

Research News You Can Use

Commentary on research findings that have important business applications

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The High Cost of Laissez-faire Leadership

Would you like to be a more effective leader? If your answer is yes (and why wouldn't it be?), then be sure to respond regularly to both good *and poor* employee performance.

Although researchers have delved into many facets of leadership, one that is just now gaining their attention is the *absence* of leadership, which has been labeled “laissez-faire leadership.” It is characterized by behaviors such as avoiding decisions, abdicating responsibility, not responding to problems, hesitating to take action, delaying responses, and being absent when needed.¹ Early results indicate that there are substantial negative effects when leaders fail to respond to both good and poor performance. For example, subordinates view laissez-faire *leaders* as ineffective, and they express strong levels of dissatisfaction with them. In addition, preliminary research suggests that laissez-faire leadership is negatively related to subordinates' role ambiguity and role conflict. There also may be long-term negative effects on subordinate performance.

The bottom line is this: it is impossible to optimize business results in an environment where leaders are non-responsive to subordinates' performance, refuse to make decisions, and generally abdicate their own roles. Very simply, organizations cannot afford the high cost of laissez-faire leaders, which **only begins** with ineffective leadership, high levels of employee dissatisfaction, confusion over job roles and responsibilities, and maybe even lower performance overall.

Not everyone is cut out for the responsibilities required of leaders. Given the above evidence, why not make sure that all the leaders in your organization are willing *and able* to serve effectively in a leadership capacity? If they are not, you must either provide the support they need to change their negative behaviors, or find them other jobs.

I invite you to drop me an e-mail and let me know your thoughts on this topic! ➔

Pat Lynch, Ph.D., is President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc., a consulting firm that helps clients optimize business results by aligning people, programs, and processes with organizational goals. Pat can show you how to apply relevant research findings in practical ways to create immediate results in your organization. Contact us today to see how we can help you make a difference!

¹Hinkin, T.R. & Schriesheim, C.A. (2008). An examination of “nonleadership:” From laissez-faire leadership to leader reward omission and punishment omission. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93:6, 1234-1248.