies" can turn into your best allies.

Barrier 4—Going It Alone

The leadership road can often be tough and filled with potholes. We think we have to be independent and not let our guard down at any cost. Going it alone can seem like the only safe way to succeed.

But gathering perspective, grounding and support from a "team" of family, mentors or colleagues can provide just the extra fuel you need to get you through those rough spots. Outside members can provide you with perspective from a view outside yourself. Many of my colleagues and clients have surrounded themselves with their own "team" or kitchen cabinet with that independent perspective. I know my own personal "team" has been invaluable throughout my leadership career.

Barrier 5—Waiting for Permission

Patience is a gift in many circumstances. But the authors say, "patience can be a curse for emerging leaders. It can undermine our potential by persuading us to keep our heads down and soldier on, waiting for someone to recognize our efforts and give us the proverbial tap on the shoulder—a better title and formal authority."

Now is not the time to keep our heads down! We must be proactive in our role and in our life. Seize opportunities to make a difference, to create change when needed and to step forward without being asked.



What Are Your Barriers?

The research has been done for you. Five identified SELF IMPOSED barriers that continually hold leaders back. What's holding you back? Now is the time to move those boulders. Whether you have one boulder in your way or all five, take the first step. Honestly assess yourself on the areas that are getting in your way.

Your challenge is to learn to recognize the obstacles that you place in your own path and become the type of leader that creates impact not only for yourself but for others as well. For help with assessing your leadership strengths and opportunities for development, contact me at Mary@wernercoaching.com.

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