

# The Psychology of Good and Bad Leadership

Find out the cheap psychological tricks used by bad leaders.

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Good leadership is hard work. In comparison, bad leadership is relatively easy. Bad leaders know or learn that they can easily take advantage of followers. People all too often fall prey to self-serving and exploitative leaders - leaders who know how to manipulate and use psychological tactics to gain power.

Let's look at some tactics - we'll call them "cheap psychological tricks"-- that bad leaders use to easily gain control over and dominate followers. Then, we'll see what good leaders do (or should do) to lead effectively.

First tactic: **Using the in-group, out-group bias.** This is sometimes called the "we-they feeling." It is very easy for bad leaders to use this cheap psychological trick to motivate followers and to build follower commitment and solidarity. "We are the good guys, they are the bad guys. We are right, they are wrong. They represent a threat to our way of life." In-group, out-group bias is the root of prejudice.

We see in-group, out-group bias in politics when leaders use opposing groups as targeted scapegoats. So an opposing nation becomes "the evil empire" or the "axis of evil." On the other side, we become "the Great Satan." Nothing will focus a constituency better than an apparent threat from an outside group, but this is why it is a cheap leadership trick: The animosity on both sides escalates. Differences are magnified, while similarities are ignored. We see this in international struggles, in our partisan politics, in rival street gangs, and in our communities where leaders allow the "other guys" to be vilified, primarily to solidify their followers' support.

What makes a great leader?

The bad leader gains a short-term advantage: the loyalty and commitment of the followers, but there are long-term costs. It is extremely difficult when the two nations or groups need to work together in the future. And, when we demonize those in the out-group it can bring out the worst in human nature.

So, what should the good leader do? Focus on the commonalities - what are called the superordinate goals. These are goals that benefit both sides and are larger than the initial conflict. Taking the path of working for win-win solutions, or bringing together divided coalitions, is not easy, but it represents more effective leadership in the long run.

Second tactic: **Demanding unquestioning obedience to authority.** "Obey because I'm the boss." That's a statement indicative of bad leadership. Milgram's obedience studies demonstrated that people will show blind obedience to an authority, - even going so far as to provide painful and dangerous shocks to innocent victims.

When leaders demand absolute obedience that is a warning sign of bad leadership, and it's another cheap psychological trick. As children we are taught to obey authority, and some people too easily submit and will blindly follow.

It is the harder path (but the path of the good leader) to allow followers to question the leader's authority when it is warranted. A leader who does not consult with followers, who does not allow a sharing of power, and who demands unquestioning loyalty is not only a bad leader, but one who will likely be ineffective in the long run.

Check back for more of the cheap psychological tricks bad leaders use. If you are interested in really bad leaders, check out these earlier posts: [How to spot a bad leader](#) and [Bosses from hell...](#)