Why some good leaders stop getting better
The 'near enemies' of leadership behaviours

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'Far enemy' and 'near enemy' are concepts that come from Buddhist psychology and can be very useful in self-development. The idea behind this is that virtues have enemies. A far enemy is the obvious opposite of a virtue. For example, the far enemy of compassion is cruelty, inflicting, or causing suffering. In contrast, a near enemy is something that impersonates the virtue in question but subtly undermines it and is a hidden obstacle to growth. For compassion, its near enemy is pity, as it involves sorrow for someone's suffering but from a position of looking down upon them. Far enemies are loud and near enemies whisper.

Usually, these concepts are used for cultivating virtues such as kindness, connection, joy, etc., but can also be very useful in unpacking development feedback that we receive from our bosses as part of year-end processes. Let's explore a few common feedback tropes through the lens of these teachings.

Empathy
The far enemy of empathy is dismissiveness - bypassing emotions in favour of logic or simplicity. Its near enemy is sympathy without accountability. When you are sympathetic towards someone's issue, but fall short on actually providing them with the support to navigate the issue, individuals only feel partially heard.

Strategic thinking
The far enemy of strategic thinking is short-term focus - driven by urgency rather than long-term vision. Its near enemy is over-analysis & over-thinking. These lead to chasing perfection while delaying decision-making. Another variant could be using complex frameworks or narratives to portray strategy without actually making any clear choices or trade-offs.

Humility
Humility's far enemy is arrogance - inflated

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ego and sense of self-worth. On the contrary, its near enemy is performative openness. This happens when someone declares themselves open to learning, while concealing intellectual superiority and not actually being open to learn.

Empowering teams
Micromanaging, or excessive control of every aspect of a workstream, is the far enemy of empowerment. Its subtler near enemy is supporting without passing over authority. This would look like delegating tasks to your team, but not exactly transferring decision-making authority at the right levels.

Deep listening
Interrupting is the far enemy of deep listening. It clearly demonstrates a lack of interest from someone who has already pre-decided the final takeaway. On the other side, its near enemy is passive listening. Passive listeners nod and agree, and patiently wait for their turn to respond, rather than soaking in or retaining the information.

Accepting feedback
The far enemy of accepting feedback is defensiveness. It's when you receive critical feedback, and your first instinct is to justify or dismiss it altogether. The more complex near enemy is intellectualising feedback. It is a psychological defence mechanism to create emotional distance from the feedback by overindexing on logic and facts.

Why near enemies need attention
The development of many high-performing employees plateaus not because of the easy-to-detect far enemies, but because of near enemies masquerading as progress. Far enemies are usually corrected early, while near enemies are sometimes even mistaken as improvements in the short term, and often rewarded. Near enemies and their detriments become visible when employees rise up the rungs into senior roles. At this stage, it becomes harder to accept or work

on feedback. Moreover, the impact of these shortcomings gets further scaled as senior employees are rightly positioned to cause tangible damage in the decision quality and culture of an organisation.

How to use this concept
When you receive development feedback that you trust and genuinely want to work on, ask yourself if your plan is actually going to tackle the issue at the core, or if you are simply choosing an easier and more comfortable route that delivers short-term gains but barely scratches the surface of the feedback. If you really believe that working on a development area will be good for your development, pay attention to its near enemies.

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Gen-Z guide to choosing your first career direction

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Gen-Z enters the workforce carrying ambition, curiosity, and a quiet awareness of reality. We grew up hearing "follow your passion" while mentally calculating coffee budgets, phone upgrades, and whether life will ever feel financially breathable. The pressure to choose a career that sounds impressive, feels meaningful, and leads somewhere stable often turns the first job into a personal referendum. The truth, however, is less dramatic and more practical. Your first career move functions best as a starting point, not a life summary. It is a test run, and treating it like one changes everything.

This is not a calling; it is a test run
Early career decisions feel heavy because they get framed as permanent. A better approach is to treat the first job as a learning environment with a clear purpose. Instead of asking whether a role feels perfect, ask what it teaches over the next 12 to 18 months. What skills will you practice repeatedly? What kind of problems will you learn to solve? Who will you observe up close? This is where the idea of a trial horizon matters.

Commit long enough to build competence and short enough to reassess with confidence. Define success before starting, because it can mean different things for different people: ranging from skill growth, industry understanding, or clarity about preferences. All of those outcomes are valid. Early rigidity backfires because careers evolve faster than plans. Industries shift. Roles blur. People change their minds. The smartest early moves keep multiple paths open instead of narrowing everything too soon. Your first job is a prototype. Document what you learn. Notice what energises you and what drains you.

Choose skills that travel over titles that impress
Job titles look impressive until the industry changes. Skills, on the other hand, compound quietly. When evaluating a role, ignore the branding for a moment and focus on the work itself. Ask whether the job helps you get better at thinking clearly, communicating ideas, building things, analysing information, or making decisions. These are skills that travel across companies and sectors.

Be cautious of roles that offer prestige without ownership. If you spend most of your time coordinating, forwarding, or executing without understanding why decisions are made, growth slows down. Skill-light roles often feel busy but leave little behind. This does not mean ignoring money or stability. Financial reality matters. Not everyone can afford high-risk choices, and pretending otherwise helps no one. The goal is balance.

Prioritise roles that offer learning density within practical constraints. A stable job that teaches transferable skills often beats a glamorous one that teaches none. By the end of your first year, you should be able to articulate what you are better at than before. If you cannot answer that clearly, the title did not matter as

much as it seemed.

Curiosity works best with structure
As Gen-Z, we are curious by nature, but also overwhelmed by options. However, curiosity becomes productive only when paired with structure. Career experimentation is most effective when intentional, measurable, and manageable. You can design experiments through side projects, short courses, internal

rotations, freelance work, or volunteering. Each experiment should have a clear purpose, a defined timeline, and criteria for success. Without these parameters, curiosity may create noise rather than clarity.

Time-boxing experiments allow you to generate actionable insights. Define what you want to learn, how long the experiment will last, and what outcome will indicate progress. Exploration often feels unsettling, especially when peers appear to have settled. The idea is to think of experimentation as intentional skill-building rather than indecision. Every low-risk experiment generates data, strengthens your judgment, and increases confidence.

Your career makes sense even when strangers feel confused
Comparison can add unnecessary pressure. LinkedIn timelines, peer milestones, and family expectations create noise that makes early careers feel confusing or off-track. Careers function best as personal systems rather than public performances. Observe how your skills, interests, and leverage evolve. Publicly share simple, clear explanations that highlight key achievements without overexplaining or seeking validation.

Maintaining a distinction between identity and career strengthens flexibility. Your self-worth exists outside of job titles and company logos. Career changes, pivots, or experiments feel natural and intentional when you maintain a

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grounded sense of self. Your career will continue to evolve regardless of outside perspectives. As long as it moves you forward, builds skills, and aligns with your values, it holds value and purpose even when others do not fully understand the path you are taking.

Understand the difference between growth and just being busy
Being active or exhausted does not automatically translate into meaningful progress. Reflection, observation, and measurement clarify whether your efforts are creating growth. A simple self-check every six months focuses on three questions: Are your skills sharpening consistently? Is your leverage increasing through visibility, trust, and ownership? Is your professional direction becoming clearer and more intentional?

True growth often feels quieter than busyness. Decisions become faster and better. Communication becomes clearer. Patterns and opportunities emerge more quickly. Confidence increases steadily. Save work samples, review feedback, and note achievements. Observe challenges that once felt difficult but now feel manageable. These markers indicate momentum and demonstrate the value of your career choices.

Your first career decision functions as a platform, not a verdict. Treat it as a prototype. Focus on learning, transferable skills, and structured exploration. Build momentum through directional moves rather than chasing perfection. Every choice in your career creates pathways, and every reflection generates clarity. By embracing flexibility, curiosity, and structured growth, you build a career that reflects your personality, values, and ambitions. Remember, your first move is simply the beginning of a journey designed to expand options, deepen skills, and strengthen confidence.

Andreessen Horowitz raises over $15 bln funding

NEXT STEP DESK

Venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz (a16z) has raised more than $15 billion across five new investment funds, according to a recent announcement.

The new funds include $6.75 billion for a growth fund to scale startups, $1.7 billion for an AI infrastructure fund, and $1.12 billion for a fund focused on national interests like defence and supply chain, states a report by Reuters on the matter. The fundraising comes less than two years after the firm's last major haul of $7.2 billion in April 2024.

The successful raise highlights how large, established venture firms continue to attract capital despite a broader slowdown in VC fundraising, suggests the report. Industry data

PHOTO: REUTERS/ MIKE BLAKE

Ben Horowitz, co-founder and General Partner, Andreessen Horowitz.

shows new commitments to VC funds dropped significantly last year, reaching the lowest number of new funds in a decade.

The firm, which currently manages over $90 billion in assets, was previously reported to be seeking a roughly $20 billion megafund for AI investments. It is known for early investments in companies like Facebook, Instagram, and Coinbase.

BTCL reduces .bd domain price

NEXT STEP DESK

Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited (BTCL) has recently announced a reduction in the registration and renewal fees for two categories of .bd domain names.

According to a press statement issued in Dhaka on January 11, 2026, the price cut applies to .bd third-level domains and .bd second-level domains, both with names longer than two characters. The company said fees for these categories have been reduced by 36%.

The revised prices, charged per domain per year, are as follows: For '.bd

Third-Level Domain' (for example, abc. com.bd), registration fee reduced from BDT 1,100 to BDT 700, with renewal fee reduced from BDT 1,600 to BDT 1,020. Meanwhile, for '.bd Second-Level Domain' (for example, abc.bd), registration fee reduced from BDT 2,000 to BDT 1,280, with renewal fee reduced from BDT 2,500 to BDT 1,600.

Value-added tax (VAT) will apply at the prescribed rate, and that registrations will be governed by existing regulations set by the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), along with tariff decisions approved by BTCL authorities, states the press release.

IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES