

Ten signs of *toxic* leadership.

We are quick to call other people toxic. The harder, more honest habit is to hold the same mirror up to ourselves. These signs rarely announce themselves; they show up in small patterns that shape a culture before anyone names them, and on a hard week most of us will recognise one or two.

01



Micromanagement

CONTROL THAT ERODES TRUST

When every decision needs a leader's sign-off, autonomy drains away. People start to second-guess themselves, good ideas stall, and growth gives way to a fear of getting it wrong.

02



Favouritism

INCONSISTENCY THAT DIVIDES

Uneven treatment in praise, opportunity or accountability pulls a team apart. People sense when they, or their colleagues, are being set against one another or performance-managed out, rather than supported.

03



Blame culture

ACCOUNTABILITY WITHOUT OWNERSHIP

Credit flows upward and blame flows down. Over time people stop owning their mistakes, stop speaking openly, and stop believing responsibility is shared.

04



Manipulation

UNCERTAINTY AS A TOOL

Shifting expectations, convenient forgetting and the flat denial of past decisions keep people unsteady. When the ground keeps moving, no one can plan or improve.

05



Punishing dissent

CHALLENGE READ AS DISLOYALTY

Healthy organisations welcome a dissenting voice. Toxic ones punish it, through exclusion, heavier workloads or a word in the wrong ear. Eventually people stop speaking up.

06



Poor communication

DECISIONS WITHOUT DIALOGUE

When big calls are made with no consultation and no explanation, people are left guessing. Unclear messaging breeds confusion, and confusion makes room for distrust.

07



Low morale

A CULTURE OF ATTRITION

High turnover, flagging energy and steady burnout point to something deeper than individual choices. People rarely leave a job. They leave their leader.

08



Parent and student politics

REPUTATION OVER RELATIONSHIPS

When the question becomes what looks good rather than what is right, integrity suffers. Staff feel undercut when commercial interests are appeased at the expense of fairness.

09



Style over substance

OPTICS IN PLACE OF OUTCOMES

When the energy goes into the social feed, the glossy brochure and the staged event rather than real improvement, people begin to wonder where the priorities really sit.

10



Ego-driven leadership

VISIBILITY OVER SERVICE

Leadership is performative. Initiatives are announced and rarely seen through. Relationships turn transactional, and the organisation becomes dependent on the leader's image.

A QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF

Which of these, on my hardest week, could be said of me? Naming one honestly is where change begins, not a verdict on you, and it is exactly the kind of work a coach can help with.