

BEHAVIOUR BREAKTHROUGH BLUEPRINT

Strategies for Addressing Challenging Workplace Behaviours



As leaders, we all encounter people whose behaviour disrupts trust, culture, and performance. Left unchecked, these behaviours can drain energy, erode morale, and undermine authority.

At TLC Leadership Group, we believe leadership is about more than managing tasks — it's about navigating the human dynamics that make or break team success.

This blueprint outlines common challenging behaviours you may face in your team — and practical strategies to help you address them with confidence, clarity, and care.

This is not a performance management guide. Instead, it focuses on how to manage behaviour patterns that, if ignored, can compromise your leadership impact.

If issues persist despite your best efforts, formal performance management may be necessary. In those cases, TLC Leadership Group can support you through coaching, leadership development, and tailored strategies to ensure you address behaviour effectively while strengthening your overall leadership impact.

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING – PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE

Case Scenario: Joan never raises issues she is worried about. Instead, she communicates her true feelings through eye-rolling, sarcasm, and gossip.

What Lies Beneath: Passive-aggressive individuals are in denial of their frustrations and avoid direct communication. They may appear agreeable on the surface but act differently in subtle, undermining ways.

Impact on Leadership & Teams: This behaviour creates confusion and mistrust because words and actions don't align. Team members begin to wonder what is really being said behind closed doors, which erodes psychological safety. Morale suffers as negativity spreads through sarcasm and gossip, and the leader's authority is weakened because the behaviour challenges them indirectly without accountability. Left unchecked, passive-aggressiveness can quietly corrode team culture, making collaboration and open communication almost impossible.

Leadership Response: Address the behaviour as soon as possible, preferably in a one-on-one setting. You might begin with: "I noticed you rolled your eyes when we discussed the project. That makes me think you may not agree – can you tell me more?" By creating a safe platform for concerns, you give the individual an opportunity to voice issues directly. Always focus on the behaviour, not the person. This avoids defensiveness while holding them accountable for aligning words and actions.



THE MIGHTY MOANER – CHRONIC COMPLAINER



Case Scenario:

Mary constantly identifies problems, raising objections in an accusatory style that wears people down. She complains to colleagues about systems, processes, or people but rarely takes responsibility for solutions.

What Lies Beneath:

Complainers focus on risks and shortcomings, often driven by anxiety and stress. They get stuck in the problem rather than moving toward solutions.

Impact on Leadership & Teams:

This behaviour drains energy, spreads negativity, and undermines momentum. Instead of encouraging constructive problem-solving, it traps the team in a cycle of frustration. Morale declines, collaboration weakens, and leaders risk losing credibility if they appear to tolerate constant negativity.

Leadership Response:

Stay calm and avoid being pulled into defensive arguments. Acknowledge concerns without validating the negative framing, then redirect focus toward solutions. Ask open questions such as: “What would you suggest instead?” or “What’s one action we could try?” Coach the complainer to take ownership of their concerns and commit to constructive actions.



THE OSTRICH – THE AVOIDER

Case Scenario:

Thomas withdraws when issues arise. He stops contributing, avoids eye contact, and responds with vague or minimal answers.

What Lies Beneath:

Avoidance is a freeze response, rooted in fear or discomfort. When people don't feel safe, they retreat in an attempt to protect themselves.

Impact on Leadership & Teams:

Avoidance undermines team performance by withholding ideas, feedback, or concerns that could strengthen outcomes. Silence is often misinterpreted as agreement, which creates blind spots. Over time, disengagement lowers morale and damages trust in the team's ability to have open, honest dialogue.

Leadership Response:

Create psychological safety by starting with empathy: "I've noticed you've been quiet in these discussions. I value your input – what are your thoughts?" Call out the behaviour gently but directly, and provide reassurance. Work with the individual to build confidence through small steps, encouraging them to voice their perspective in a safe environment.



THE DICTATOR – THE FORCER



Impact on Leadership & Teams:

This behaviour damages collaboration, creates resentment, and silences diverse perspectives. Over time, trust in the leader diminishes, and team members may disengage rather than risk confrontation. Authority based on fear is never sustainable – it weakens the very influence it tries to secure.

Leadership Response:

Confront the behaviour directly but professionally, sticking to facts rather than emotions. Match their energy with firm but respectful communication. Make it clear that collaboration, not domination, is the expectation. Highlight the long-term consequences of their approach: “When one person takes over, it prevents us from using the full expertise of the team.”

Case Scenario:

Elly dominates meetings, insists on her way, and disregards objections. She positions herself as the authority, regardless of her role.

What Lies Beneath:

Forcers thrive on control and dominance. They often equate leadership with power and “winning,” focusing on their own agenda at the expense of others.



THE PEOPLE-PLEASER – THE ACCOMMODATOR



Case Scenario:

Harry says yes to every request, even when overloaded. He avoids saying no, then struggles to keep up, leaving him resentful and exhausted.

What Lies Beneath:

Accommodators crave harmony and approval. They put others' needs ahead of their own, often sacrificing their wellbeing and productivity.

Impact on Leadership & Teams:

While people-pleasers may seem helpful, over time this behaviour leads to burnout, poor performance, and frustration. Leaders lose trust in their reliability, and the team misses out on authentic contributions because the accommodator isn't expressing their true perspective.

Leadership Response:

Encourage boundary-setting by normalising the idea that saying no can be the most responsible choice. Provide scripts such as: "I'd like to think about that and come back to you." Reinforce that their voice matters and that contribution means balancing their own needs with the team's. Help them practise assertiveness so they can sustain performance without sacrificing themselves.



THE KNOW-IT-ALL – THE EXPERT OR FAKE EXPERT

Case Scenario:

John dismisses others' ideas, insists on his own, and positions himself as superior in knowledge and experience.

What Lies Beneath:

True experts are passionate and deeply knowledgeable but can take disagreement as a personal attack. Fake experts, on the other hand, use confidence to mask shallow understanding. Both behaviours stem from insecurity and a need for validation.



Impact on Leadership & Teams:

This behaviour suppresses diverse thinking, discourages collaboration, and alienates colleagues. Leaders risk losing team creativity and buy-in if one voice dominates or dismisses others.

Leadership Response:

With genuine experts, acknowledge their knowledge and invite them to share insights constructively: "Can you explore the alternatives and risks for us?" With self-proclaimed experts, fact-check, bring in additional perspectives, and make balanced decisions. Reinforce that expertise is valuable, but collaboration and respect for all voices are non-negotiable.

THE SMILING ASSASSIN – THE SOCIOPATH



Case Scenario:

Archie is charismatic, charming, and persuasive. Yet behind the façade, he manipulates colleagues, bends the truth, and takes advantage without remorse.

What Lies Beneath:

Individuals with sociopathic traits lack empathy and exploit others for personal gain. They are skilled at appearing trustworthy while undermining those around them.

Impact on Leadership & Teams:

This behaviour is deeply toxic. It erodes trust, fractures relationships, and destabilises culture. Over time, it can create fear, mistrust, and even long-term damage to individuals' wellbeing. Leaders who ignore it risk their team's cohesion and their own credibility.

Leadership Response:

Protect yourself and the team by documenting behaviour, setting clear boundaries, and checking observations with others. Do not engage in emotional appeals – sociopaths do not respond to empathy. If patterns confirm manipulation, escalate appropriately and, where possible, remove the individual from the environment (through performance management) Safeguarding the team must come first.





CONCLUSION

Taking the Next Step

At TLC Leadership Group, we partner with leaders to turn challenges like these into opportunities for growth and performance. To explore how we can support your leadership journey, whether through coaching, workshops, or tailored leadership development programs, visit www.tlcleadershipgroup.com or connect with us directly.

If you'd like a practical framework to support these conversations, refer to our TLC Difficult Conversations Roadmap — a simple, step-by-step tool to help leaders approach tough discussions with confidence and clarity.

Leadership is a journey best taken together. We'd be honoured to walk alongside you.