

Leadership misdiagnoses are killing your strategy—here's the cure



The invisible epidemic in leadership (and why you should be worried)

Let's talk about Semmelweis—because this is *your* story, too

If you've never heard of Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis, buckle up. Because this story is about you.

Mid-1800s. Vienna General Hospital. Two maternity wards. One run by midwives, the other by doctors. The mortality rate in the doctors' ward? Astronomically higher. Women were dying at terrifying rates from puerperal fever (childbed fever).

And here's the kicker: Nobody knew why.

Semmelweis starts digging. He notices that doctors often go straight from autopsies to delivering babies—without washing

their hands. No soap. No antiseptic. Just straight-up body-to-body contamination. He puts two and two together and thinks, *"My goodness, we're the problem."*

So he introduces handwashing with chlorinated lime. Mortality rates plummet. A miracle, right?

Wrong.

Because here's where [self-deception](#) rears its ugly head: his peers *refused* to believe they were causing harm. Admitting it would mean admitting they'd been complicit in the deaths of hundreds—maybe thousands. Their egos couldn't handle it. So they fought back, mocked him, and rejected his evidence. Eventually, Semmelweis was discredited and institutionalized. He died disgraced. And women kept dying.

Why? Because people would rather *double down on their illusion of rightness* than confront the horror of being wrong.

And that, my friend, is the exact trap most leaders are in.

Self-deception: the ultimate leadership saboteur

Think this doesn't apply to you? Think again. Self-deception is what happens when you start thinking:

- "My team just isn't motivated."
- "These people can't handle change."
- "If they'd just execute, we'd be fine."

You're not seeing reality. And your leadership gets distorted by it. The result? You put your energy in all the wrong places—fixing symptoms instead of root causes.

That's a leadership misdiagnosis. And it will tank your KPIs every time.

You can't fix what you won't own

Your mindset—especially an [*inward mindset*](#)—might be the biggest obstacle to your strategy working.

An inward mindset means you see others as objects—obstacles, vehicles, irrelevancies, but not people. And when people become “problems” instead of *people with problems*, you're in dangerous territory.

Your team feels it. Communication breaks down. Innovation stalls. You try to fix things with tighter controls or new incentives. But it's all just treating symptoms.

Until you shift your mindset, you're just rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

The cure? See people as people

Semmelweis saw the truth: his own actions were hurting people. That takes guts. Can you do the same?

Because the fix isn't a new strategy doc or another offsite. It's seeing your team and yourself differently.

That's what we call an [*outward mindset*](#). And it changes everything.

- You stop blaming and start listening.
- You stop demanding and start collaborating.
- You stop defending and start owning.

When you show up like that, people respond. Performance improves. Trust builds. Strategy *actually sticks*—because now your people are bought in. Not because you pushed them harder, but because you finally started leading with clarity and truth.

The bottom line

Dr. Semmelweis had the cure, and people ignored him—because the truth was too uncomfortable. Don't make the same mistake. If you're serious about [culture transformation](#), strategic alignment, and real [leadership](#) impact, then the first place to look isn't the org chart or the dashboard. It's the mirror.

So, what's your Semmelweis moment?

Because until you have one, your strategy isn't going to work the way you want it to.