

# Napoleon's Tragic March Home from Moscow

## Lessons in Hubris

*Hubris: excessive pride, often leading to one's downfall*

### Examples of the Sources of Hubris

Sources	Napoleon	Executives
Narcissism	Napoleon's need for position and self-aggrandization to satisfy his narcissism	Executives with hubris will seek out positions of power to satisfy their narcissism
Recent successes	Napoleon's hubris grew as his record of battlefield victories lengthened	A record of outstanding performance permits an executive to rationalize his or her hubris
Exaggerated accolades of others	Napoleon's hubris fed on the adulation showered on him by the French people and press	As executives receive praise from others and the media, their hubris is reinforced
Exemption from the rules	Napoleon regularly broke the rules that governed nineteenth-century Europe, and his hubris grew as he got away with more and more	A sense of entitlement accompanies hubris in executives as they break the rules and get away with it
Confidence turns to arrogance	When Napoleon's officers pointed out the perils of the Russian campaign, he called them timid and weak	Executives with hubris appear to undertake mergers that are overpriced out of a sense that they know better than others what is best
Relying on a simplistic formula	Napoleon assumed the quick, hard-hitting attacks that had worked before would subdue Russia	Once executives believe they alone know the formula for success, they repeatedly trot out the same strategy regardless of circumstances
Unwillingness to see the obvious	Napoleon systematically refused to recognize the differences between the Russian campaign and earlier campaigns	Once absorbed with hubris and convinced of infallibility, executives may become blind to signals of environmental change

Source: William E. Rosenbach and Robert L. Taylor, *Contemporary Issues in Leadership*, Fifth Edition, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Westview Press/Perseus Books Group, 2001, 109-228.

*"Napoleon, supreme egoist that he was, ignored the significance of the omens that until he and his host were completely irrevocably committed to an undertaking that was doomed. Never did the gods punish hubris more severely."*

M. de Ferensac, **The Russian Campaign, 1812**

