

When Followers Become Toxic

Leaders

are vulnerable, too. That is, they can be led astray just as their followers can actually, by their followers. Sometimes, good leaders end up making poor decisions because well-meaning followers are united and persuasive about a course of action. This is a particular problem for leaders who attract and empower strong followers.

These

executives need to become more skeptical of the majority view and push followers to examine their opinions more closely. At other times, leaders get into trouble because they are surrounded by followers who fool them with flattery and isolate them from uncomfortable realities.

Charismatic leaders, who are most susceptible to this problem, need to make an extra effort to unearth disagreement and to find followers who are not afraid to pose hard questions. Organizational mechanisms like 360-degree feedback and executive coaching can help these leaders get at the truth within their companies.

Finally, unscrupulous and ambitious followers may end up encroaching on the authority of the leader to such an extent that the leader becomes little more than a figurehead who has responsibility but no power. There's not much leaders can do to guard completely against a determined corporate lingo, but those who communicate and live by a positive set of values will find themselves better protected.

And because followers tend to model themselves after their leaders, the straightforward leader is less likely to have manipulative followers.