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If you want to empower, engage, or motivate others, don't just focus on [increasing your positive behaviors](#). Pay attention to what you need to *stop* doing as well. Why? Because people remember the bad more than the good. To quote from a previous HBR article, [How to Play to Your Strengths](#), "Multiple studies have shown that people pay keen attention to negative information. For example, when asked to recall important emotional events; people remember four negative memories to every positive one." So, which behaviors do leaders most need to avoid? Drawing on thousands of 360 qualitative interviews, here are our top three:

Judgmental, non-verbal body language. No one, especially your successful colleagues, can tolerate perceived condescension. Research [studies](#) show that somewhere between 75 to 90 percent of our impact comes from our non-verbal communication, and tone is a key ingredient of this. Do you make comments to others in a way that sounds evaluative, harsh, or condescending? Often, this is not our intention but an in-the-moment reaction. Other non-verbal offenders include scowling, furrowed brows, quizzical looks (as if to say, 'are you stupid?'), rigidity, and sarcasm. While seemingly small, each of these subtle darts creates a considerable amount of relationship damage.

Interrupting and interrogating. There's been a lot of buzz recently around how to have "conversations that drive innovation" and how to "create safe environments for employees to bring their ideas forward." It's almost impossible for people to feel safe if the boss takes up most of the airtime, cuts people off, or interrogates half-baked ideas. Yes, employees have a responsibility to communicate with clarity, but if you expect every idea to be buttoned up, fully thought out, or structured before someone speaks, your colleagues will assume that you're not willing to invest the time to be a thought partner.

Being inconsistent. Peers and staff often comment on how discouraging it is to see a colleague act in two very different ways — absolutely charming with the executive team and external clients while being disrespectful to those they work with every day. This inconsistency makes these behaviors even more memorable and egregious. Others have shared a different impact — the feeling of walking on eggshells at work, wondering who is going to show up: “smiling, charming, funny person” or “judgmental, intense, snapping person.” Over time, this drives passive aggressive responses from others in their attempt to avoid confrontation.

Ultimately, loyalty and followership are the two things we cannot demand or set as an expectation. What is perceived as fear-based motivation, belittlement, or power play can yield real short-term compliance from others. But negative behaviors ultimately diminish the legacy we leave. Consider what behaviors you might need to stop doing so that you can have a positive, lasting impact.

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