



10 MISTAKES

Leaders Make

and how to

AVOID THEM

By Halelly Azulay

talentgrow

10 MISTAKES LEADERS MAKE AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

No. 1: They don't communicate properly

They hoard information ("information is power"), or they share it on a "need-to-know-only basis". They only talk to people during official meetings. They ignore emotions and try to keep all their conversations 'business only', and they get right to business and don't spend time to connect as humans.

No. 2: They listen wrong

They ignore people altogether when they're speaking to them, or they pretend to listen or listen in a distracted way. They have their door closed a lot. They jump to conclusions about people's intentions or meaning. And they allow interruptions during their conversations with employees.

No. 3: They don't build trust

They don't think about trust in a proactive, conscious way. Treat trust is an afterthought at best. They don't intentionally practice trust-building behaviors and don't actively avoid trust-hindering or trust-eroding ones. They don't foster trust-building behaviors among/between team members.

No. 4: They don't manage performance actively

They spend most of their time and energy on poor performers. They don't hold people accountable. They only discuss performance during milestone meetings (annual review, quarterly review, etc.), and don't give timely performance feedback.

No. 5: They don't delegate well

They don't delegate at all or delegate work in an unprincipled or non-strategic way that is not well-suited to people's current or desired skillset. They delegate work that is too narrow or doesn't allow the satisfaction of seeing the full cycle and closure. They micromanage, or macromanage.

No. 6: They don't make it safe to make mistakes

They don't tolerate failure, and criticize or punish mistakes. Or, they try to 'save' people from mistakes and don't allow them to learn and experience consequences. They don't provide a safety net for failure.

No. 7: They don't give (enough or appropriate) praise & recognition

They withhold praise or don't give praise sincerely, or timely, or specifically, and don't reward good performance or celebrate success. They assume what motivates their people and don't ask or tailor their recognition and rewards to individual preferences or styles. They don't promote their good people's success – try to keep them a secret. They don't share credit.

No. 8: They don't develop their people

They don't discuss development goals beyond the once-a-year review. They don't take the time to teach new skills or share knowledge or look for non-training ways to develop their employees. They use the 'throw people off the cliff' approach to development. And they don't create opportunities for cross-training among team.

No. 9: They allow their meetings to suck

They have meetings that aren't necessary, and don't have agendas or specified roles. Their meetings are too long, and they don't invite the right people. They don't ensure that meetings achieve their objectives as effectively and efficiently as possible.

No. 10: They don't manage themselves effectively

They come across as fake, inauthentic, or insincere -- they don't show the 'real me'. They try to pretend they're perfect and don't show vulnerability or admit mistakes. They don't have high self-awareness. They use the 'do as I say not as I do' method. They're too busy or have door closed a lot.

NO. 1: THEY DON'T COMMUNICATE PROPERLY

They hoard information (“information is power”), or they share it on a “need-to-know-only basis”. They only talk to people during official meetings. They ignore emotions and try to keep all their conversations ‘business only’, and they get right to business and don’t spend time to connect as humans.



Instead, do this:

- Err on the side of over-communicating.
- Be open and transparent with most information – people need to know and desperately want to [avoid uncertainty](#).
- Develop the habit of talking to people in the halls, at their desks, during social events, and on the phone (especially if you lead them remotely).
- Recognize that emotions are a biologically non-negotiable. We are all rigged to experience emotional reactions even before we can conjure up a single rational thought. So, take note of your own emotions and those of your team members, and [learn ways to be more emotionally-intelligent in your communication](#).
- Neuroscience studies show that humans are deeply social animals. We need to feel socially connected to feel safe and to think clearly and creatively. So [build in opportunities at work to connect](#) by asking people about their weekend, their hobbies, their families, and yes, how they’re doing today. Sincerely be and show an interest in each of them as a human being. They’ll be much more apt to follow you then.

NO. 2: THEY LISTEN WRONG

They ignore people altogether when they're speaking to them, or they pretend to listen [or listen in a distracted way](#). They have their door closed a lot. They jump to conclusions about people's intentions or meaning. And they allow interruptions during their conversations with employees.



Instead, do this:

- Yeah, you're busy. Or maybe you've heard them say that same thing before. Or maybe you really need to focus on your project deadline. But this person who is trying to talk to you is aware that you're ignoring them. And it makes them feel rejected. It erodes trust. It obviously undermines the success of your communication interaction with them. And these damages will come back to haunt you long after this listening episode ends. So if you can't listen, say so. Excuse yourself and ask them if it can wait. Or be prepared to temporarily push 'pause' on whatever has your attention and turn your full attention to this person across from you (or on the phone).
- And no, [you cannot actually multitask while listening](#). You're just fooling yourself.
- Your closed door sends a message that you're unavailable. It's okay to close your door periodically to do some head-down, focused work. But if your door is closed most of the time, you make yourself unavailable to your employees when they need you and you're not doing your job as a manager – to guide them and remove obstacles from their way.
- Listening well involves trying to understand the other person's meaning as they see it. [Don't allow your mind to jump to conclusions](#) about the meaning of someone else's words. Instead, truly listening to them. Otherwise, you're missing out on important information and possibly contributing to distrust and misunderstandings with them. When you allow constant interruptions to interfere with your conversation with your employee, you're sending the message: "you're not that important." Focus. Put away your phone and computer, close the door if necessary or even go somewhere outside of the regular office environment so that you can avoid interruptions and [give 100% of your attention to the person speaking with you](#).

NO. 3: THEY DON'T BUILD TRUST

They don't think about trust in a proactive, conscious way. Trust is an afterthought at best. They don't intentionally practice trust-building behaviors and don't actively avoid trust-hindering or trust-eroding ones. They don't foster trust-building behaviors among/between team members.



Instead, do this:

- Trust usually doesn't build by chance – it requires nurturing.
- Show [trust-building behaviors](#) like taking interest in people's personal situations, personality, and interests or concerns. Create opportunities to get to know them better by taking some time to have coffee or a meal together every once in a while, asking questions about them and things/people they care about, and give them glimpses about who you are and what you care about outside of work.
- In addition, always be reliable and create opportunities for team members to succeed in delivering on promises by manufacturing a way to deliver on multiple small deadlines initially (when they're new to the team or a project) so that they can experience demonstrating their trustworthiness.
- It's super-easy to break trust, so you have to be really mindful of sustaining your fragile trust once you've built it.
- It's important to build trust between you and each member of your team, but as a leader you must also facilitate trust-building opportunities among team members. Implement practices such as 'Take 5' at the beginnings of team meetings and host social or team-building events that allow the team to gel as people.
- Also, find ways to toot their horns for them to build credibility and share success of various team members with each other. This helps them see each other as reliable, competent, and consistent.

NO. 4: THEY DON'T MANAGE PERFORMANCE ACTIVELY

They spend most of their time and energy on poor performers. They don't hold people accountable. They only discuss performance during milestone meetings (annual review, quarterly review, etc.), and don't give timely performance feedback.



Instead, do this:

- Your team needs your attention. When you spend most of it on those that are performing the worst, you're depriving all the rest of your team of this important resource. They're the ones delivering for you, and they need your guidance, your support, and your coaching. Make sure to [make more time for them](#).
- One of the reasons that many leaders and managers struggle with poor performance on their team is that they fail to hold people accountable. This sends two bad messages: one, to those who don't deliver on their responsibilities saying, "it doesn't matter. No need to change." And the other to everyone who worked hard to get things done on time, saying "you're a fool for working hard to get things done – it's not important and you can slow down if you want to." And it contributes to an erosion in morale on the team.
- People need to know how they're doing. They need [actionable, constructive, timely feedback](#) in order to correct mistakes, improve performance, and thrive. Managers and leaders that withhold this information and save it for a special meeting are doing their employees a huge disservice and are definitely hurting the bottom line by allowing problems to continue and by not letting people know what they need to keep doing and what they need to change.

NO. 5: THEY DON'T DELEGATE WELL

They don't delegate at all or delegate work in an unprincipled or non-strategic way that is not well-suited to people's current or desired skillset. They delegate work that is too narrow or doesn't allow the satisfaction of seeing the full cycle and closure. They micromanage or macro-manage.



Instead, do this:

- Don't think "I can just do it myself in the time it will take to teach him/her to do it" because then you'll be doing it yourself forever. Your employee will not have the opportunity to learn the task and eventually take it off your hands. Employees want to learn new skills and to grow their repertoire. So delegating work to them helps them grow. Plus, it helps create a more balanced and smooth workflow. And a burned out leader is not going to be of any use to anyone, so try not to do that to yourself, okay?
- You need to [think about several factors when you're delegating](#), such as their current skill level as well as their desired skill development, their current workload, and the distribution of delegated tasks among your staff. Take a big picture view before zeroing in on who will be the best person for the job.
- Try to gradually [increase your employees' levels of decision-making](#) and decrease the level of monitoring/autonomy to help grow a capable team. When you only delegate narrow, uninteresting, repetitive or unchallenging work to people, you burn them out and prevent them the opportunity to see the fruits of their labor or learn the natural consequences and cause-and-effect of their work. This is an unsatisfying way to work and they'll become disgruntled and disengaged
- [Micromanaging means applying excessive control](#). When an employee is new to the job or task, they need extra hand-holding and support. But as they grow and become more comfortable, you need to scale back your involvement and let them operate more independently.
- Some leaders are so loath to micromanage that they give too little support as a result, staying out of the picture completely and giving employees too much independence. Employees often want to get some guidance from you based on your experience and perspective, as well as performance feedback about how they're doing. [Macromanaging](#) denies them both.

NO. 6: THEY DON'T MAKE IT SAFE TO MAKE MISTAKES

They don't tolerate failure, and criticize or punish mistakes. Or, they try to 'save' people from mistakes and don't allow them to learn and experience consequences. They don't provide a safety net for failure.



Instead, do this:

- Mistakes and failure are the path to success. From birth, we all learn by trial and error. It is a necessary component of mastery, so you must have a [growth mindset](#) and tolerate a certain amount of failure as par for the course.
- Because mistakes happen on the way to mastery, we need to feel okay about them and not be ashamed of them. If we can pull learning lessons from our mistakes, we will likely not repeat them and our performance will gradually improve. Be aware of your reactions to mistakes to ensure that you're not explicitly or implicitly punishing your people for making (reasonable) mistakes as long as they're learning from them.
- With good intentions to prevent discomfort or to avoid the messiness of mistakes, leaders sometimes interfere with the natural learning process when they try to over-sanitize the learning experience by stripping it of any failures. As described above, [mistakes are a necessary component of mastery](#), so just as you allow your toddler to fall when they learn to walk, so you should allow your employees to stumble on their path to learning new skills.
- Even though mistakes are a critical and necessary component of learning, [people learn when they're in the 'learning zone' but stop learning when they're in the 'panic zone'](#). So you need to create mechanisms that allow mistakes but that also prevent catastrophic or extreme consequences. When we're trying something new, it helps to know that while we will not be prevented from falling, we'll have a net to cushion our fall. It gives us the courage to go for it.

NO. 7: THEY DON'T GIVE (ENOUGH OR APPROPRIATE) PRAISE & RECOGNITION

They withhold praise or don't give praise sincerely, or timely, or specifically, and don't reward good performance or celebrate success. They assume what motivates their people and don't ask or tailor their recognition and rewards to individual preferences or styles. They don't promote their good people's success – try to keep them a secret. They don't share credit.

Instead, do this:

- Positive reinforcement helps people know what works. They need to know what to keep doing and what to change. By praising good performance, you can help ensure that you'll get it again. Plus, it makes people feel good to know that you've noticed something they did right and that you appreciate it. When people feel good about working for you, they'll want to stick around and keep up the good work.
- When you do give praise or recognition, you need to follow my [STS Formula](#): Make your feedback Specific, Timely, and Sincere. Don't give them vague "good job" or pat on the back, and don't wait too long.
- Sometimes verbal feedback or thank you is all you need. And sometimes it's a good idea to give a more significant reward. Humans are usually motivated by [intrinsic motivations](#) to gain mastery, autonomy, or a sense of purpose. However, beyond those or for some tasks or projects, a gift, a card, flowers, lunch, a monetary bonus, or a host of thousands of other possible rewards can fuel their continued engagement.
- Have [ongoing conversations with people](#) to ask them questions and discover what motivates them. Each person is different. Don't assume you know
- As the proverb goes, "If you love somebody, set them free." You have to be the champion of your employees' career success. Sometimes, their best path is out of your team or even out of the organization. Good leaders never stand in the way of their people's success. What goes around, comes around.
- When you do something great and someone else steals credit for it, or doesn't explicitly share the credit with you, it stings. It causes you to work in a less dedicated way and become disengaged. Promote your people's success far and wide – toot their horn and give credit always. See above – you should never be motivated by the fear of losing them.

NO. 8: THEY DON'T DEVELOP THEIR PEOPLE

They don't discuss development goals beyond the once-a-year review. They don't take the time to teach new skills or share knowledge or look for non-training ways to develop their employees. They use the 'throw people off the cliff' approach to development. And they don't create opportunities for cross-training among team.

Instead, do this:

- Great performance never comes from a 'set-it and forget-it' approach. Talking about how your people can develop themselves cannot happen only once a year. [Talk to them about their development](#) goals at the beginning of the year, create a plan, and then create multiple check-in opportunities (formal and informal) to see how they're doing and how you can help.
- Although some skill development will occur naturally through the course of doing one's daily work, development is faster and more effective when done mindfully and proactively. You hold skills and knowledge that your employees could benefit from knowing, so build in opportunities to teach them – you could build in 5-10 minutes into your team meetings, for example, to do a mini-training about a different topic each time.
- Experts estimate that only about ten percent of learning happens in a classroom or a formal learning environment. The majority of learning happens through coaching and on-the-job. There are so many ways to develop employees outside the classroom (I've described many in my book, [Employee Development on a Shoestring](#)). Most do not require a lot of time or money – just proactive and thoughtful intention and some planning.
- Some people thrive in situations where there's a high-risk learning curve. They are highly motivated to learn a skill and are sufficiently resilient to withstand the risk of failure. Other people need a bit more coaching and support along their learning curve and are more risk-averse when it comes to making mistakes on their path to mastery. Apply a tailored and individualized approach to development to help each employee thrive and succeed.
- You have varying skillsets and development levels on your team and you can leverage them to everyone's advantage by creating cross-training opportunities among your team members. You could use some of your team meetings time to allow team members to teach each other tricks and techniques. You could also design dedicated opportunities where different team members shadow and train each other on their own areas of expertise or job responsibilities. This not only helps protect your team from deficiencies in the event that someone is absent or leaves, it also helps people understand the full process of your team's work and results better which enhances their own ability to perform within their role. Plus, most people find it satisfying to add to their skillset and learn new things.

NO. 9: THEY : THEY ALLOW THEIR MEETINGS TO SUCK

They have meetings that aren't necessary, and don't have agendas or specified roles. Their meetings are too long, and they don't invite the right people. They don't ensure that meetings achieve their objectives as effectively and efficiently as possible. Their meetings suck.

Instead, do this:

- Some things shouldn't be done in a meeting. Meetings are a good way to solve problems, generate ideas, gain common agreement from potentially divergent views, make decisions to which people are collectively bound and committed, and to get people committed to a course of action by sharing a vision and obtaining reactions. Meetings are not so good for organizing information, doing detailed analysis, writing reports, rubber stamping, or discussing personal issues of a controversial or confidential nature.
- All effective meetings must have an agenda that shows what will be done by whom and for how long during the allotted timeframe. The more detailed the agenda, the more likely you are to achieve it or know that you're off course in time to course-correct or change it.
- People can be involved in a productive way in running an effective meeting. Instead of trying to do it all yourself, assign roles like facilitator, time keeper, and scribe to different people on the team and not only will you be more likely to achieve your meeting's objectives, you'll get more people actively engaged and feeling a sense of ownership.
- When you have thought through the agenda, you're likely to keep the meeting on time. You're more in control instead of letting the meeting control you. And you can design the meeting to fit the content so that it's just the right duration.
- Know what you'd like to achieve in the meeting and you'll know who needs to participate to make it possible. Invite only those who can contribute to achieving those outcomes.
- Explicitly state the desired outcomes for the meeting in advance and share these objectives with all invitees. When you begin with these objectives in mind and have crafted a detailed agenda that helps you achieve them, you're likely to succeed.

NO. 10: THEY DON'T MANAGE THEMSELVES EFFECTIVELY

They come across as fake, inauthentic, or insincere -- they don't show the 'real me'. They try to pretend they're perfect and don't show vulnerability or admit mistakes. They don't have high self-awareness. They use the 'do as I say not as I do' method. They're too busy or have door closed a lot.



Instead, do this:

- People can 'smell' fake from a mile away. When you're not real, you erode trust and damage engagement. Be real.
- Being real means admitting that you're human and make mistakes like everyone else. You don't need to only show your mistakes, but you need to show a balanced view that lets your employees see you as a multi-dimensional human who is vulnerable. There is considerable research evidence that shows that [vulnerability begets trust and commitment](#).
- Self-awareness is the first step to self-development. You're on a learning journey and the more you are aware of your strengths and shortcomings, the better able you will be to leverage those strengths, admit your mistakes, and work on improving yourself to become a better leader to your people. To become more self-aware, seek feedback from trusted and objective sources and be sure to seek input not just from '[yes-men](#)' – look for people who will tell you unpleasant information too.
- Model the way. Lead by walking the walk, not just talking the talk. When you don't act in alignment with your words, people will not trust you and will not take ownership of their own actions.
- What message are you sending when you're always too busy or have your door closed? That you don't care about your people and their success. It is your job to guide them, support them, and remove obstacles from their way. The only way to do this job is to give them your time and attention. It is your job to figure out a way to make this happen. Delegating can be a place to start removing some of your tasks to free up some time on your calendar for leadership and management activities. Better prioritization and time management is another place to invest some thought and effort.

Have we met? I'm Halelly Azulay. I'm an author, speaker, facilitator, & leadership development strategist and an expert in communication skills & emotional intelligence.

I am the author of two books, [*Employee Development on a Shoestring*](#) (ATD Press) and [*Strength to Strength: How Working from Your Strengths Can Help You Lead a More Fulfilling Life*](#). My books, workshops and retreats build on my 20+ years of professional experience in communication and leadership development in corporate, government, nonprofit and academic organizations.



I am the president of TalentGrow LLC, a consulting company I founded in 2006 to develop leaders and teams, especially for enterprises experiencing explosive growth or expansion. TalentGrow specializes in people leadership skills, which include communication skills, teambuilding, coaching, and emotional intelligence. TalentGrow works with all organizational levels, including C-level leaders, frontline managers, and individual contributors.

People hire me to speak at conferences and meetings and to facilitate leadership workshops, but what I love most is to help fast growing organizations create a leadership development strategy and approach.

I'm a contributing author to numerous [books](#), articles and blogs. I was described as a "[Leadership Development Guru](#)" by TD Magazine. I [blog](#), publish a leadership [podcast](#), and have a popular free weekly subscription newsletter – so you should definitely sign up at www.tinyurl.com/talentgrow.

Learn while on the go: Listen to my leadership podcast, **The TalentGrow Show!**

Are you a leader who is always looking to take your game to the next level? Maybe you're new to leadership or aspiring to become a leader?

This podcast is for self-motivated and growth-oriented current and future leaders who want actionable, results-oriented insight and advice on how to take their leadership, communication, and people skills to the next level and **become the kind of leader people *want* to follow.**

Go to www.talentgrow.com/podcast

Download on [iTunes](#) or [Stitcher](#)

Listen while commuting,

walking the dog, or exercising!

Subscribe and never miss an episode!



Employee Development on a Shoestring

gives managers the tools to grow their team members into engaged, highly-skilled employees, outside the classroom and 'outside the box', within an efficient, cost-effective framework.



www.bit.ly/EmpDevShoestring

"Whether you are a supervisor looking for...developmental ideas or a trainer seeking ways to stretch your company's training and development budget, **this book delivers.**"

from the foreword by "The Trainer's Trainer," **Elaine Biech**
author of *The Business of Consulting* and dozens of other books

"**Halelly Azulay gets the importance** of keeping employees up to speed in a constantly changing workplace, and doing so in ways that are respectful of their individuality and your company's values."

Daniel H. Pink
best-selling author of *To Sell Is Human*, *A Whole New Mind* and *Drive*

"Halelly Azulay has written a **book that will help supervisors and professionals** develop their staff within the limits that most organizations now face—time and budget!"

Marshall Goldsmith
million-selling author of New York Times bestsellers, *Mojo* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

halelly@talentgrow.com

talentgrow.com

SPEAKING



WORKSHOPS



FACILITATION



TalentGrow: We develop leaders and teams to improve the human side of work

Call us today for a consultation about ways to develop your leaders, teams, and employees +1 301.760.7179

SPEAKING

Need an expert to engage, educate, and inspire your leaders to greatness? Bring leadership and communication expert and author Halelly Azulay to speak at your next event, conference, or company meeting. Halelly is a dynamic and energetic speaker who shared her research-based expertise in a way that is fun, interactive, and interesting. Frequent audience comments include words like, "engaging!", "knowledgeable!", "inspiring," and "enthusiastic!".

Halelly speaks to audiences large and small at industry conferences, corporate events, and association meetings. As a curious and voracious life-long learner, thought leader and author, she is always on the cutting edge of industry research and publications and shares the latest findings with audiences of leaders, managers, and high-performers around the U.S. They walk away with specific tools and techniques that they can implement right away, on the job, to increase their effectiveness and engagement.

WORKSHOPS

We design and develop learning and training workshops that are geared toward how adults like to learn: hands-on, interactive, and rich with thought-provoking large and small group discussions, experiential learning activities, and self-reflection assessments and exercises. We combine the latest theoretical concepts and thought leadership with practical, concrete examples to allow learners to walk away with fresh insights, improved skills, and new tools and techniques they can begin implementing immediately.

Popular Workshop Topics include Employee Development on a Shoestring, Strength to Strength (both based on Halelly Azulay's books), The 3 Keys to Communication Success, Becoming an Engaging Leader, Harnessing the Power of Emotional Intelligence, Influencing with Integrity (Even Without Authority), and Feedback: Success!.

FACILITATION

Team-Building: We help teams of all sizes identify successes and areas that present challenges. Each team-building effort is different. At TalentGrow, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each solution is customized to the specifics of the organization, the team, and the situation at hand. We listen and observe carefully and craft an approach that is targeted specifically to help your team foster the work environment and productivity it seeks.

Retreat Facilitation: When a team or organization has an important problem to solve or decision to reach, they often need an objective, external facilitator to help them succeed. Our professional facilitation skills allow your team to identify objectives and desired outcomes, develop a strong and effective agenda, and then fully focus on engaging with the subject-matter at hand and with each other and let us take care of the rest.