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Ivan/Getty Images On a warm evening after a behind-the-scenes strategy, a team of executives arrives at a famous local restaurant. The group is looking forward to a joint dinner, but the CEO is not happy with the table and demands change. It's not one that my assistant usually reserves to me, he says. The young waiter quickly finds a manager who explains that there are no other tables available. The group tries to move on, but is again interrupted by the CEO. Am I the only one who's annoyed with the opinion? Why is construction taking place today? He demands it. The waiter tries to explain, but to no avail. You really have to get up to your game here, the CEO responds. The air is thick from the voltage. After the waiter leaves, someone jokes about the man's competence. This seems to please the CEO, who responds with his pejorative wit. The group laughs. If you were present at that dinner, would you tell the CEO that you disapprove of his language and behavior? Could you try to set a better example? Or keep quiet? This scene encapsulates three psychological dynamics that lead to the intersection of ethical lines. First, there is omnipotence: when someone feels so exalted and entitled that they believe that the rules of decent behavior do not apply to them. Secondly, we have a cultural numbness: when others play along and gradually begin to accept and implement deviant norms. Finally, we see justifiable neglect: when people don't talk about ethical violations because they think of more immediate rewards, such as staying on a good footing with the strong. The same dynamics come into play when much larger lines intersect in the corporate sphere: allegations of corruption at Nissan, allegations of sexual harassment in the media sector, privacy violations at Facebook, money laundering in the financial sector, and the role of pharmaceuticals in the opioid crisis. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to find evidence that leaders have generally become less ethical over the years, some are sounding the alarm. Warren Buffett, explaining Berkshire Hathaway's practices in an annual shareholder letter, notes that he and Vice Chairman Charlie Munger ... seen all kinds of bad corporate behavior, both accounting and operational, driven by management's desire to meet Wall Street expectations. What begins as an innocent fiction in order not to disappoint the street - say, trading load at a quarter end, turning a blind eye to growing insurance losses or winding down the reserve of the cookie-bank - can be the first step towards full-scale fraud. Buffett's note is important because it's really about most of us: neither saints nor criminals, but reverent leaders who are sometimes unable to with its moral compass while speeding forward into a landscape full of tripwires and traps. That's why, moral leadership is not just a matter of good or bad action. It's about navigating the vast space between them. So how do you know when you, or your team, are on their way to an ethical lapse? Here's more on how to define omnipotence, cultural numbness, and justifiable neglect in yourself and in your team, and a few tips to combat each dynamic: omnipotence. Many moral omissions can be traced back to this feeling that you are invincible, untouchable and hyper-capable, which can energize and create a sense of delight. For an almighty leader, rules and regulations are meant for everyone but them. Crossing the line feels less like a transgression and more like what they should. They feel they have the right to skip or redraw the lines. In the example of the dinner party above, it is no coincidence that the CEO's entitled and indulgent behavior comes after a day of stragenuous development and mastermind following big steps. Almighty is not all bad. Sometimes the rush you get from bold action is what it takes to make breakthroughs or real progress. But the higher you climb the stairs, the more it can become a burden. This is especially true if fewer and fewer people around you are willing and able to keep you grounded. If no one tells you no, you have a problem. One way to assess whether you have reached the peak of omnipotence is if your decisions are met only with applause, reverence, and silence. The psychological counterbalance to omnipotence is the possession of your flaws. It's a mature ability to look in the mirror and recognize that you're not above it all. Especially if you are in a leadership position, let's assume that you have weaknesses and think about them regularly. Sometimes you'll need help with this. The best leaders I see have close colleagues, friends, coaches, or mentors who dare to tell them the truth about their work and judgment. You should cultivate a similar group of trusted peers who will tell you the truth, even if

it is unpleasant. Also, make sure to encourage commitment to dissent among your core team. Cultural numbness. No matter how principled you may be, you must recognize that over time the bearings of your moral compass will shift towards the culture of your organization or team. From my work with the police and military units infiltrating criminal groups, I have seen examples of cultural numbness forcing leaders to cross borders. Usually it starts subtly. Officers need to learn and penetrate the new culture. They need to fit in by speaking the language, acting according to the code, and dressing to fit in. But by doing so, they risk going too far - mimicking the culture of the gang members they have to stop and get into the value system The same moral takeover takes place in companies not overnight, but gradually. Gradually. You make a compromise between establishing in culture and staying true to what you value. First, cultural numbness can take the form of ironic distance or frustrated resignation when there is a mismatch between them, or between the ideals your company supports and what you see showcased and rewarded. But the mind needs resolution. So over time, you will stop noticing when offensive language becomes the norm, or you begin to behave in a way that you would never expect to be part of your repertoire. Cultural numbness is where I have seen the most serious failures in ethical leadership because it is so hard to detect. Leaders who have crossed the line never describe it as a clear choice along the way, but as wandering along a muddy road where they lost count of what was right and wrong. They describe a process in which they are numb at the language and behavior of others and then on their own and have lost a sense of objectivity. In fact, their warning bells just stopped ringing. So, start looking for signs of moral capture: those brief moments when you don't recognize yourself and any other signs that you're exposing your personal agency to the deviant norms of the collective. Another regular gut check you can use involves asking whether you will be comfortable telling a journalist or judge about what's going on. At the same time, you can't always trust yourself in such situations. As with omnipotence, it can help to get the perspective of an outsider by contacting a trusted friend or family member who may be able to detect changes in you that you may not be able to see. Also, be sure to regularly extract yourself from your organization to compare and contrast your culture with others and remind yourself that the rest of the world can't work the same way. Justifiable neglect. The human mind skillfully justifies minor intrusions when there is a tangible reward at stake, and when the risk is low. On the production line of a pharmaceutical company, for example, a hurried lab technician forgets to take off all her makeup. A speck of mascara accidentally falls into a batch of drugs large enough to serve the middle country for a year. For a short time, the minuscule impurity draws a thin, yellowish color trail, but then it is gone, impossible to detect. The drug saves lives and is very valuable, with only a hint of makeup, which is probably harmless. Do you report the incident? If you were a manager who was quietly asked what to do, would you destroy the party? Would you change your mind knowing that patients may suffer or even die from a serious production delay? Will your ballooning production budget and your company's weak financial position factor in Solution? you'd push the problem up to your superiors, knowing that those with interested in the result can turn a blind eye to the incident? Many leaders faced the choice of getting rewarded or doing the right thing. The slippery slope starts right when you start to rationalize actions and say to yourself and others: It's an exceptional situation, or we have to bend the rules a bit to do things here, or we're here to make money rather than do charity. These initial slips cascade into more that turn into habits you know are bad, but which begin to feel forgivable and even acceptable given the circumstances, and eventually become part of your moral fabric. It's hard to pinpoint exactly when an important line is crossed, but it's much easier, of course, right at the very beginning of a slippery slope than when you slide at full speed from what's right. Remember that power corrodes more than corrupts, often as a result of clever excuses of ethical neglect. You can fight this psychological dynamic by creating formal and social contracts that oblige you and your colleagues to do the right thing: Rewarding ethical conduct; and the definition and sharing of your boundaries. The latter can be as simple as making a list of things you won't do for profit or pleasure, keeping it in a convenient place to read regularly and sometimes show it to your team as a reminder. The reality is that for many leaders there is no true direct and narrow path. You beat the way as you go. Thus, ethical leadership largely depends on your personal judgments. Because of this, the moral or ethical dilemmas you experience can feel lonely or taboo - a struggle you don't want your peers to know about. But you have to recognize that this is part of working life and must be addressed in a direct and open way. While most companies have some cultural and structural checks and balances, including value statements, CSR guidelines, and even whistleblower functions, leaders must also be mindful of the psychological conditions that push people - including themselves - to cross ethical lines. Understanding the dangers of omnipotence, cultural numbness and justifiable neglect is like setting the first few warning signs on the long journey of your career. You will inevitably hit some punches, but the more you are willing to handle them, the likelier you have to keep your integrity intact. [Intact. psychology of addictive behaviors pdf.](#) [psychology of addictive behaviors book.](#) [psychology of addictive behaviors moss pdf.](#) [psychology of addictive behaviors abbreviation.](#) [psychology of addictive behaviors editorial board](#)

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