

Leader-itis Diagnostic

Leader-itis is a common ailment among top leaders. How many of the following symptoms do you sometimes experience in your job? Please mark YES or NO.¹

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|---|-----------|
| 1. I am often reluctant to delegate because I believe it's more likely to get done to my standards if I do it myself. | YES
NO |
| 2. I feel like I can't make mistakes in front of my staff – as if somehow I have to be perfect. | YES
NO |
| 3. I sometimes feel awkward having power over others in my organization. | YES
NO |
| 4. I have the imposter syndrome. I feel like people believe I'm smarter and more competent than I am – that somehow I've fooled everyone. | YES
NO |
| 5. I get uncomfortable making unpopular decisions. | YES
NO |
| 6. I get frustrated that my staff isn't doing what I want them to do. | YES
NO |
| 7. I feel an enormous weight of responsibility that makes it hard to relax. | YES
NO |
| 8. I'm sometimes reluctant to simply tell people what to do. | YES
NO |
| 9. I feel like I have to project confidence and look like I know what I'm doing, even when I don't feel it. | YES
NO |
| 10. I'm sometimes uncomfortable with how others treat me as an authority figure. | YES
NO |
| 11. I get insecure making big decisions that have so much impact on others. | YES
NO |

¹ The digital version of this PDF form can be filled out using Adobe Reader.

ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM LEADER-ITIS?

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 12. I feel isolated in my role because there are things I can't talk to my staff about and have to keep to myself. | YES
NO |
| 13. I feel like I'm never doing enough. | YES
NO |
| 14. When anything goes wrong in the organization I feel like it's my fault. | YES
NO |
| 15. I feel like I'm juggling too many balls and worry that I'll start dropping them. | YES
NO |
| 16. I often feel like I'm not doing well enough at my job. | YES
NO |
| 17. I sometimes long for the old days before I became a top leader. | YES
NO |
| 18. I sometimes wonder how long I really want to stay in this job. | YES
NO |
| 19. My mind is almost always racing – first thing in the morning and when I'm trying to go to sleep – thinking about all that have to do. | YES
NO |
| 20. I feel like there must be something wrong with me that I have so many concerns about fulfilling my role. | YES
NO |

Are some of the above symptoms familiar?

Don't worry! From having trained and coached thousands of leaders, I can assure you that it's actually normal to have these kinds of feelings. You're just a human being trying to do a tough job.

What is Leader-itis?

Leader-itis is actually the malady of having these completely normal emotions but thinking there's something wrong with you. It's feeling like you have to pretend not to wrestle with insecurity, isolation and overwhelm. It's trying to deny your humanity because you're a top leader.

Is there a cure for Leader-itis?

Yes! And fortunately, the remedies for leader-itis are easy to find, completely safe, and ultimately wholesome and joyful.

Remedy #1 Have compassion for yourself

Your job is hard to begin with, but a significant contributor to leader-itis is a nagging inner judge who's on your case for being a wimp. Be compassionate with yourself.

Here's a quote from a CEO of a major corporation:

By far the most difficult skill for me to learn as CEO was the ability to manage my own psychology. Organizational design, process design, metrics, hiring and firing were all relatively straightforward skills to master compared to keeping my mind in check. Over the years, I've spoken to hundreds of CEOs all with the same experience. Nonetheless, very few people talk about it, and I have never read anything on the topic. The first rule of the CEO psychological meltdown is don't talk about the psychological meltdown.²

Remedy #2 Get Connected

Top leaders tend to feel isolated. There are things you can't speak about with others. Breaking that isolation is preventative and curative for leader-itis.

Here are some options:

- Cultivate a real partner in your organization – someone who is in tune with your priorities and someone you think you can trust.
- Find a colleague with whom you can do regular peer coaching.
- Join or help start a local support group for Executive Directors. (Leaders actually do this.)
- Form a kitchen cabinet: a small group of trusted advisors from outside your organization who can serve as a sounding board and support.

Remedy #3 Get a Life

Having priorities other than work is critical to maintaining some semblance of balance and personal fulfillment. Engage in recreational activities that actually help “recreate” you. One of the best cures for leader-itis is spending more time with family and friends. I ran a hospice program for a number of years. I never heard anyone on their deathbed wish they had worked more.

Remedy #4 Care for your body

Leader-itis often leads to poor habits of self-care. Then, failure to take care of ourselves leads to more leader-itis. Countless studies show the impact of sleep, diet and exercise on not only our moods and self-confidence, but on concentration, analytic reasoning, productivity and executive judgment.

Remedy #5 Invest in your own development

When suffering from leader-itis, we often fail to take the time to invest in our ongoing professional development. Training, reading, coaching, ongoing education and self-reflection are critical for the lifelong learning that helps develop great leaders.

² <http://www.businessinsider.com/whats-the-most-difficult-ceo-skill-managing-your-own-psychology-2011-4>

Remedy #6 Connect to the source

Leaders need to draw strength and meaning from a connection to something larger than themselves. One of the most potent cures for leader-itis is an active connection to our deeper sense of purpose, to a cause or community that we serve, or however we might experience spirit or the Creator.

Leader-itis is a self-replicating ailment. Sufferers tend to act in ways that produce greater symptoms. Leader-itis is also contagious. Your moods and behavior impact everyone who works for you.

Break the cycle! Take the cure!

- Remedy #1 Have compassion for yourself.
- Remedy #2 Get Connected
- Remedy #3 Get a Life
- Remedy #4 Care for your body
- Remedy #5 Invest in your own development
- Remedy #6 Connect to the source