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## Bosses who don't listen

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Mumuli enjoyed leading teams. She worked for a consulting firm for several years before landing her dream job in the technology sector. One of her favourite leadership activities entailed brainstorming sessions with the engineers and programmers. Mumuli treasured the interaction and the solidification of paths forward gained from the meetings. One Thursday morning, she decided to give her staff a satisfaction survey.

Upon receiving her employees' feedback and synthesising the results, much to Mumuli's shock, the workers felt that she lacked inspirational leadership. Horrified, she sought out an organisational behaviourist to clarify her situation and leadership potential.

Is it better for a leader to listen or be heard? Society and most corporations tend to reward the most talkative, overtly gregarious, and consistently outspoken employees. Boards of directors typically like to see a strong CEO taking charge, giving orders, imparting guidance, and holding staff to targets. The CEOs in turn tend to hire executives who hold similar personality preferences who then employ mid-level managers with similar traits.

Tragically, the corporate aggressiveness-bias permeates most organisations including right here in Kenya.

A disconnect subsides between what science knows and what organisations actually practice. In reality, powerful and dominant leaders cause lower organisational performance. Harvard Business School's Francesca Gino's research shows that introverts surprisingly make better leaders, on average, than do extroverts. The reason? Introverts tend to listen more. Listening abilities represent a salient cause of a leader's success in managing teams.

Leaders must create a work environment where people feel free and flexible enough to speak up and share their ideas. Then managers should receptively listen, affirm, channel, and guide those ideas.

Leaders usually compound personality trait issues with feelings of power that prompt leaders to increase their amount of talking even further. The psychological effect of power is not limited to the internal behavioural effects on the leader who experiences feelings of either high or low power. Instead, the internal effects and behavioural consequences impact the entire group that the leader manages. A leader's feelings of power changes collective team outcomes by also changing the behaviour of interaction partners in the group.

How can managers solve their aggressive over-talking and avoid the negative effects?

First, open discussions with teams starts to decrease the adverse impacts of leader over-talking. Managers may create openness in discussions not just by holding meetings and asking for ideas, but by specifically stating the instrumentality of each employee on the team with each new task assigned to them.

As an example: "Munya, you are critically important for us to reconcile those accounts receivable in time". Such statements force a subtle change in managers' brains that their team members matter to task success and later departmental success.

Second, executives should regularly remind their employees that staff input and information proves critical to success on specific projects and key performance indicators. As high-power leaders become aware of the instrumentality of their team members, they behave more encouraging of others' input. Then the negative effect of power on the team's open communication reduces and eventually gets eliminated.

Third, human resources departments should provide a guiding checklist to managers that they should fill following each team meeting.

The checklist should include at least six points as follows: have all members had the opportunity to express opinions? Did team members listen to each other's input? Did at least 70 per cent of the team speak during the meeting? Did members hold back in fear of what others thought? Did members restrict their comments based on fears of retaliation by the presiding manager or supervisor? Were members free to make positive and negative comments?

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