

Leadership Hot Buttons

On the front right corner of the monitor for my computer, there is a small sticker. It contains this message, “Push the Button.” It is a note to remind you that you can push the button if you want a brighter picture when playing games or DVDs.

There is another illustration here. Machines have buttons. Buttons allow us to turn on the power, turn off the machine, change channels, increase volume, raise the bass, tenor, balance, or a whole host of other actions.

1. **All leaders have buttons.** These are the people, situations, emotions, and reactions that we demonstrate automatically. We don't like disagreement so, whenever conflict surfaces, we hide or escape so that we can avoid it altogether. We like control, so we become angry when anyone or anything threatens our control. These are just a couple of illustrations.
2. **Buttons exist for many reasons.** One leader may be a perfectionist, so he or she expects everyone else to do work to match a certain level. Unfortunately, this raises a concern. Employees are not perfect. And, leaders can have unrealistic expectations. So, what happens when employees do good work, but they don't do *perfect* work?
3. **Buttons are exposed.** Often leaders are not aware (or maybe they are aware), that their button/reaction mode is out there for the whole world to push at any given moment. While they may not be aware of how quickly they react to certain people or situations, others can easily see it.
4. **When buttons are pushed, automatic reactions follow.** That's right—automatic! A person says something, and we immediately react. The reaction is almost without thought or hesitation.
5. **Reactions can be in thought, word, action, emotion, or attitude.** These are all connected. Thoughts trigger emotions, which may generate words, which ultimately lead to action and our overall attitude.
6. **Once reactions happen, damage follows.** A leader says something before he or she stops to think. The employee feels the impact of the very pointed message. Work relationships suffer. Performance drops. The business loses.
7. **Leaders try to do damage control, but it is too late.** Once the reaction takes place, the damage has been done.
8. **Leaders can learn.** Leaders should take ownership for their growth and development. Start with asking for feedback. Accept feedback as a gift of insight. Look for ways to stop reacting and start responding.
9. **Leaders can recover.** When you overreact, take positive action. Admit your mistakes. Let employees know of your desire to grow. Ask for their help.
10. **Don't pretend you don't have buttons.** All leaders have them.