



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring and summer of 2016, [\*The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design\*](#) conducted a **study on leadership effectiveness** with our database of high-performing and executive men and women. The results of the study revealed that those professionals who were highly affectively committed – or highly emotionally attached to their organizations – were also very concerned with career advancement, job growth, and successes/accomplishments at work. Additionally, these leaders had low levels of entitlement; practiced helping behaviors at work; reported having a high level of support both within and outside the workplace; and had low role overload. In contrast, however, the study revealed that these committed leaders tended to have employees who reported high levels of burnout and intentions to leave the organization.



We propose that there may be an indirect relationship between leader attitudes and employee attitudes and encourage leaders to consider negative behaviors that may emanate from having high affective commitment. Such negative behaviors may be those that influence the demands placed on employees and/or the control employees have over their work. Demands and control are two factors that have been identified in past research as integral to employee effectiveness and well-being. Some recommendations for supporting direct reports are below.



### Recommendations to Leaders

**Provide Support Measures** – Leaders who are affectively committed to an organization want to exceed expectations, not just meet goals; as a result, they can additionally tax their employees with more work than is reasonable. Adding on additional work or expanding the scope of a project can put undue pressure on direct reports. Without additional support, this can lead to burnout, resentment, and the desire to leave the position/organization. Consider providing added benefits and support to employees such as:

- Establish a mentoring relationship
- Make yourself available for one-on-one meetings or in-person conversations
- Be willing to answer questions
- Be highly responsive to inquiries, requests or communications
- Provide encouragement and counsel
- Keep a watchful eye out for indicators of stress or fatigue

**Give Autonomy** – When delegating work to employees, be sure to give them the power to execute the work as they see fit and empower them to make decisions. Work collaboratively to set expectations and timelines and then take a back seat while the work is done. This will take some pressure off employees and give them a sense of autonomy in the process.

**Be Selective** – Be aware of what you have already assigned to employees and be thoughtful and selective about adding new projects, tasks or work.

## Resources

- [Resilience is about how you recharge, not how you endure](#)
- [4 things that sink new executives and how to overcome them](#)
- [The Resilience Habit I Taught Thousands Of Army Drill Sergeants](#)
- [Talks for when you feel totally burned out](#)

## THE RESEARCH STUDY

### The Leader-Employee Relationship

Organizational commitment— a job attitude that captures the extent to which an individual identifies with and is involved in a particular organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979)—is a pressing concern for organizations with 71% of business executives ranking organizational commitment as critical for organizational performance (Harvard Business Review, 2013). In an attempt to develop a richer understanding of organizational commitment, management scholars have examined key correlates of organizational commitment (e.g., Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Shore & Wayne, 1993), how organizational commitment emerges (e.g., Allen & Meyer, 1990), and how organizational commitment shapes important work outcomes such as job performance: those who are highly affectively committed tend to also perform well on the job (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). In sum, effective organizational members— employees and their leaders—are committed ones.

Relatedly, practitioners and academic scholars alike have devoted a great deal of attention to understanding what makes specifically leaders “effective”. Some scholars have taken an individual-level approach, delineating the personality traits such as extraversion (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Bono & Judge, 2004; Zaccaro, 2007) as well as the contextual factors like organizational structure (Fiedler & Chemers, 1967; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987; Morgeson, 2005; Panwar & Eastman, 1997) that enhance leader effectiveness. Others have argued that effective leadership must take into account those being led (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991). That is, leaders form unique relationships with their employees, and it is the quality of the relationships that shapes important organizational outcomes (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). For example, high-quality relationships between leaders and their employees have been linked to task performance, job satisfaction, turnover, and organizational commitment (Gerstner & Day, 1997), as well as organizational citizenship behaviors—beneficial behaviors that go beyond an employee’s job description (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Organ, 1988).

### About the Sample

One hundred and one business executives and leaders participated in this study, which took place over the spring and summer of 2016. Approximately 66% of the sample was female, 34% of the sample was male. Respondents were employed across a wide variety of industries, including, but not limited to, Education, Finance, Health Care, Manufacturing, Professional Services, and Retail Trade. The average organizational tenure was 10.5 years.

## Key Definitions

- **Executive's Affective Commitment:** Refers to employees' identification with, emotional attachment to, and involvement in the organization
- **Extra-Role Behaviors:** Refers to behaviors that are considered outside the scope of one's job description
- **Subordinate Burnout:** A prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job characterized by stress and strain
- **Subordinate Turnover Intentions:** The degree to which an employee intends to leave his or her organization

## When What is Good for the Leader is Not Good for the Employee: The Findings

High-quality relationships between leaders and their employees and resulting important organizational consequences are in part determined by leader's job attitudes (Loi, Lai, & Lam, 2012). As such, one would expect that the more positive the job attitude, the better a given employee and organizational outcome. As applied to affective commitment, higher leader affective commitment should be beneficial for employees as well as the organization as a whole. Yet, in our study, we found that leaders who reported high levels of affective commitment were also those who had employees who reported high levels of emotional exhaustion/burnout and higher intentions to leave their organization.

Why might high leader affective commitment negatively affect employees by increasing employee burnout and turnover intentions? There are two reasons why strong leader affective commitment may be detrimental for leader's employees: (1) increased demands placed on employees and (2) decreased employee control (Karasek, 1979).

### Increased Demands on Employees

When leaders are high in affective commitment, they risk placing an undue amount of pressure upon their employees. This is because leaders high in affective commitment are likely to execute behaviors that go above and beyond their role responsibilities (Loi, Lai, & Lam, 2012). Such behaviors often require input from those who they supervise. For example, leaders may decide to set ambitious goals for work output that may be unattainable as a way to express their deep attachment to the organization of which they are a part. Achieving such goals would require increased effort from employees within the team/organization. As a result, ***employees may find themselves facing increasing demands from their supervisors, and increased demands are a direct cause of high burnout and greater intentions to quit one's job.***

### Decreased Employee Control

Additionally, when leaders are high in affective commitment they may unwittingly decrease the psychological sense of control – or autonomy—employees have over their own work. This is because leaders high in affective commitment direct employees' efforts towards organizational visions, goals, and values (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004; Sheldon, 1971). While such direction may provide employees with a sense of security, it also decreases the discretion employees have to choose how and on what to work. This decreased autonomy can be highly

problematic because those low in autonomy tend to have an external locus of control—they believe that rewards are controlled by outside factors, not their individual behavior (Rotter, 1966). Because they start to feel as though they cannot, and are not, successful at navigating their environments, people with an external locus of control tend to experience helplessness (Ashforth, 1989) and psychological stress and strain (O'Driscoll & Beehr, 2000). In other words, **decreased autonomy causes high burnout and increases intentions to quit one's job.**

## Recommendations

### **Not All Extra-Role Behaviors Are Created Equal: Leaders Must Choose Wisely**

Although high leader affective commitment can increase demands placed on employees, this need not always be the case. For example, certain extra-role behaviors practiced by leaders as a result of high affective commitment may benefit employees. For example, in a study of 2042 members of a Midwestern National Guard and their military leaders, Tepper and Taylor (2003) found that leaders invested in mentoring their employees as a way of staying true to their deep emotional attachment to the organization. Mentorship is an extra-role behavior that more often than not is beneficial, rather than detrimental, for the employee receiving the mentoring. Therefore, while setting ambitious goals for projects that are not in the scope of one's workload as a result of a deep attachment to an organization may place undue stress on employees, practicing other extra-role behaviors such as mentoring may not. Leaders must be careful in choosing which behaviors to practice to express their high affective commitment as not all extra-role behaviors are created equal.

### **The Perils of Micromanaging: Leaders Must Express Their Affective Commitment While Preserving Employee Autonomy**

Although high leader affective commitment can decrease employees' sense of psychological control, such a proposition is contingent on how leaders direct their employees' attention to organizational goals, visions, and values. Leaders who excessively scrutinize their employees' work or constantly check in as ways to direct employees' attention move from delegation to micromanagement (Canner & Bernstein, 2016). When a leader delegates, he or she gives employees a goal and a set of parameters within which an employee must operate. However, when a leader micromanages, he or she dictates exactly how tasks must be executed to achieve a desired organizational goal. In the latter case, employees' sense of control is threatened, but in the former case, it remains intact. Therefore, although leaders high in affective commitment are likely directive when interacting with their employees, the way they direct is essential to understanding if their high affective commitment may have detrimental effects on their employees.

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