



# TOXIC LEADERSHIP

PROFESSOR  
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# Bad Days are Rampant

How often do you have a bad day at work?

*Answers:*



■ Every day or almost every day 19%

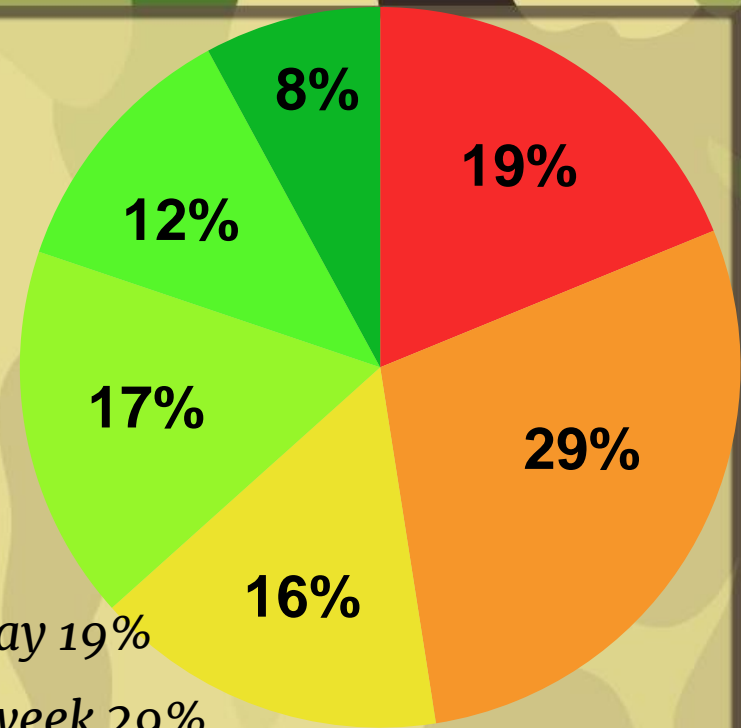
■ More than one day a week 29%

■ About one day a week 16%

■ -3 days a month 17%

■ About once a month 12%

■ Never or almost never 8%





# Top 5 Factors

## The top 5 single factors that cause bad days at work:

1. Lack of help and support from my boss (**40%**)
1. Negative coworkers (**39%**)
1. Uncertainty about the workplace's vision and strategy (**37%**)
1. Lack of praise or recognition for the work I do- (**37%**)
1. Feeling of being overworked (**36%**)



**\*\* The survey offered a long list of options and respondents could chose as many as were relevant. \*\***



8 UNSETTLING  
FACTS ABOUT  
**BAD**  
**BOSSSES**



**3** out of **4**  
employees report their  
boss is the worst and most  
stressful part of their job.





# 50%

of employees who don't feel valued by their boss plan to look for another job in the next year.

3

American companies spend an estimated

**\$360 billion**

each year in health care costs as a result of bad bosses.



Employees with bad managers are among the

# LEAST PRODUCTIVE

workers.





5

60%

of employees working for the U.S. federal government are miserable - not because of low pay, poor workplace benefits, or insufficient vacation days - but because they have bad bosses.





# 65%

of employees say  
they'd take a new  
boss over a pay raise.

7



37%

of employees say their  
boss failed to give credit  
when due.

# 44%

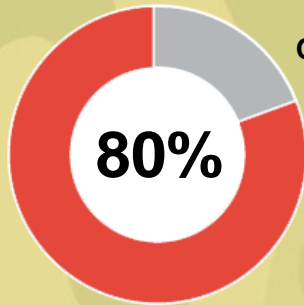
of employees say they've  
been emotionally or  
physically abused by a  
supervisor in their career.





# The Toxic Boss Cost

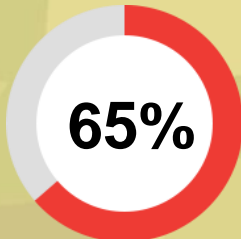
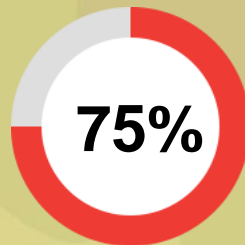
**Toxic bosses kill employee productivity, which directly affects the bottom line.**



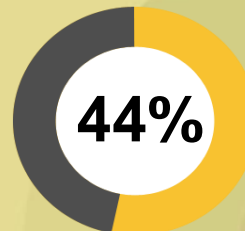
Of employees surveyed said their boss was one of the top three reasons they were willing to leave (or have left).



Of employees state that their boss is the worst part of their job.



Would take a new boss over a pay raise.



Say they've been verbally, emotionally, or physically abused by a supervisor or boss at some point in their career.



## Employees with Toxic bosses vs good bosses:

33%

25%

confessed to not putting in maximum effort

30%

6%

slow down or purposefully make errors

29%

5%

took sick time off when not ill

25%

5%

took more or longer breaks



**39%**

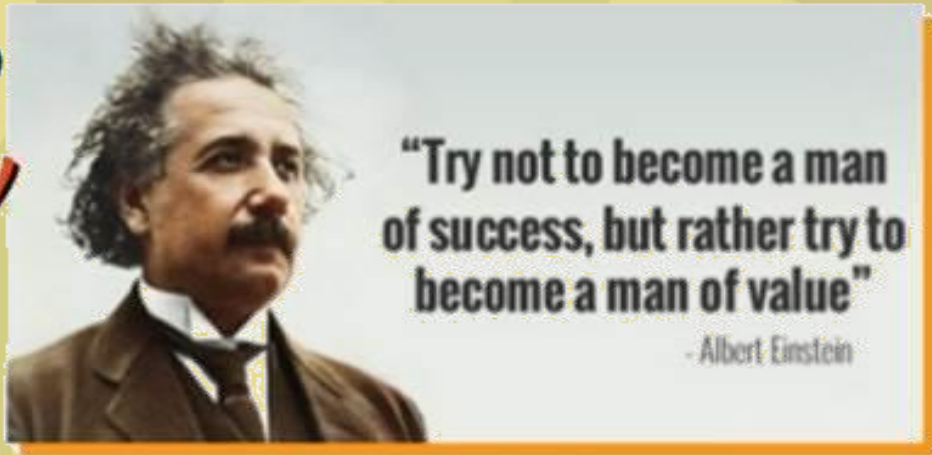
said they had actually left because of their boss

## SOURCES

DDIWorld.com, Inc.com, OnlineMBA.com, APA.org, FSU.edu, Milewalk.com

# What is Leadership?

*Leadership  
is basically  
a matter  
of values*



## Charismatic Leaders Embody:

- **Fierce Resolve & Grit:** leading from the front with the will and drive to create a destination that does not yet exist...
- **Equanimity:** the ability to overcome and stay calm in the midst of unforeseen circumstances and obstacles...
- the ability to **RESPOND vs REACT!**
- the demonstrated ability to inspire people, to believe in the outcome before they can see it.

# Toxic Leaders

Some people in leadership positions have a style that is so destructive that they not only do not add value, they are a detriment to their organizations.



# Definition of Toxic Leadership

- An apparent lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates.
- A personality or interpersonal technique that negatively affects organizational climate.
- A conviction by subordinates that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest.





# A Cautionary Note

Not all loud, demanding, and “large personality” supervisors are toxic.



There is a time and place for almost any leadership style. The art is in matching the appropriate style to the context of a given situation.

***Self-awareness and adaptability are key traits***

# Toxic Characteristics

1. Negative, mean spirited
2. Autocratic
3. Stickler for details, intolerant, impossible to please
4. Intimidating, treats people as resources
5. Unrealistic
6. Stubborn; impossible to influence
7. Manipulative
8. Meddlesome; untrusting
9. Control freak; micro manager; evaluative
10. Uncommunicative; aloof; unsupportive
11. Weak, prone to favoritism; low performance standards
12. Impatient; temperamental; unpredictable
13. Ignorant bureaucrat; clueless; defensive
14. Stifling my development

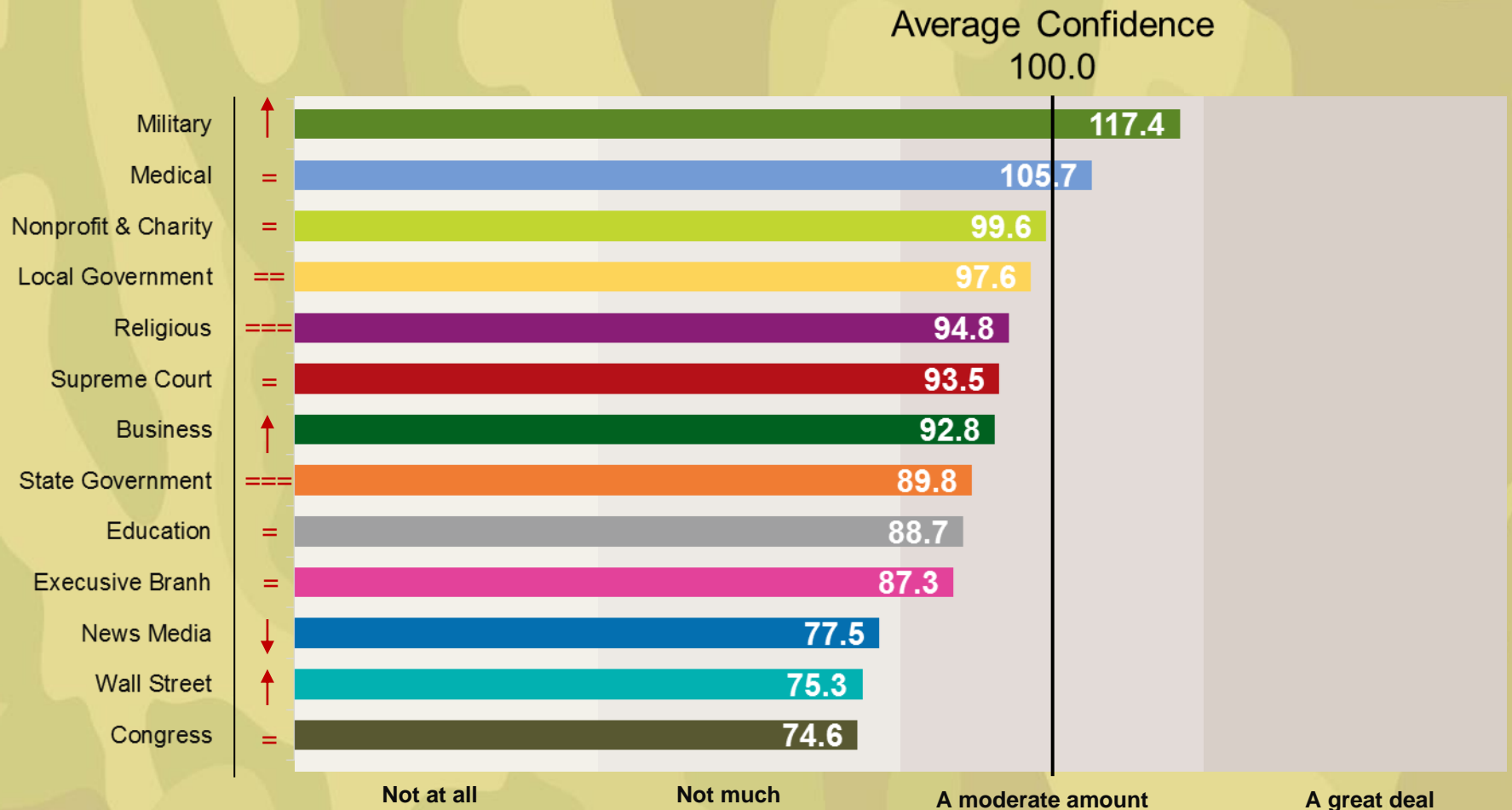


# An Organizational Problem

- Toxic leaders leave a wake in their path that extend long beyond their tenure.
- Superiors do not see or acknowledge the negative impact of toxic leaders.



# National Leadership Index



The **National Leadership Index**, prepared annually by the Harvard Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership, found Americans surveyed nationwide had "above-average confidence" only in the military and medical sectors. The 2012 index was the eight year in a row in which the military won top spot over 13 other fields.



# Is it a Military Problem?

“Superior leadership in the U.S. Military is pervasive, consistent, and expected...

...except for the estimated 20% of U.S. senior military leaders who are toxic leaders.”

Kevin P. Kelley



# How Big Is This Problem?



## **U.S. Army Study:** 20% = worked for a toxic leader\*

- 35% of those say they have worked for 3 or more
- ...but 30% to 50% of Army senior leaders are perceived by their subordinates as being outstanding leaders



## **U.S. Navy Survey:**

- 30% of "...sailors feel their command leaders have a negative effect on morale"\*\*\*
- 17% of "...sailors said their immediate boss did not deal well with subordinates"\*\*\*

\* Center for Army Leadership Annual  
Survey of Army Leadership 2011: 22,000 participants

\*\* Navy-wide Personnel Survey 2021



# Just the Tip of the Iceberg

- Other Symptoms?

- Senior Officers relieved/fired:

- U.S. Army: 2003 to 2014

- 129 senior officers relieved “for cause” = **11 per year**
      - Less than 1% of U.S. Army command billets

- U.S. Navy: From 2009 through 2014 (**Just 6 years**)

- 116 commanding officers relieved “for cause” = **19 per year**
      - Less than 2% of command billets

- » Various reasons cited by Navy, including creating a toxic environment estimated to be as high as 25%...but more firings for sexual misconduct, alcohol abuse or other misconduct.

- ...but how many others were not identified in time to take action?



# Handling Toxic Leaders

- Defuse, don't escalate. Ask for time to think.
- Listen to your heart, literally.
- Hold your immediate response.
- Actions should be based on goals not anger.
- Don't defend when he is on a rampage.
- Let him know you heard.
- Ask what he'd like you to do; State what you want to achieve.
- Let him have last word.
- If all else fails... *Choke him!*





# How is a Paradigm Formed?

**TOXIC**  
CULTURE

A graphic of a yellowish-green toxic spill with a biohazard symbol inside the letter 'O' of 'TOXIC'. The word 'CULTURE' is written in a lighter, outlined font below 'TOXIC'. The background features faint, stylized blue and green shapes.

A group of generals placed 5 privates in a cage and in the middle, a ladder with a cool GI Joe backpack on top.



Every time a private went up the ladder, the generals soaked the rest of the privates with freezing cold water.



After a while, every time a private climbed up the ladder, the others beat up the poor Joe on the ladder.





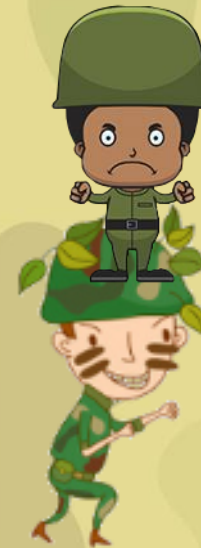
The Generals then decided to substitute one of the privates.  
The 1<sup>st</sup> thing this new private did was climb up the ladder.  
Immediately the other privates beat him up.



After several code reds, the new private learned not to climb the ladder even though he never knew why.



A 2<sup>nd</sup> private was substituted and the same occurred. The 1<sup>st</sup> private participated in the beatings. The Generals replaced a 3<sup>rd</sup> private, a 4<sup>th</sup>, and finally the 5<sup>th</sup> always with the same result.



What was left was a group of 5 privates that even though never received a cold shower, they continued to beat up any private who attempted to climb the ladder.





If it was possible to ask the privates why they would beat up all those who attempted to go up the ladder...  
I bet you the answer would be...

"I don't know - that's how things are done around here"  
Does it sounds familiar?



# Responses to Toxic Cultures

1	We have <i>always</i> done it that way	2	That's <i>not the way we do</i> things around here
3	<i>That's the way we</i> do things around here	4	Doesn't matter what we say. <i>Nothing</i> will change anyway
5	Don't <i>boil the ocean</i>	6	Don't set the bar <i>too high</i>
7	We're <i>different</i>	8	It won't hurt us
9	It's <i>not my problem</i>	10	If it ain't broke, <i>why</i> fix it
11	We tried that ages ago.... <i>it didn't....</i>	12	That won't work here



# What Can be Done?

- Changing toxic culture...very hard to do but essential...set new standards
- Focus on ethics vice compliance. “Do what is right vice following the rules”
- Looking to Private Industry: Coaching, mentoring, psychological assistance
- Targeting leadership training/education at all levels
- Self-worth training
- ...and “**follower**” training
- Tools:
  - Command climate surveys...what are the right metrics?
  - 360 Degree Reviews...how will they be used?
  - Increased mentoring programs
  - Revised performance evaluation reports to explicitly address character and integrity
  - Revised process for selecting officers for command
  - Public notice of those fired as a deterrent





# Solutions/Antidotes

- Name the problem (toxic leadership) and talk about it openly.
- Develop and select with an eye to leadership style, not simply short term effectiveness.
- Hold supervisors responsible for the style of their subordinates.
- Implement climate assessments. Look for the weak signals.
- Evaluate the long term health of the organization as well as accomplishment of the short term goals.
- Implement 360 degree or multi-faceted evaluations for development, and eventually as a data point for promotion, selection, and assignment.
- Have the ***hard discussions***.





# Conclusions

- Toxic leadership is a serious problem not just in the U.S. military...but in society as a whole
- Leadership training, mentoring, monitoring, and assessment tools can all contribute towards the goal of eliminating toxic leaders from the U.S. military...and from your organizations
- Follower training will be an essential element of these efforts



# Questions?

