



mhca's e-Newsletter

*Published February 2025*

## **The Self-Sabotaging Leader's BIG Mistake**

*A Guest Article from Steve Bedwell MD*

It's not every day I stump a certified genius. Robert Sapolsky is an internationally acclaimed authority on stress, author of the bestselling book *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, and a recipient of the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship Genius Grant.

Several years ago, I attended one of Professor Sapolsky's lectures. The key takeaway from Sapolsky's insightful, entertaining presentation was that, unlike zebras, we humans stress ourselves out. For instance, we ruminate endlessly and unproductively over job security, house payments, and relationships. Eventually, unable to let go of our stressors, we worry ourselves sick. In short, we emotionally self-sabotage.

During his presentation, Professor Sapolsky made an extraordinary confession: "I've been studying stress for thirty years now...so presumably I should have incorporated all of this. The reality is I'm unbelievably stressed and type A and poorly coping."

And so, during the Q&A that followed the lecture, I asked him, “Why do you find it so difficult to apply what you know about stress?” There was an awkward pause. The audience began laughing. Eventually, with a shrug, he dodged the question. “I guess I need to read my own books.”

For the record, my question was sincere and not a “gotcha” intended to stump this distinguished academic. I’m one of Professor Sapolsky’s biggest fans. In fact, he’s my favorite neuroscientist. (Yep. I have a favorite. Doesn’t everyone?) Color me gullible, but I suspect Professor Sapolsky has read his own books. And so, on this occasion, I found his reply to be deeply troubling. If a world-renowned expert on stress can’t manage his own stress, what hope is there for the rest of us? Is it our curse to imagine the worst and then freak ourselves out? Are we condemned to a life of emotional self-sabotage?

Unfortunately, emotional self-sabotage isn’t our only problem. We also self-sabotage cognitively and behaviorally. When I give keynote speeches, I often meet smart, educated leaders who pursue self-knowledge: they watch TED Talks, listen to podcasts, read self-help books. Fluent in pop-psychology, they drop terms like “confirmation bias,” “amygdala hijack,” and “dopamine high” with confidence. And, after attending numerous leadership conferences, they’ve also learned a bunch of tactics for smarter thinking, emotional regulation, and impulse control.

Yet, after amassing this knowledge, these intelligent, informed individuals still battle with personal and professional self-sabotage.

In a nutshell, they continue to react to life’s challenges in ways that undermine their progress, wellbeing, and relationships. For example, they struggle with bad workplace habits, overlook obvious clues to solving problems, or mishandle their emotions and risk burnout.

### **What’s The Solution?**

Unsurprisingly, most leaders default to consuming even more TED Talks, podcasts, and business books. More smart = less stuck, right? Wrong. This is the self-sabotaging leader’s BIG mistake.

We don’t need more “book smarts.” We need better timing: To fix self-sabotage, we must catch ourselves in the act. If we don’t spot self-sabotage in real time, we can’t apply a tactic at the right time. If we’re oblivious at this moment of truth, all the sabotage-busting tactics in the world won’t save us.

At the **mhca** Winter Conference, I’ll explain why we self-sabotage and provide tactics for fixing it. Crucially, I’ll also explain how to spot self-sabotage in real time. When you know what to look for, it’s easy to catch.

By the end of my program, you’ll know how to recognize and counter self-sabotaging thoughts, feelings,

and actions. This will enable you to respond to the professional and personal challenges in your life with great cognitive, emotional, and behavioral flexibility.

You'll also be asking, "What the heck happened to that balloon?" Expect a program that's riveting, provocative, and explosively funny...and I'll aim to exceed your expectations.

*Enjoyed the article? Don't miss Steve's sessions at our upcoming Winter Conference in Clearwater Beach, Florida. [Click here](#) for the full agenda.*

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