

# Reducing Conflict 66 Trickle Down Misery

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Organizational misery usually starts out at the top and trickles down through the layers. I have seen the problem in hundreds of organizations over decades of study. If there are issues of trust, they almost always have their roots at the highest levels of leadership.

Top leaders rarely have the intent to make life miserable for other people. It just seems to happen in many cases. This article is an attempt to peel back the root causes of the problem and suggest some viable antidotes. Let's look at several typical causes and suggest ideas that can help.

## Trickle Down Misery

Many leaders do not consider that they are part of the problem. The best way for leaders to understand how their actions impact others is to study ["Trickle Down Mindset"](#) by Michal Stawicki. The book offers leaders an innovative approach to shift into a more productive path. It helps to understand how things tend to trickle down in organizations. The mindset is especially important when setting goals.

## Unrealistic Goals

Goal setting needs to be a combined activity between leaders and the workers who will pursue the goals. Too often leaders just establish unrealistic or inappropriate goals without proper buy-in from the workers. The result is low commitment and a feeling of futility and low trust. These feelings can lead to quiet quitting or the exodus from the company.

When the workers have real input in the formation of goals, they are far more engaged to actually reach them. The sense of ownership is pivotal for workers to perform at their best.

## Trust and Inspire

A recent book by Stephen M.R. Covey shows leaders how they must shift their approach to be successful today. The book is titled ["Trust and Inspire."](#) It highlights the need to stop using "Command and Control" logic when dealing with people. Instead, Covey advocates a "Trust and Inspire" mode of working with people. Covey points out

that many leaders have not or cannot make the shift. The book is convincing and extremely well-written.

### **Lead with trust**

One of my own books is a good vehicle to reduce the trickle-down misery in organizations. The title is [“Leading with Trust is like Sailing Downwind.”](#) In the book, I point out that leaders who establish a culture of high trust have a significant advantage. They can relax and enjoy the wonderful ride of great leadership. The trickle-down effect is not required. In many cases, the problem is one of low Emotional Intelligence.

### **Low Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to understand one’s own emotions and the emotions of others. It also has to do with behaving in a helpful way once the emotions are understood. [Daniel Goleman](#) observed that people with low Emotional intelligence have blind spots and cannot see how they are coming across. Leaders with low emotional intelligence often say or do things that take them in the wrong direction.

[“Emotional Intelligence 2.0”](#) by Bradberry and Greaves is very helpful at opening the eyes of leaders who need help. The book provides an overview of the topic and then gives numerous exercises for self-study. Often Emotional Intelligence is blocked by hubris.

### **Hubris**

Leaders who are full of themselves or resistant to change tend to turn off people under them. They see themselves as the center of the universe and put down anyone who would challenge their ideas.

There are two books that I like to get conceited leaders to read. The first is [“Good to Great”](#) by Jim Collins. In his model of excellence, he coined the phrase “Level Five Leaders” to describe humble leaders.

The second book is [“Simple Truths of Leadership”](#) by Ken Blanchard and Randy Conley. It lists 52 ways to be a better Servant Leader and build trust. The book highlights ways to make common sense common practice. Ken Blanchard focuses on how leaders can understand and practice the art of servant leadership. Randy Conley wrote about building higher trust.

### **Conclusion**

There are many more books and resources to stem the trend toward trickle-down misery. It is really worth the time to read and heed the advice in these books.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.