

'Dark leadership' is a threat to Canada's tourism industry, say researchers

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It's summer and that means high season and busy times for the tourism sector. According to the [United Nations World Tourism Organization](#), more than 285 million tourists traveled internationally from January to

March 2024, an increase of about 20% compared to 2023.

Canada is nearing its 2019 levels of international tourist arrivals, indicating the sector's recovery from the pandemic. However, the situation isn't as good as it appears: the tourism and hospitality industry is experiencing a worker shortage worldwide.

This labor gap threatens tourism destinations, like Canada, by impacting service quality and potentially damaging the reputation and desirability of hospitality brands.

Employers are scrambling to find enough staff to deliver quality services to summer visitors. Traditionally, employers have relied on students looking for summer jobs and [temporary foreign workers](#). In some places, like Alberta, the industry has even [successfully lobbied for dedicated immigration streams](#) to fill this gap.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has made this situation more visible, [the labor shortage is not new](#) and has deep roots. Hospitality companies now face difficulties in attracting and retaining talent.

Destructive leadership

Jobs in the hospitality industry often involve frequent shift changes, low pay, lack of recognition, emotional labor and inconvenient working hours, which sometimes results in [occupational stigma](#).

On top of that, some workplaces are especially toxic, resulting in employees experiencing burnout and [mental health issues](#). Researchers found that chefs—an integral part of the hospital industry—in Australia and New Zealand are struggling with their mental health and many wish to leave the industry.

Destructive leadership [is further compounding these challenges](#).

Destructive leadership is an umbrella term that can be defined in several ways, including abusive supervision, petty tyranny, and toxic, despotic, corrupt or narcissistic leadership, among others.

[Abusive supervision](#), for example, is a form of harassment in which a supervisor shows hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors towards their subordinates, such as humiliation, lying to or threatening them, or outright ignoring them. Managers displaying these behaviors negatively impact both businesses and their employees.

Despotic leadership is considered the most destructive and selfish leadership style. It is characterized by authoritarian, dominant and self-serving personal behaviors. Despotic leaders [show a lack of morality](#), engage in fraudulent behaviors, and manipulate and exploit employees for personal gain.

A [recent study conducted among Spanish hotel workers](#) demonstrated the negative effects of abusive supervision and despotic leadership on [employee](#) retention.

The 'dark triad' and leadership

Destructive leadership is closely linked to a concept called dark leadership, which concerns the psychological mindset of destructive leaders. [Dark leadership](#) involves actions that can harm, or intend to harm, an organization and its employees. This can include encouraging staff to pursue goals that conflict with the organization's interests, or hurting or disrespecting employees.

Certain personal factors, such as negative or ["dark" personality traits](#)—known as the ["dark triad"](#) of narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy—can explain the emergence and impact of destructive

leadership.

Situational factors within an organization's internal and external environments, such as high-pressure work conditions or poor organizational culture, also play a role. A conducive environment, a destructive leader and susceptible followers are known as the "toxic triangle."

Bad leadership often results from a lack of hard and soft skill competencies. Research shows [soft skills like emotional intelligence](#) are crucial for effective leadership.

Dark leadership develops over time and can lead to negative outcomes that compromise the quality of life or the satisfaction of both internal stakeholders, like employees and managers, and external stakeholders, like customers.

What happens internally within an organization [ultimately permeates the service provided to the customer](#). Addressing internal issues, including destructive leadership, is necessary to ensuring high-quality service and maintaining a positive reputation in the industry.

Creating positive workplaces

To remain competitive, hospitality companies must establish [more attractive work environments](#) by fostering positive workplace culture and enticing employees to work. This is needed to attract and retain [a new generation of workers](#). For [young people](#), [fairness in treatment and compensation at work](#) is very important.

Human resource departments can play a crucial role in identifying and eradicating toxic behaviors by superiors. Empowering employees, establishing clear codes of conduct, and developing supervisor evaluation

systems where employees can express their opinions freely without fear of reprisal can limit the influence of toxic leaders.

Studying and discussing bad organizational behaviors and [leadership](#) is difficult for industry leaders and managers. It requires courage and a willingness to look at oneself in the mirror.

Some researchers have addressed this by studying how workers' perceptions of their [managers' behaviors](#) impact their decision to leave a company, or the industry altogether. Others demonstrate the positive value of [inclusive leadership](#).

It's essential to investigate how negative job experiences cause [junior employees to leave the industry](#) to prevent a further decline in [Canadian tourism and hospitality programs](#). The industry's future is at stake. It's time for tourism and hospitality professionals to make their sector more attractive to young Canadians.

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