

A portrait of Shane Hipps, a man with short brown hair and a friendly smile, wearing a dark blue blazer over a dark turtleneck sweater. The background is dark and out of focus.

shane hipps

# 3 LEADERSHIP MISTAKES

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together in a supportive grip, set against a dark background.

that WASTE TIME  
and KILL MORALE

# 3 Leadership Mistakes that Waste Time and Kill Morale

Harvard researchers recently found an alarming statistic about leadership and teams in business. They surveyed 127 teams in public and private companies, both small and large, all over the world.

The researchers wanted to know how teams performed in three areas:

- 1) Accomplishing big goals.
- 2) Growing more effective over time.
- 3) Developing into better leaders.

The results were not good. **75%** of teams rated **mediocre** or **poor**.<sup>[1]</sup>

A dysfunctional team experience is one of the biggest contributors to wasting time, dissatisfaction at work, and eroding performance.

What follows is for leaders who are contending with any or all of the following:

- You're tired of trying to figure out how to resolve personality conflicts and miscommunication in your team.
- You've experienced the frustration of having a diverse group of people not bought in to a vision or pulling in the same direction.
- You need to attract, retain, and motivate top talent to perform at the highest levels

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- You want to prevent needless turnover and its related costs (research shows that turnover costs 200% of the annual compensation of a senior team member).<sup>[ii]</sup>

If any of this describes you, you are in the right place. By the time you finish you will...

- Identify the **3 biggest mistakes** leaders make and how to prevent them
- Realize the most important ingredient to **double productivity** in a team
- Understand how to make a **bigger impact** and **greater profit**

Leading or managing people can either be the most fulfilling or most frustrating experience. There's nothing like the exhilaration of performing at your best with people you enjoy working with. This is one of the areas I help leaders in.

I work with business leaders who want to maximize the best results from their team. I have the unique privilege of coaching a number of high-performing, creative, and brilliant leaders such as Ije Nwokorie, a senior director at Apple.



***“Shane is the best leadership coach I know. He’s made a huge difference in the way I show up and interact with the people I work with.”***

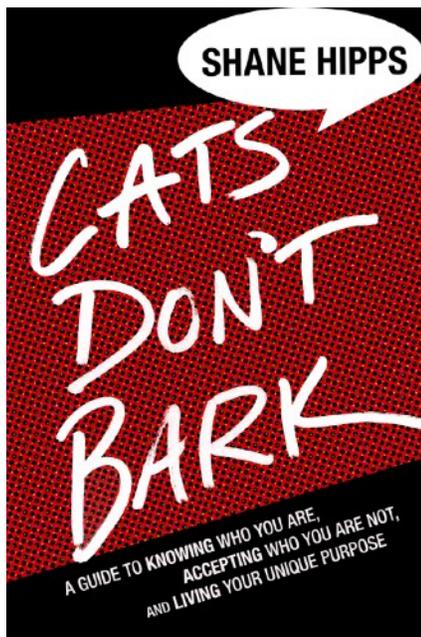


Ije Nwokorie  
**Senior Director, Apple**

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Sairah Ashman, the CEO of Wolff Olins, a global creative consulting firm for some of the world's biggest and most innovative companies (Google, Microsoft, GE, Mercedes Benz, and more). And Greg Henry, winner of the **Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award** and CEO of Aspen Heights Partners, a national real estate development company.

I'm also a speaker and best-selling author of four books, most recently *Cats Don't Bark: A Guide To Knowing Who You Are, Accepting Who You Are Not, and Living Your Unique Purpose* (Hachette, 2015).



Finally, I don't just coach leaders, I also served as a lead pastor for nearly a decade, most recently for a mega-church of 6000 people with an online listening audience of 25,000. I know first hand the challenges, successes, and failures of leading complex systems of people.

After nearly 20 years of leading, serving leaders, experimenting, making mistakes, and refining my method here's what I've learned are the three biggest mistakes leaders make and how to easily avoid them.

MISTAKE  
#1

## Ignoring the Power of the Heart

The business world has a tendency to handicap leaders in a subtle but very important way. Modern business has created institutions and organizations that function like a wheat sifter.

A wheat sifter is a simple tool that separates the wheat from the chaff. The wheat is collected and retained and the debris is sifted and discarded.

The business world does something similar. When we enter an organization, there's an unspoken expectation that some parts of us will be left at the door. This sifter is precise in what parts it extracts. The world of work seeks to retain our thinking and intellectual abilities and either deliberately or inadvertently sift out the human heart.

This is a grave mistake. The heart is like the wheat berry. That's where the nutrients live. When I talk about the heart, I am not talking about vague sentimental feelings, reactive emotionality, or romance. The heart is a powerful center of intelligence all its own with very unique powers.

Researchers have measured and discovered that the heart has an electromagnetic field 5000 times bigger than the electromagnetic field of the brain. It extends out from the human body more than 8 feet in every direction.



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The heart is the source of courage, desire, commitment, compassion, guidance, intuition, and love. These are essential ingredients for transformational leadership. Yet, the corporate sifter has discarded the very center of intelligence that delivers these qualities.

Research has shown that companies with high levels of employee engagement have on average **20% greater productivity and profit.**

[iii] *Employee engagement is the domain of the heart.*

The difference between a good manager and a transformational leader is found in the heart. Inspiring leaders bring their heart to their work and invite others to join them. Great leaders also know this must be voluntary. The heart cannot be coerced. The leader's job is to model the way and create the conditions that encourage his/her people to bring the fullness of who they are to their work.

A big part of my program, *The Next Level Leader*, is designed to show you how to reconnect to this nuclear superpower. But let me give you a simple suggestion to start with.

Begin by connecting everything you and your team do to an authentic higher purpose, which means answering the question why? Why do you do what you do? Why does it matter so much?

The answer to this question needs to be about more than just making money. According to research, there is a ceiling to the amount of money that incentivizes workers. Once the ceiling is reached, people are motivated by the integration of profit and purpose. (True motivation comes from a real connection with bigger sense of purpose.)

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Let me make this practical. When you think about your organization or team, is there a stated vision? If so, does that vision have anything to do with a non-financial reason for being? If it doesn't, can you push yourself to name a higher purpose? This applies whether you are the leader of an organization or a team leader.

Here's an example of an aspirational sense of purpose.

One of my clients, Aspen Heights Partners, is a real estate development company. Their vision before we started working together was to be the best their industry. This was a good start, but it didn't reflect the true mission of the founder and CEO. He had a growing sense that something more was possible and wanted to pursue it.

I worked with him to evoke and articulate the bigger vision, one that connected with the "why." The result is the following:



*Aspen Heights exists to cultivate human potential and add value to our world by creating and managing spaces where people live, connect, and learn.*

You can see the vision starts with something unrelated to their industry. They exist to “*cultivate human potential and add value to our world.*” That value includes a lot more than merely financial value.

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This simple shift had a powerful impact on attracting superior talent. At the time the company had 300 employees, they recruited a leader from a Fortune 40 company whom had managed 70,000 team members. He was drawn in large part because he found the company's purpose so compelling. This is the power of the heart when it connects to purpose.



***“Shane brings a ton of value to our business, from vision clarity to team alignment, all of which rolls straight to the bottom line.”***

Sid Keswani, former **SVP** and **COO**



Here is a small but potent way of changing the nature of our teams. What if instead of a wheat sifter, our organizations became a water pitcher, a container that does not separate. The fullness of the water is retained and contained, even if the shape is changed. In the same way, the fullness of what makes us so powerful is welcomed.

What if we were unafraid to talk about love in our organizations? What if we could talk about our love of what we do, the people we work with, our customers and clients, our products and services?

Love isn't sentimental feelings, nor does it mean perfect harmony where everyone always gets along. Love will mean conflict, challenges, truth, and disagreement. But it will be in the context of dignity.

What have you sifted out of your work life, either because it felt safe, wasn't allowed, or just didn't seem relevant? What larger part of your heart could you bring to your team and organization?

## MISTAKE #2

### Failing to Look in the Mirror

Another big mistake leaders make is to assume others are the source of their team's performance problems. What they don't realize is the problem almost always starts with them in some way. The first step to resolving performance of anyone on your team is to look in the mirror.

Tom, the CEO of a mid-sized company, called me in a panic about his most pivotal direct report. Lisa was more knowledgeable than anyone in the company in her domain and had repeatedly demonstrated superior judgment to others.

She was also abrasive, unyielding, and emotionally unpredictable. Lisa would often talk ill of the CEO in front of her direct reports and wore this as a badge of honor. "I'm not afraid to cut through the B.S. and call it like it is," she'd say. The subordinates weren't impressed. Instead, they found it destabilizing and stressful. Unbeknownst to her, Lisa's approach was killing her team's morale, exhausting her peers, and angering the CEO.

When Tom learned through back channels that Lisa's strongest team members were thinking of leaving if things didn't change, he reached out to me in hopes of fixing her behavior.

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As I listened to the story, I knew Lisa would need to wake up to her impact and confront disruptive habits that were eroding her credibility. But, I also knew from experience that everything in an emotional system starts at the top.

As I interviewed all the stakeholders to get a picture of what was going on, most everyone pointed to Lisa as the culprit. What they could not see was how the CEO had inadvertently created a climate that provoked Lisa's reactivity and disruptive behavior.

Tom had started this company and become wildly successful. He had a self-image of a leader who could see things in his industry no one else could. As a fresh thinking visionary who had flipped the script, Tom enjoyed the success. He had an inspiring vision and was articulate, friendly, and generous. As a result, his company attracted some of the best talent in his industry.

Unfortunately, Tom didn't fully appreciate that Lisa had far more experience in the industry than he did, which meant she could understand what he couldn't. He didn't know what he didn't know. As a result, he didn't know how to evaluate her input properly. She was sending out warnings about key decisions he was making and he was dismissing them.

When she saw the iceberg coming, she got louder and more antagonistic. Tom didn't like it, so he started ignoring her input. Eventually, Lisa was proved right, but Tom never acknowledged that to her.

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Lisa had no tolerance for a boss who didn't respect her opinion. She legitimately had the right answers, but wasn't being heard. So she started undermining him.

When I finally shared my observations with Tom, he was defensive at first, but eventually warmed to the idea that he may have co-created the problems by not understanding who she was and what she could see. He also admitted he didn't acknowledge when he was wrong.

It all starts with the leader, so I encouraged him to pivot and try a different tact with Lisa. I recommended the following 5 steps to him:

#### 1. Make Your Goal Understanding

Start the conversation with the following statement: "My goal in our conversation is to get more clarity on your perspective and experience."

#### 2. Take Notes as They Talk

It may sound strange, but tell them you want to take notes to be sure you get it right. This serves two important purposes: First, it shows what they say matters to you. Second, it actually creates emotional distance in case what they say triggers you. You're writing it down like a dispassionate journalist.

#### 3. Ask Only Clarifying Questions at First

This is not an interrogation, but an inquiry. Phrases like, "I want to understand more about that..." "I'm not sure I'm clear..." or "What impact did that have on you?" can really help.

#### 4. Get Curious and Suspend Judgment

They will say things you disagree with. Don't get hooked. You can always come back later to debate finer points or assumptions. But the initial objective is maximize the other person's experience of being truly heard. You might learn something.

#### 5. Ask "What Do You Need?"

Regardless of how the conversation goes, at the end, ask the person: "***What do you need from me in order to be successful in this?***" The above question helps create a safe container to surface possible frustrations without evoking blame, assigning false motives, or prompting character assassination.

This simple shift in approach did wonders for changing how Lisa showed up. Tom immediately noticed two things. One, Lisa was much less defensive when she sensed a genuine hearing. She shared her perspective from a place of clarity and calm, which was much easier for Tom to understand and absorb. Two, she actually acknowledged that she felt out of control at times and needed to work on herself too. She had never demonstrated vulnerability in the past. That opened the door for Tom to introduce much needed coaching services for her, which she gladly accepted.

None of this is possible without the leader going first. The sequence is essential, the leader has to look in the mirror first in order for followers to have incentive and feel safe enough to do the same.

In my *Next Level Leader Program*, I teach dozens of simple tools and techniques in addition to the ones above to help leaders cultivate transformational self-awareness. Self-awareness is a critical trait required to develop greater leadership intelligence.

## MISTAKE #3

### Failing to Enroll People In Your Vision

The final big mistake I see leaders make is misunderstanding how people get on-board with an idea, initiative, or decision. Leaders, whether working with direct reports or in a partnership, assume that because it was communicated, everyone understood it and is on-board in the same way.

The reality is misunderstanding and miscommunication are the rule, not the exception. Leaders are often surprised or frustrated by having to talk about something that seems so obvious to them. When team members aren't bought in, lifting at the same time, or don't lift at all, the result is a hit to productivity, morale, and ultimately profit.

This is an opportunity for the leader to understand the way people learn and make decisions. Each new idea, proposal, or initiative introduced requires a learning period in order to achieve alignment and buy-in.

The Learning Ladder is a simple tool to support getting buy in. Here's how it works. Learning occurs in stages. Understanding each stage helps leaders develop a strategy for how to take people on the journey.

## THE LEARNING LADDER



This is not a light switch but a dimmer dial. Everyone starts at the first rung-- **Awareness**, and climbs up from there. Depending on the scope of the project and the number of stakeholders, the time it takes to climb the ladder varies.

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The goal is to get people to **Enrollment** without skipping over **Understanding**, a common mistake that leads to problems later. Finally, **Ownership** and **Leadership** are very powerful if achieved, but they are not requirements for effectiveness and success.

The learning ladder does two things:

1. It gives people permission to be where they are on the ladder. When someone is at Awareness, you welcome his lack of interest or strong disagreement. That freedom to feel (or not feel much), helps him hear.
2. It helps leaders formulate a strategy for how to get people to Enrollment, which is the goal. The leader has far more realistic expectations about what is possible, by when.

I teach how and when to use this tool, and others like it, in my *Next Level Leader Program*. When used correctly, these tools make change management pain-free for leaders and their teams.

These are the three biggest mistakes I see leaders make and it costs them time, money, and energy. But this is only the beginning. My passion is to help leaders free up more time and energy, while at the same time increasing productivity and profit to make a bigger impact.

If you'd like to learn more, apply for a **free Next Level Leader Strategy Session** below...

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If you're looking for results like this, then I invite you to apply for a **free** Next Level Leader Strategy Session.

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These sessions are complimentary, but my time is limited, and that's why you must apply. If your application is accepted, and I hope it is, you will get access to my calendar to schedule your **Next Level Leader Strategy Session.**



*"I can't say enough about Shane's impact on my leadership. His work has been invaluable to me and my business."*

James Haddaway, **CIO**

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[i] [Korn Ferry Team Research](#)

[ii] [American Progress Research costs for replacing employees](#)

[iii] [Gallup research employee engagement meta analysis](#)