

Integrity is the single most important characteristic of a good leader. However, as the past decade of scandal, corruption, and Congressional hearings proved, there are an alarming number of people in leadership roles who behave badly. What causes people to betray one another, and how can companies prevent betrayal in the executive suite?

TRUST & BETRAYAL



Beyond the headlines, daily organizational life includes regular episodes of staff abuse, rule breaking, and betrayal by people in positions of authority (Hogan and Kaiser, 2010). In fact, in a Hogan survey of more than 700 individuals, more than 80% of respondents reported they had been lied to, stolen from, cheated, or treated dishonestly by a supervisor or coworker.

Betrayal in the Workplace

Most people possess an inborn resistance to those in positions of authority. For most of history, humans lived in egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies that were fiercely resistant to formal chiefs or rulers.

This evolutionary resistance to tyranny is reflected in modern business. Leaders that inspire voluntary commitment engage followers and tend to improve employee morale and attitudes, which are linked to greater productivity, customer satisfaction, and financial results. Dominance may produce compliance, but at the cost of alienation and resentment.

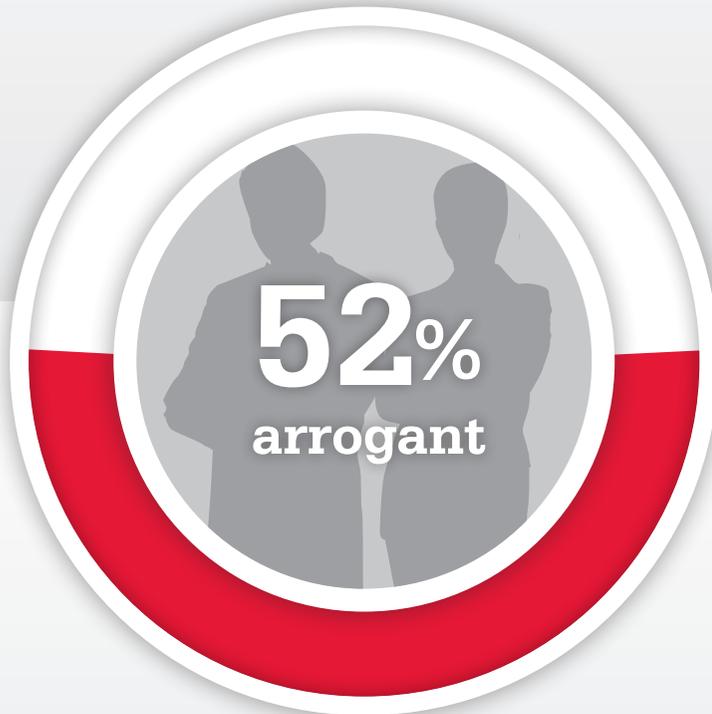
An individual's ability to exercise leadership is hinged on his or her ability to persuade others to follow. According to the Hogan Leadership Model, followers look for four essential qualities in a leader: *integrity, judgment, competence, and vision*. Of these, integrity is most essential.

In a recent survey, Hogan asked more than 1,000 individuals about the qualities of their all-time best boss. Eighty-one percent of respondents said trustworthiness was their most important personality characteristic. Conversely, 50% described their worst boss as manipulative.

“People need to know that the person in charge won't take advantage of his or her position,” said Dr. Robert Hogan, founder of Hogan Assessments. “That they won't lie, steal, play favorites, and betray subordinates.”

In a separate study, Dr. Hogan and Hogan co-founder and former vice president Dr. Joyce Hogan gathered personality data and performance ratings from the immediate supervisor and subordinates of 55 managers at a large transportation company. Statistical analysis revealed that subordinates ratings of their managers' overall effectiveness was directly tied to the degree to which a manager was trusted. The Hogans reasoned that, because they likely view their subordinates as pawns, rather than people, they would have made their careers by selling out their subordinates in small but significant ways.

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Cheating your Way to the Top

Unfortunately, many of the same characteristics that typify the ideal betrayer are the same characteristics that propel many up the corporate ladder.

In their book chapter “The Mask of Integrity,” published in *Citizen Espionage: Studies in Trust and Betrayal*, Drs. Joyce and Robert Hogan, outlined four characteristics that typified the ideal betrayer – charisma, self-absorption, self-deception, and a hollow core.

Charisma – According to Dr. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, vice president of research and innovation at Hogan, there are three ways to influence others: force, reason, or charm. Force and reason are rational – even when people are forced to do something, they obey for a good reason. Charm, on the other hand, is based on emotional manipulation and has the ability to trump rational assessments.

Self-absorption – The second characteristic of an ideal betrayer is an unusual degree of self-absorption, or, more to the point, a relentless drive for self-advancement. Benjamin Disraeli once observed that the key to success is constancy of purpose. Betrayers possess a ruthless dedication to self-advancement to the extent that other people lose their value as humans and become objects to be manipulated.

Self-Deception – The third characteristic that typifies the ideal betrayer is self-deception. A major tenet of psychoanalysis and existentialism is that people are prone to deceive themselves about the reasons for their actions; alternatively, people are reluctant to inquire closely about the real reasons for their actions. Self-deception – lying to oneself – often carries with it the tendency to lie to others.

Hollow Core Syndrome – The final characteristic of the ideal betrayer, and the underlying dynamic that unifies these themes and makes betrayal possible, is a pattern of personality characteristics called the hollow core syndrome. The hollow core syndrome refers to people who are overtly self-confident, who meet the public well, who are charming and socially poised, and who expect others to like them, but who are privately self-doubting and unhappy.

This charm, confidence, and talent for ingratiation provides betrayers the tools they need to find employment at and quickly ascend the ranks of large, hierarchical organizations, while the private self-doubt associated with the hollow core fuels their pursuit of the money, power, and prestige offered by senior management positions. As Clive Boddy points out in a 2005 paper, this implies that, of the approximately 1% of people in organizations that possess these characteristics, the concentration of them can be found in the corner office.

Hunting out the Moles

There are some basic steps companies can take to avoid the devastating effect betrayers can have on morale, engagement, and productivity.

1. Adopt a new definition of leadership. In most companies, leadership is defined in terms of a person's status in the organization. The truth is that the manner in which people advance in many large, hierarchical organizations is by pleasing their superiors – something at which betrayers are adept. A more useful way to define leadership is in terms of a person's ability to build and maintain a high-performing team.

“Performance appraisals reflect how much supervisors like their subordinates,” said Dr. Hogan. “Consequently, the managers designated high performers are often more skilled at office politics than actual leadership. If organizations want a true assessment of a leader's abilities, they should ask that person's subordinates, and they should look at the performance of his or her team. Employees who have been betrayed or abused tend to fight back in the form of disengagement and lowered productivity.”

2. Select leaders using valid assessment tools, instead of relying on intuition. “Betrayers tend to be confident and charming, which means they perform well in interviews,” said Dr. Chamorro-Premuzic. “Psychometric assessments of reputation can identify character flaws and predict a candidate's likelihood of derailing. And, unlike humans, assessments are immune to charm.”

Personality is best defined from two perspectives: identity and reputation. Identity is personality from the inside – how you see yourself. Reputation is personality from the outside – how others see you. Reputation tends to be stable over time, and is an excellent predictor of future behavior.

Hogan measures reputation along two dimensions. *Bright-side* personality characteristics reflect people's strengths and weaknesses when they are on their best behavior – during a job interview, for instance, or when interacting with their superiors. *Dark-side* personality characteristics refer to people's behavior when they are less concerned about how they are perceived – like when they are dealing with subordinates.

3. Provide leaders training and development to mitigate their risk factors. For most people, there is a gap between who they think they are (identity) and how others perceive them (reputation). As a result, they often seem to say one thing and do another. This gap corrodes relationships, and inhibits leaders' ability to inspire followers.

Personality assessment, feedback, and targeted coaching can provide individuals with strategic self-awareness – a better understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and reputation among their peers and subordinates, and how those factors affect their performance.

About Hogan

Founded in 1987, Hogan Assessments pioneered the use of personality assessment to improve workplace performance. Twenty-five years later, we are committed to continuing the same spirit of innovation and attention to science.

Hogan's assessment solutions help businesses reduce turnover and increase productivity by hiring the right people, developing key talent, and evaluating leadership potential.

