

Spot the Power Trippers Before They Derail Your Culture

Your team is finally hitting its stride. Everyone's aligned, ideas are flowing, and then—enter the power tripper. They dominate every meeting, take credit for team wins, and make it clear that things need to go their way. This isn't just an annoyance. Left unchecked, a power tripper can poison your entire team culture, drain morale, and leave a high-performing team feeling frustrated and disengaged.

But the good news? You can spot them early and stop the derailment before it begins. Here's how to identify and handle power trippers before they turn your culture into a battlefield.

Power Tripping 101: Who Are They, and Why Do They Do It?

Power trippers are people who believe in control as a source of influence. Instead of leading by inspiration or collaboration, they impose authority, often in unhealthy ways. And it's not just managers or leaders—power tripping can come from anyone. That officemate who insists on having the final say on every group project, the team lead who blocks good ideas unless they're their own, or even the employee who aggressively enforces minor rules to feel in control.

Power-tripping behaviors often mask insecurities, a lack of self-awareness, or a fear of losing control. Some people trip on power because they think it's the best (or only) way to be respected.

The Red Flags: How to Spot a Power Tripper Early

Recognizing the signs can save your culture and keep the workplace healthier for everyone involved. Here are some behaviors that typically mark a power tripper:

1. Dominates Conversations and Decisions

- They monopolize discussions and rarely let others contribute, often steamrolling ideas with their own opinions.
- *Example:* In team meetings, a power tripper might cut off others mid-sentence, redirecting all the attention to their point of view without inviting feedback.

2. Takes Credit, Shifts Blame

- Power trippers are quick to bask in the spotlight for team achievements, but when things go wrong, they shift responsibility to others.
- *Example:* When a project succeeds, they make sure everyone knows their role in it. But if it falters, they'll be the first to point fingers elsewhere.

3. Micromanages and Exerts Control Over Minor Tasks

- They're constantly breathing down everyone's necks, trying to control even the smallest details of other people's work.

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- *Example:* They'll insist on approving every step, even if it means slowing down the entire team, all in the name of "quality control."

4. **Criticizes Publicly, Praises Privately**

- Power trippers don't mind calling people out in front of others, but they rarely give public praise.
- *Example:* A power-tripping manager might single out someone's mistake in a team meeting but deliver compliments only in private.

5. **Imposes Rigid Rules on Others, But Not Themselves**

- They expect others to follow stringent guidelines that they feel exempt from.
- *Example:* They might insist on strict punctuality but routinely arrive late themselves, showcasing a double standard.

The Cost of Letting Power Trippers Run Free

Unchecked power trippers can seriously damage your team culture. When team members feel dominated or undervalued, it creates an atmosphere of distrust, disengagement, and resentment. The more your team has to tiptoe around one person's ego, the less energy they have to innovate and excel. And once morale drops, productivity and creativity soon follow.

Consider the ripple effect of one power tripper in your office. They impact others' performance, encourage high turnover, and spread a toxic vibe that can take years to reverse. Simply put: if you value your team's morale, act swiftly.

How to Keep Power Trippers in Check Without Fueling the Fire

While it might seem daunting, addressing power-tripping behaviors head-on is often the best solution. Here are strategies to keep your culture intact while managing the power trippers effectively.

1. Set Clear Expectations for Team Collaboration

Establish and communicate clear ground rules for how the team operates. Emphasize respect, open dialogue, and shared decision-making as core values.

- *Example:* In meetings, set a rule that everyone speaks without interruption. Give each person an opportunity to share their ideas, leveling the playing field and naturally checking the power tripper's dominance.

2. Provide Constructive Feedback in Private

Power trippers often react defensively when criticized publicly, which can escalate the issue. Address their behavior one-on-one, focusing on the impact of their actions on the team's morale and productivity.

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- *Example:* If a team lead is micromanaging, explain that autonomy actually increases performance. Offer suggestions on delegation, which can build trust and demonstrate that they don't need to control everything to be effective.

3. Encourage Team Accountability

Encourage open dialogue among team members, where they feel safe to give and receive feedback. This often helps expose power-tripping behavior organically and empowers everyone to hold each other accountable.

- *Example:* Implement a monthly “feedback forum” where team members can share what’s working and what’s not. This creates a non-threatening space for people to address issues and discourages power-tripping tendencies.

4. Establish a Culture of Recognizing Contributions

Power trippers often seek validation through control. By creating a recognition culture where everyone’s achievements are acknowledged, you reduce their need to seek attention through power plays.

- *Example:* Start team meetings by highlighting individual and team accomplishments from the previous week. When everyone feels valued, it lessens the power tripper’s urge to dominate.

5. Involve HR if Needed

If power-tripping behavior persists and affects team morale, it may be necessary to involve HR for further coaching or even a performance improvement plan.

- *Example:* If a team lead’s controlling behavior continues despite feedback, HR may need to step in to provide structured guidance on effective management practices.

Don’t Let Power Trippers Hijack Your Culture

Power trippers can quickly derail a strong team, but with vigilance and proactive strategies, you can prevent this from happening. By recognizing the signs and addressing them early, you’ll protect your culture, support your team’s growth, and maintain a workplace where everyone feels respected and motivated to contribute.

Team dynamics thrive when everyone works together in mutual respect, not when one person imposes control. So stay observant, encourage open feedback, and don’t hesitate to step in if someone’s power trip threatens the bigger picture. After all, a culture that’s safe from power trips is a culture where everyone wins.