



Ten signs of toxic leadership.

Most leaders can name a toxic boss they once worked for. Fewer can say which of these signs a colleague might see in them. The signs build up slowly through small habits, and in a difficult week most of us will recognise one or two.



1 Micromanagement

When every decision needs the leader's sign-off, people stop using their own judgement. Good ideas stall while they wait for approval, and staff grow anxious about getting things wrong.



2 Favouritism

When some people get the praise and the opportunities and others get the scrutiny, a team splits. Staff notice who is protected and who is being managed out, and they stop trusting that the rules apply to everyone.



3 Blame culture

Credit goes up to the leader and blame comes down to the team. Before long people hide their mistakes and stop raising problems while they are still small.



4 Manipulation

Expectations change without warning, and past decisions are forgotten or denied when they become inconvenient. People cannot plan or improve when they never know where they stand.



5 Punishing dissent

Staff who question a decision find themselves left out or quietly undermined. Others notice, and soon nobody raises a concern.



6 Poor communication

Big decisions are made without consultation and announced without explanation. People fill the gap with guesswork, and trust in the leadership wears away.



7 Low morale

When turnover is high and burnout is widespread, the cause usually goes beyond the individuals involved. Good people who leave often name the way they were led as part of the reason.



8 Parent and student politics

Decisions are made to keep families happy, even when that is unfair to staff. Teachers feel let down when a complaint is settled at the expense of a colleague who acted properly.



9 Style over substance

Time and money go into the school's image on social media and in the prospectus, while work on teaching and learning waits. Staff begin to wonder what the priorities really are.



10 Ego-driven leadership

Initiatives are launched with fanfare and rarely followed through. Relationships become transactional, and the school comes to depend on the leader's personal profile.



A question to ask yourself

Which of these could colleagues say about me in a difficult week? If one fits, it is worth talking through with someone you trust. For leadership coaching, email hello@azimuth.org.uk.