



Toxic Leadership Strategies

Toxic leadership is a detrimental force that emerges when a leader's attitudes, motivations, and actions are driven by personal gain, satisfaction, or glory, and lose sight of the mission. This can result in negative impacts on subordinates, the organization, and performance. This type of leadership is defined by a continuous pattern of behavior that erodes the welfare of those under their command, impedes the efficiency of the unit, and jeopardizes vital mission objectives.

Addressing a toxic leader:

As an EO advisor or senior leader you may need to address a toxic leader on someone's behalf. The following is some basic guidance.

Prior to the conversation-

- Before you approach the leader, make sure you have a clear goal and a valid reason for having the conversation. Ask the individual you are trying to help to provide some evidence or examples of how the leader's behavior is affecting them, their team or the unit as a whole.
- Check with other members of the team or unit to see if they are experiencing similar issues with this leader.
- Choose a time and place that is appropriate and respectful for the conversation. Avoid public settings, busy hours, or stressful environments.
- If you are including the person you are trying to help in the conversation with the leader, prior to the conversation, coach them to avoid accusing, blaming, or attacking the leader. Ask them to use "I" statements and focus on how they feel and what they need. For example, they can say "I feel frustrated when I don't get credit for my work" or "I feel that I am receiving a lot of unwarranted criticism. "

During the conversation-

- Listen actively and empathetically to the leader's response. Try to understand their perspective and motivations. Don't interrupt, judge, or dismiss them. Acknowledge their feelings and concerns. Try to identify some common ground or areas of agreement.
- Express your appreciation and gratitude for the leader's time and attention. Thank them for listening to you and being open to your feedback.

Follow up-

- Follow up with the leader and the individual after the conversation. Send a brief email summarizing what you discussed and agreed on. Remind them of any action steps or commitments that were made during the meeting.



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- Check in regularly with the leader and their subordinate to see how things are progressing and offer your support.

Individual experiencing toxic leadership:

- If you have a supportive team and other team members are also having problems with your leader, ask a more senior team member or your EO Advisor to speak to your leader on your behalf. If you do not feel you have the support directly on your team, always reach out to an EO advisor for support and documentation of concerns.
- Try seeking out mentors or advisors who can offer a fresh perspective and help you come up with a plan of action.
- Document incidents. This can include keeping a written record of your leader's behavior and the impact it has had on you. If the behavior continues or escalates, this documentation can be valuable evidence if you need to discuss the behavior with your EO advisor, report the behavior to the IG, or take further action.
- If you're feeling overwhelmed, it's okay to take a step back and take care of yourself. This might mean talking to a therapist, or seeking support from friends and family.

*Academic research on this topic is somewhat limited: the above practical approaches are provided for leader consideration.

