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a parent/child relationship, leaders all too often adopt a "do as I say, not as I do." As a leader, you may not be held accountable for your mistakes and misjudgments.

Amy Vetter • Sep. 12, 2019



We all know the old adage: "Do as I say, not as I do". If you had a mom or dad who deployed this phrase it probably drove you crazy. Why on earth would there two different sets of rules for parents and kids? As frustrating and baffling as the double standard is, there's nothing you can do to fight it when you are dependent on your parents and have no other choice. In a way, it's not that dissimilar from the relationship a leader in the workplace has with their team – what those on top say, those on the bottom have to live with.

While the leader/team member structure doesn't have the comprehensive reach of a

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When we are responsible for leading our teams through change, it is important to connect to the traits that may be holding us back as a leader, that affect the overall outcome of the transformation. There is a concept in behavioral psychology known as the [self-serving bias](#). This cognitive bias leads you to misattribute the cause of your successes and failures. When you suffer from this bias, you attribute good outcomes solely to your influence and bad outcomes solely to external factors.

The best example to illustrate this bias is poker. Poker is ultimately a game of skill—over time, better players will win more money than worse ones—but it also has an incredibly high variance rate, especially over a small sample size. In other words, luck and skill are always both in play. Players with a self-serving bias assume every hand they win is because of their skill and every one they lose is because they got unlucky. Obviously, reality doesn't work this way, but unless somebody is there to correct your bias, it's easy for it to warp your perception without you even realizing it. As surely as it can happen at the poker table, it can happen in the workplace.

Why leaders can develop biases

Inhabiting a leadership role includes two factors that create the perfect environment for self-serving bias to develop. First, leaders have to be critical of their team members. It goes with the territory and it's essential, but it can also lead to a tendency to only see people for their faults. This is how people become “branded” in the workplace and have a hard time overcoming that stigma. I have sat in leadership meetings myself where staff are being evaluated and another leader in the room brings up a mistake from year earlier. When we do that, we don't give people the opportunity to grow and learn, because they are afraid of being criticized.

The second, as we discussed earlier, is the power dynamic in place. The leader writes the narrative of their team more than any other contributor, so they have the ability

to spin a story in a way other people that work for them can't. After all, being

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members, or compile ill-matched teams if they think it will help ensure their own place at the top," the [report](#) on his study states.

How crazy is that? And yet, I'm guessing everyone reading this has been in a situation with a leader who behaves that way. At the end of the day, if we are out for only ourselves, we all lose.

Open your eyes

The first step to fixing a bias is acknowledging that you have it. It can be a good practice to review your day each day, either quietly asking yourself or journaling, the last ten times you made a mistake as a leader, or one of your team made a mistake, and what contributed to it. These moments of quiet are to release ourselves from the pressure of the day and take an honest look at ourselves so that we don't deceive ourselves and can show up the next day making the necessary improvements.

However, like any [undesirable habit](#), can be fixed. It takes hard work, but it's doable. [Mindfulness techniques](#) can be hugely helpful when it comes to fixing this bad habit in particular. When you learn to take stock of your surroundings and see reality for what it is, rather than plowing ahead at all costs, it's a lot easier to empathize with others and recognize when you're not being honest with yourself.

We started with one old adage, so let's close with another one – “good leaders give the credit and take the blame”. That's a much better operating principle than the alternative, but the best possible leaders are those who can see a situation from all eyes, and only then analyze the situation. To do that, though, consider taking the steps to alter your leadership lens.

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