

# **SELF-HANDICAPPING: FROM BUSINESS SCHOOL TO LEADERSHIP**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The concept of self-handicapping has been widely researched in the psychology and education literature, but remains absent from the business/leadership literature. Self-handicapping is the process where individuals attempt to externalize a potential failure by means of an excuse or reduced effort. Each creates obstacles to leadership success. It is caused by uncertainty and the need to manage impressions rather than focus on mastering competence. This process is often learned and reinforced in education and finally manifests itself in poor educational habits and leadership. It can be overcome in several ways. The authors believe that a focus on self-handicapping behaviors should be part of every business school curriculum with special attention devoted to the relationship between self-handicapping and leadership. To become exceptional leaders, students must learn what behaviors are preventing them from learning and growing as a leader.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Leadership self-sabotage is a daily occurrence witnessed by most employees. It manifests itself in avoiding confrontation, inconsistent leadership, hiring the wrong people, tunnel vision, poor decision making, and blaming others for a leader's own poor behavior. This causes employees to become disengaged, apathetic, lose motivation, and avoid ownership. Most leaders know what they should be doing – making good decisions, building trust, transparency and accountability, engaging and motivating their workforce, and driving towards outcomes. Gallup research (Harvard Business Review, 2014) said that only one in ten leaders consistently do these things – so what gets in the way? We think it is self-handicapping.

What leads to self-handicapping is impression management. Impression management is behavior that employees use to shape how they are seen by others. This process may be conscious and strategic or unconscious and habitual. Jones & Pittman (1982) identified five tactics of impression management: ingratiation (favors, agreeing), self-promotion (boasting, taking credit), exemplification (staying late at work, appearing busy), intimidation (making threats), and supplication (playing dumb). Very little research has focused on the use of defensive impression management behaviors (e.g., excuses, justifications, apologies)(Decker & Mitchell, 2016).

When uncertain of their ability, leaders often provide excuses to change others' attributions about their ability. They then allow their excuses to turn into reduced effort and learning. Because these excuses are successful in impression management, leaders can keep using them habitually instead of finding effective solutions or building greater competence. This reduced effort leads to poor outcomes – namely, employee disengagement, not owning their own competence, and

ultimately poor performance with customers. It all starts with a simple excuse used to manage impressions. This process is a slippery slope that is called self-handicapping.

All leaders hope to find more of the 20% who are super producers using some magic *talent management or engagement formula*; but, usually don't. We suggest what is needed is an industry-wide conversation about self-handicapping. All employees want to have fun, do a good job, and work toward something useful – at least, in the beginning. All managers want to make things better. By not dealing with the effects of self-handicapping and its effects on employees, we have taught ourselves and impose on our employees a huge burden of self-defeating behaviors. Just think about moving half of those 80% folks over to the 20% column. How would that affect any leader's work day? There is virtually no literature in business addressing these issues (Crant & Bateman, 1993; Ishida, 2012; McElroy & Crant, 2008; Siegel & Brockner, 2005) but over 375 articles in the psychology and education literature which do (contact the authors for a complete bibliography).

Exceptional leadership can be accomplished by eliminating self-handicapping – it frees up enormous time that can be redirected to excellence. Individuals in the top 20% are more focused and more efficient because they have not started self-handicapping – they focus on being more competent rather than avoiding mistakes or looking incompetent – the things that lead to the use of impression management. Focusing on the right issues and being effective and efficient largely comes from not self-handicapping. Extensive effort is wasted on self-handicapping and it bogs organizations down. How to manage it should start in business schools.

### WHAT IS SELF-HANDICAPPING?

Self-handicapping is the process where “people withdraw effort, create obstacles to success, or make excuses so they can maintain a public or self-image of competence” (Kearns, Forbes, Gardiner, & Marshall, 2008). *It provides an explanation for potential failure or sets the stage for an individual to receive more personal credit for success than might otherwise accrue (this is enhancement) (Crant & Bateman, 1993).* Self-handicapping is a before-the-event strategy with two varieties: *claimed* self-handicapping is an excuse for potential failure and *behavioral* self-handicapping is can be either reduced effort or the actual creation of an obstacle to success. Both can be internal or external to the person -- as shown in the table below – and excuses commonly lead to behavioral handicaps. Self-handicapping allows individuals to externalize potential failure and avoid the personal accountability for learning from it.

	Self-Handicapping Process	Internal	External
<b>Claimed</b>	<i>Excuse</i>	“I don’t know how to use PowerPoint very well”	“My boss made me hire that employee”
<b>Behavioral</b>	<i>Reduced Effort</i>	Not learning how to use PowerPoint more effectively	Lack of mentoring/training the unwanted employee
	<i>Create Obstacle</i>	Produce a poor PPT slide deck	Assign new, unwanted employee to a failing project

Self-handicapping influences observers’ impressions of a leader through two processes, one before the task (lowering expectations) and one after it (changing attributions about the individual) (Siegel & Brockner, 2005). If the leader performs poorly, self-handicapping may discount the blame ordinarily associated with failure (Snyder, 1990). People tend to use self-handicapping when others are watching them (and presumably would have knowledge of their behavior/excuse) (Kolditz & Arkin, 1982).

Claimed self-handicapping is common: leaders claim anxiety, lack of time, task difficulty, lack of authority, and lack of resources (whether or not these are actually true). Behavioral self-handicapping is used slightly less often (setting unrealistic goals, avoiding accountability, lack of sleep, drug and alcohol use, and reducing effort) (Hoffman, 2007). Internal handicaps (being unprepared, claiming an injury) are less likely to be used than external ones (the boss, peers, workload, the organization) because leaders must appear competent -- and some internal handicaps like drug and alcohol use violate norms of organizational conduct. Yet, behavioral self-handicaps are more effective because they are less disputable and more tied to actual performance (Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005). Self-handicapping does not always undermine immediate performance because it reduces the stress of self-evaluation and that allows the person to focus on the immediate task and perform better. There are positive short-term effects from self-handicapping (Drexler, Ahrens, & Haaga, 1995; Garcia, 1995; McCrea & Hirt, 2001; Seligman, Nolen-Hoeksema, Thornton, & Thornton, 1990); but, long-term performance is inhibited by reducing effort and creating obstacles to success. Frequent self-handicapping lowers observer impressions over time (Giacalone & Knouse, 1990).

### HOW IT WORKS

When presented with new or complex task, leaders can take three stances: They know they will fail, they are uncertain of the outcome, or they will succeed even if it takes many attempts. Those who believe they will fail and those certain of success have no need to self-handicap. Yet, most business leaders will feel some degree of uncertainty. This uncertainty breeds self-handicapping, which serves as a comfort zone in those situations. A simple excuse can easily

become habitual due to the extreme effectiveness of self-handicapping – externalizing failure. This keeps blame away from the person, reduces any sanctions for failure, and may enhance attributions of the person. This makes it easier to self-handicap at a later time, rather than expending the energy needed to work on greater competence, or to put up the determined fight to solve problems and overcome challenges. In other words, self-handicapping in impression management is easier than learning, growing, and overcoming challenges. We all do it and it works to a certain level.

But, those excuses are the start of a vicious cycle leading to failure of leadership. A leader who routinely self-handicaps does not typically improve the impressions of his boss or peers over time. Self-handicapping directly leads to poor outcomes from employees – i.e., disengagement. First comes the excuse, “I can’t spend all this time to talk to employees on the way to meetings; I am too busy.” This may save time and change the boss’s impression at first; but, even more devastating is the reduced effort that follows. This means the leader is avoiding learning better ways to interact with his employees or fighting through the feelings keeping him from relating to employees on a one-on-one level. He may make it to meetings on time, pleasing his boss, but his behavior leads to a huge obstacle: disengaged employees. In the end, customers suffer.

You can see the pattern: uncertainty, excuses and expedient choices of leadership behavior, positive short-term outcomes from self-handicapping, reduced effort to learn and get better, obstacles to effective leadership with employees and customers, and ultimately, a bogged down career. We call this the ERO Spiral (for Excuses – Reduced Effort – Obstacles). The ERO Spiral is the hidden slippery slope to poor leadership for many. Great leaders stay off this slope.

There are several points of intervention with the self-handicapping process: the leader, the situation, his/her excuses, his/her behavior, and dealing with any self-deception (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). Changing how individuals think about themselves and how individuals react to others’ impressions of them helps reduce self-handicapping (Siegel & Brockner, 2005). A rather simple method to prevent people from using self-handicapping strategies would be to “turn off” negative attitudes and self-perceptions that create uncertainty and threat. Such an undertaking in a workforce would be arduous and frowned upon by most CEOs reluctant to fund such activities (though they may be doing it now through executive counseling). When a leader is taught to recognize uncertainty, know that it can trigger self-handicapping, and defer his/her reactions to it, he/she may have the power to overcome self-handicapping (Decker & Mitchell, 2016). Goal orientation is related to self-handicapping (Akin, 2014). Schwinger and Stiensmeier-Pelster (2011) have shown that students with a mastery orientation avoid self-handicapping because they view failure as an opportunity for personal growth and as a modifiable and controllable outcome. Those with mastery goal orientation simply do not handicap and are less uncertain than those without this goal framework.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

Business education has and is in the process of undergoing a transformation into a more applied curriculum. Many studies have recommended schools of business improve content relevancy and become more accountable to market needs (Keys & Wolfe, 1988; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009). The current makeup of business management and leadership courses in America

focus on management/leadership *theory*. While a theoretical approach to business education is necessary to provide problem solving skills, analytical skills, and historical context; curriculums would be well-served implementing a more practical element. As both employers and accrediting bodies move toward “behavioral, complex cognitive, and affective competencies,” teaching and academic resources must move in conjunction to serve that need (Revere, Decker, & Hill, 2012).

Rubin & Dierdorff (2009) have shown a misalignment between the outcomes thought critical by practicing managers and MBA program curriculums. Belasen & Fortunato (2000) suggested that the split between theory and practice is too great in business schools, with curriculum emphasizing theory and cognitive skills rather than application skills. Wren, Halbesleben, and Buckley (Wren, Halbesleben, & Buckley, 2007), using more recent survey data, concluded that there is an increasing emphasis towards teaching theory in business schools. Despite these criticisms, business schools have done little to respond and have continued to focus more on cognitive learning outcomes (Stokes, Rosetti, & King, 2010). Consequently, current critics suggest business education leaves students with little practice to become competent in the action skills necessary for good management (Alan T. Belasen & Rufer, 2007; Bennis & O’Toole, 2005). The misalignment between required career skills and academic teaching needs to be addressed. Studying self-handicapping is one way to do this.

### HIGHER-LEVEL PERFORMANCE COMPETENCIES

Management and leadership are enormously complex; competencies required are more relational and multidimensional than ordered and sequential, and more intuitive than intellectual (Alan T. Belasen & Huppertz, 2009). However, business educators and curriculum planners find it challenging to shift their pedagogical emphasis from knowledge acquisition to skill development (Chia & Holt, 2008; Mintzberg, 2004). There is more than one type of learning. Bloom (Bloom, 1956), identified three domains of educational activities: **Cognitive** (retention of facts to complex decision making and evaluation), **Affective** (growth in feelings or emotional areas), and, **Psychomotor** (manual or physical skills). Bloom identified many different levels within each domain; these categories and levels can be thought of as degrees of difficulty. That is, the first one must be mastered before the next one can take place.

Bloom (1956) found that over 95 % of what students encounter in educational classroom assessment require them to think only at the lowest possible level - the recall of information or declarative knowledge. That has not changed much in the decades since his initial research (Calhoun et al., 2009; Chia & Holt, 2008). A goal of Bloom's Taxonomy was to motivate educators to focus on all three domains, creating a more holistic form of education. The work of Dominguez, Teachout, & LaFrance (2009); and Pringle, Nippak, and Isaac (2010) suggest that the key discriminators in future leadership roles depend upon much more than just declarative knowledge (J. R. Anderson, 1976).

Rubin & Dierdorff (2009) found that six behavioral competencies underlie all managerial work and that practicing managers deemed two of these competencies to be significantly more important than the others: *managing human capital* and *managing decision making*. When Rubin & Dierdorff (2009) cross-referenced these competencies to MBA curriculum, they found the curriculums of most schools underemphasized both. They suggest that curricular design should

integrate leadership, teamwork, and human communication skills in the teaching program. But, they also urge this to be done at higher order competency levels – beyond declarative knowledge and theory.

Furthermore, Boyatzis, Stubbs, and Taylor (2002) found that MBA students do acquire cognitive and emotional intelligence competencies, but not as part of a typical MBA curriculum. Navarro (2008) surveyed business schools and found a lack of emphasis on multidisciplinary integration, experiential learning, and teaching of soft skills such as engagement, negotiation, team building, etc. These themes have been echoed by researchers and practitioners in healthcare management, who noted that the same limitations apply to master's degree programs designed to produce a new generation of healthcare leaders (Friedman & Frogner, 2010; Shewchuk, O'Connor, & Fine, 2006).

It has become clear that business and management education programs have not done enough to include practical skills in leadership development, communication, teamwork, and interpersonal skills so essential for successful management in their core curricula (Jones, 2002; Richards-Wilson, 2002). Much more has to be done to assist with an understanding the development of curriculum that teaches behavioral skills in business schools. One of the drivers will be assessment of behavior and affective outcomes (Calhoun, et. al., 2009) but another will be understanding the effect of self-handicapping and self-defeating behaviors on leadership outcomes (Decker & Mitchell, 2016) and practicing more effective leadership behaviors.

### **SELF-HANDICAPPING AREAS OF FOCUS**

One example of a behavioral area of focus that will equip future managers/leaders is knowing what they do to sabotage their attempts at effective leadership – self-handicapping. Self-handicapping is triggered by expediency, avoidance, or apprehension. Expediency is when we are on “auto-pilot” and do the easiest and quickest thing in front of us. Avoidance comes from apprehension about facing something (e.g., avoiding confrontation or conflict) and can be a habitual behavior where one does not see a need to change (for the better). Apprehension is when there is anxiety or fear about doing something – so we don't do it. These fears can manifest due to competition, a fear of making mistakes, or shame (a lack of competence). Finally, the deepest source of self-handicapping behavior is self-deception. Self-deception is when our excuses turn personal and we start to blame others for our own mistakes.

Over years of self-handicapping, people can withdraw into a shell and enter into a “box”, where they move from blaming themselves for their mistakes to blaming people or things for all poor outcomes. Intervention at this stage rarely produces results due to the inability of the person to self-reflect, seek or listen to feedback, and his/her unwillingness to adopt new behaviors (The Arbing Institute, 2010).

Self-handicapping is an area of focus that business professors can supplement into their curriculum directed at helping students recognize, admit to, and adjust these behaviors that they do themselves causing poor education, leadership and management. These self-handicapping behaviors do not add to the effectiveness of the person in the long run and do inhibit the person from learning and growing. Over time, when business students turn into leaders, self-handicapping behavior serves to protect the individual in the short term, while causing ineffective leadership.

While there are many areas in which people self-handicap, we believe most can be categorized into 9 areas of focus for the business classroom:

1. **Avoiding Accountability:** *Avoiding difficult conversations and confrontation are the classic examples of avoidance of accountability. Others include: making excuses, blaming others, and poor presentation of self—physically and over social media.*
2. **Tunnel Vision:** *Maintaining a small-picture focus, avoiding “big-picture” thinking. Having a linear mindset rather than prioritizing tasks.*
3. **Lack of Awareness:** *A Lack of assessment of one’s traits, strengths, and weaknesses. Unaware of how he/she is perceived by others.*
4. **Poor Analysis & Decision Making:** *Making decisions without a proper frame or appropriate alternatives. Not knowing when to make a decision or not recognizing when added data no longer adds value.*
5. **Poor Communication Culture:** *A lack of transparency and trust. Lacking listening skills. Unable to take constructive criticism. Avoiding situations that put the person in a state of vulnerability.*
6. **Poor Engagement:** *Getting in the way of others’ commitment for work. Viewing everything as a transaction, poor networking, and talking about others behind their back.*
7. **Poor Talent Development:** *Hiring the wrong people, not cultivating talent from within, and avoiding coaching, sponsoring, and mentoring.*
8. **Micro-managing:** *Having a need to overly control situations, leading through fear. Being unable to cope with uncertainty or unexpected. Making decisions solely based on the need to control the outcomes.*
9. **Not Driving for Results:** *Confusing time spent on work with results-based outcomes, or confusing internal outcomes with customer outcomes. Avoiding challenge and risk. Spending time thinking about “what should happen” rather than taking action.*

It is important to note that the above categories are not completely distinct – some can easily blend into others. Also, they are not in any particular order.

### CLASSROOM PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This new applied curriculum should not focus only on the knowledge of self-handicapping – this pedagogical approach would remain knowledge-based and devoid of application. But rather, teaching should incorporate a method of improvement – we use the Recognize – Admit – Adjust model. We have found that the key for leaders and students to reverse self-handicapping is to *recognize* what they do, *admit* to its impact on others, and then *adjust* - find and practice alternative behaviors to break these ingrained habitual tendencies. This requires self-reflection and practice. When they see the ERO Spiral and how “innocent” excuses lead down a road to disengaged employees and dissatisfied customers, they are often ready to find better ways. This process requires, knowledge, self-assessment, self-reflection, and practicing new skills and ways of thinking. The way out is to find what is triggering this behavior – every habit has a trigger. Self-handicapping is very alluring because it works on the short-term. The application of how to identify the negative outcomes of self-handicapping and turn away from those behaviors is essential when attempting to deal with uncertainty and the need for impression management rather than mastery of competence. In the classroom, roleplaying can serve as a great tool for practice.

Business faculty are exploring many innovative pedagogical methods such as class projects (Weldy & Turnipseed, 2010), role-playing (Libin et al., 2010), action research (Raelin, 2006), business games (P. H. Anderson & Lawton, 2009; Salas, Wildman, & Piccolo, 2009), and service projects and internships (Narayanan, Olk, & Fukami, 2010) to enhance higher-order learning. All of these methods incorporate behavioral skills as well as affective and higher cognitive skills in the activity. Research indicates that class projects (Goretsky, 1984; Thomas, 2002), role-play (Alden, 1999; Baglione, 2006), and service learning (Eyler, 2001; McIntyre, Webb, & Hite, 2005) are more effective for higher-levels of learning and engagement (Gujarathi & McQuade, 2002; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005; Young, 2002) and have a stronger connection to the real world (Newble & Cannon, 1991). The benefits increase when the project involves researching a real-world business problem or opportunity (Broderick, 2007; Goretsky, 1984). Allen & Hartman (Allen & Hartman, 2008) surveyed business leaders to determine their perspectives on the effectiveness and efficiency of 27 approaches to leader development. They found that the respondents deemed 10 approaches the most useful – all included behavioral performance. Other researchers have shown that skills such as self-efficacy, optimism, & resiliency (Luthans, Avey, & Patera, 2008) and reflective leadership skills (Roglio & Light, 2009) can be successfully and efficiently taught in business school classrooms.

These are the issues that lead to a need for impression management and self-handicapping rather than a focus on the mastery of competence in the workplace. We also think that a focus, in the classroom, on declarative knowledge and theory can also lead to the types of performance goals causing self-handicapping.

### **PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES FOR SELF-HANDICAPPING**

Individuals strive to achieve for different purposes: mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance (Furner & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2011; Gardner, 2006; Mesa, 2012; Urdan, 2004). Some strive for mastery goals -- a desire to *develop* competence and continually learn. Others have performance-approach goals -- a concern to *demonstrate* competence by outperforming others, or performance-avoidance goals -- the desire to avoid appearing incompetent or less competent than others (avoiding mistakes). People with performance goals are more worried about external judgements and are often uncertain and self-handicap more. Those with mastery goals do not self-handicap – they don't need to because they see the task as a challenge to be mastered, and learn from mistakes.

Business will always be a competitive environment; but, the outcomes and assessment can be shifted to lessen self-handicapping. Classroom structure that includes involvement, teacher support, student cohesiveness, cooperation, and equity reduces self-handicapping (Garcia, 1995). Classroom structure that emphasizes our *Recognize – Admit – Adjust* model will help students understand and reduce or overcome their self-handicapping – current or future. Professors can build classroom environments that emphasize mastery of competence over performance-approach or performance-avoidance situations.

Classroom assessment of learning is typically competitive and enhances the goals of being best or avoiding error at all costs – not mastery. Success should be defined by improvement, with value placed on the process of learning and being more competent. The classroom should involve



a climate that helps students feel they can take risks, make mistakes, and reveal their lack of understanding in order to grow. This environment fosters mastery goals rather than performance goals. Plainly put, an environment emphasizing only performance goals will never produce excellence – because it fosters self-handicapping. And, this kind of classroom environment teaches students to go into business and continue to self-handicap. There are many ways to help students with low self-efficacy (and self-esteem) build their confidence – thus lessening the need to self-handicap. How individuals are introduced to new tasks is important; success in baby steps builds self-efficacy. Humility can be a sign of mastery goal orientation as these individuals know they can overcome obstacles and do not feel the apprehension others feel. Finally, there are measurement tools for self-handicapping (Strube, M.,1986).

Clearly, business schools have the ability to teach soft skills, measure impression management, and provide complex higher-level pedagogy which is learner- and mastery goal-focused (Forest & Peterson, 2006). What seems to be lacking is a clearly behaviorally-defined competency-based model which can influence pedagogy and inform assessment. One of the ways to use such a competency model with students is to show them how they self-sabotage themselves in gaining each competence and build methods (self-reflection, practice of new behaviors) to help them overcome these habits brought into school from their childhood. Roleplaying can reinforce new non-self-handicapping behaviors learned in the classroom.

As an example of a particular set of key behaviors to be used in role-play situations, let's take *Tunnel Vision: Interacting With People Only To Get What We Want*. After recognizing and admitting that this behavior is used - through self-reflection and discussion of possible negative outcomes - students can practice new key behaviors to overcome it. One can easily see here how important self-reflection is to determine why one interacts in this way – lack of empathy, fear of closeness, or lack of interest in others. Regardless of the habitual driver, this way of interacting disengages employees and is self-handicapping.

The key behaviors are:

1. *Shift your attention and focus on the speaker. Give them the impression that you're enthusiastic about talking to them – until the conversation is done.*
2. *Get out of your problems or planning ahead and listen to them. Ask open-ended questions about their interests.*
3. *Ask questions rather than tell. Be respectful of their opinions and how they feel.*
4. *Try active listening to shift focus: Repeat what they are saying in your head, summarize what you heard, and look for the message – their key words.*
5. *Give the impression that you are on the same team. Use words like “we, us, we're, our, and ourselves” to instantly build a bond.*
6. *Mimic the other personal facial expressions and body positions. Mirroring will allow you to feel what they are feeling.*
7. *Keep what you say short and to the point. When you go on and on about something, people tune you out.*

Here is another example of such key behaviors to be used in role-play to overcome *Avoiding Accountability: Confronting Peers Over Their Lack Of Accountability*:

1. *Do not deny or ignore the problem.*
2. *Develop a plan on how to deal with the situation. If you have support persons, warn them that you may confront the individual.*
3. *Stand or sit directly in front of the person and give him/her direct eye contact.*
4. *Express genuine concern for the person. You are educating them. Assume that the other person's intentions are good even if his or her actions are problematic.*
5. *Identify the specific conduct that is objectionable. Be very specific; express yourself clearly and directly. Express what emotions you feel or sense that others feel.*
6. *Ask that they cease the objectionable behavior. Speak tactfully, in a way you would like to be spoken to and be constructive. Confront gently.*
7. *State that this behavior is counterproductive to the mission. You can conclude with what would be a good next step for the person you're confronting.*
8. *Own your own message; don't apologize for your feelings or the organizational needs.*
9. *Avoid evaluating and interpreting the person (e.g., identifying him/her "controlling" or "complainer.")*

Clearly self-reflection here is used to identify why one avoids this confrontation – avoidance of conflict, not wanting to be the bad guy, or fear of retaliation. The above examples are meant to help professors start thinking about the flow of knowledge about self-handicapping to self-reflection about expediency/avoidance/fear/self-deception and practice of new, more productive behavior. This will help them incorporate overcoming self-handicapping in the classroom. For more examples see *Self-Handicapping Leadership: The Nine Behaviors Holding Back Employees, Managers, and Companies, and How to Overcome Them* (Decker & Mitchell, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Given pressures from employers, accrediting bodies, and students, business schools are making a transition from a purely theoretical curriculum to a blended theoretical/practical curriculum. The authors believe that as part of the practical portion, students would be well-served by learning what they do to hold themselves back – how they self-handicap. In the present article, we have outlined examples of self-handicapping, their triggers, and some steps on how to implement self-reflection and role-play in the classroom to begin behavior change.

By addressing self-handicapping while in school and before students embark on their career, professors will equip the student to better recognize self-handicapping behavior. Moreover, by practicing new non-self-handicapping behavior in the classroom – students will be more likely to admit to the impact of their self-handicapping behavior and find better ways to operate. This will significantly increase their leadership competence, ability to find careers, and improve the world of work everywhere.

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