

7 Reasons Toxic

Leaders Keep

Getting Promoted

(and how to break the cycle)



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1. They Deliver Short-Term Results at Any Cost

They hit their numbers by burning through people.

By the time the damage shows, they've already been promoted.

What you can do:

- Stop celebrating results without asking how they were achieved:
Who stayed? Who left? Who would work for them again?

2. They Excel at Self-Promotion and Managing Up

They're brilliant at impressing senior executives while masking destructive behaviour with employees.

Research shows they advance 29% faster to CEO.

What you can do:

- Judge leaders by how they treat people who can't help their career
- Ask their direct reports what it's really like to work for them

3. Companies Value Technical Over People Skills

Best engineer \neq good manager.

Companies promote star performers into leadership and then wonder why teams quit.

What you can do:

- Stop promoting people into roles they're not ready for. Leadership is a different skill
- Invest in leadership development and readiness assessment first

4. They Exploit Organizational Dysfunction

Toxic leaders thrive in chaotic environments with no vision or accountability.

They make decisions based on personal ambition, not company health.

What you can do:

- Establish clarity: shared goals, transparent processes, clear accountability

5. Fear and Silence Enable Their Rise

People don't speak up about toxic behaviour due to fear of retaliation.

Cultures that prioritize results over people hide abuse.

What you can do:

- Make it safe to tell the truth
- Ask: "What's not being said?"
Then act on it

6. Crisis and Pressure Normalize Their Behaviour

In high-stress environments, aggressive risk-taking and ruthless decision-making get mistaken for decisive leadership.

What you can do:

- Know the difference between decisive and destructive
- Ask: "Are we achieving this **WITH** people or **THROUGH** people?"

7. They Create Self-Reinforcing Toxic Cultures

Toxic leaders hire and promote people like themselves.

They reward short-term wins and fear-based behaviour.

What you can do:

- Hire for values
- Promote people who elevate others
- Culture changes when brave leaders like you make different choices

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