

6 Signs of Power Hungry Leaders

God-ordained public service should never be about a person's desire for power but should arise out of a servant's heart to meet the needs of the people they represent.

Jesus modeled this when He washed the feet of His disciples and when He said that the greatest in the kingdom of God are those who serve (John 13; Mark 10:43). Of course, we have power hungry leaders in every sector of society—not just in politics—and this includes the church.

Power hungry people are the cause of numerous problems and divisions within the marketplace and church, and we need to be honest with them and speak to them when necessary, lest they sabotage great organizations.

Since their drive for power will stop at nothing to achieve their ends, more mature leaders must counter their dangerous ambitions instead of continually feeding into them.

(I believe all leaders, because of our fallen nature, have to deal with some or all of the following issues at times in our lives. But some have totally given in and live out these issues as a lifestyle of choice.)

1. Power hungry leaders only relate to other “power” people.

Power hungry people are constantly going to social events, parties, conferences and frequently joining boards of powerful organizations that will connect them with the most influential people—irrespective of whether they truly have the time or talents for these activities or genuinely want to connect with these people on a deep human level.

They are always looking for the next person who can do

something to help them climb the social ladders in their spheres of influence, which causes them to use people instead of serving people.

2. Power hungry leaders constantly drop names to impress.

There are certain leaders whom I have heard speak several times, and every time they have spoken, either to me in private or in public gatherings, they have mentioned prominent academic institutions where they received their degrees or dropped the names of high-level leaders with whom they have access.

After a while, it becomes obvious they are attempting to flout their power and accomplishments so they can receive accolades or respect from others instead of it being a sincere attempt to give their audience context for their life narrative.

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3. Power hungry leaders compete with other peer leaders.

Power hungry leaders are always jockeying for position, fighting with other leaders they deem a threat to their influence or attempting to marginalize others with faint words of praise or outright gossip and slander.

(Streetwise Christian leaders usually don't engage in outright slander but tend to marginalize others subtly when in the company of those they don't know well.)

Essentially, power hungry leaders will not rest until they become the "big dog" in the organization.

4. Power hungry leaders are all things to all people.

Power hungry leaders often are like chameleons who adapt to the color of their environment. For example, I have met political leaders who speak as biblical Christians when they

are speaking in churches, but when they are with secular humanists, they speak about their antibiblical values.

The only thing power hungry people value is their own power. When they are with Christians, they speak religious lingo, and when they are with secularists, they speak secular lingo. I don't think even they know what they truly believe.

Unfortunately, many sincere Christians get fooled by these people's surreptitious words and believe anything they hear. After such people are elected, these Christians are shocked by what they really stand for!

5. Power hungry leaders are driven by selfish ambition. Though they may work many hours visiting their communities and churches and being among their people, their ultimate goal is to be in power, not to meet the needs of the people.

This is more obvious when it comes to candidates for an elected office. But pastors and church leaders have also fallen into this syndrome and act this out in the context of their own denominations or congregations.

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6. Power hungry leaders love the praises of men. At the end of the day, power hungry people live to hear other people sing their praises. They have such low self-esteem that they need to continually feed their egos by being the center of attention in every event, party and gathering they attend.

Consequently, they are easily insulted when they deem others not bowing down to kiss their rings and can quickly turn on these people.

Since all of us can fall into unhealthy leadership habit/patterns, we need some takeaways to counter these:

1. Cultivate a servant's heart. Focus on genuine service and

meeting the needs of the people you represent rather than seeking personal power and recognition. Emulate Jesus' example of humility and service, as He washed the feet of His disciples and taught that greatness comes from serving others (Mark 10:43, John 13).

2. Address power hungry behavior. Recognize and acknowledge power hungry tendencies in yourself and others, and openly discuss and address these behaviors when they arise. Encourage honest conversations and accountability to prevent these tendencies from damaging organizations and causing division.

3. Promote mature leadership. Encourage the development of mature leaders who can counter the dangerous ambitions of power hungry individuals. Mature leaders should actively work to redirect and temper the ambitions of power hungry individuals rather than enabling or reinforcing their behavior.

4. Foster diverse relationships. Encourage leaders to build relationships with a wide range of people, not just those who hold power or influence. By fostering diverse relationships and seeking input from various perspectives, individuals can avoid becoming exclusively focused on associating with "power" people.

5. Embrace humility and self-awareness. Recognize the potential for power seeking behavior in yourself and others due to human fallibility. Embrace humility and self-awareness, and actively work to resist the allure of ungodly power, acknowledging that all leaders may grapple with these issues at times, thus we need to strive to combat them for the greater good.

As the psalmist said, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:14, ESV).

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