

# 6 Super-Unhealthy Leaders to Avoid

A good friend of mine almost suffered spiritual shipwreck recently because he began following a ministry that claimed to be on the “cutting edge” of revival. The leader uses all the popular buzzwords: He is “prophetic,” he sees “healing miracles” in his meetings and he even claims to have face-to-face meetings with Jesus. But in the end, it turns out this self-appointed leader is an immoral man who has left a trail of spiritual abuse behind him.

It breaks my heart that our movement is still struggling with poor leadership. I believe we have made great progress over the past two decades, and the rate of moral failure and scandal seems to be declining. But we have a long way to go.

That’s why one of my passions is to encourage healthy leadership among Christians. When you consider unhealthy leaders, there are mainly six types, which I have listed below. You would be wise not to follow them. You would be even wiser not to become like them:

**The arrogant narcissist.** The best leaders are those who have been broken by God. Like Jacob, they have wrestled with God and walked away with a limp. Their own ego has been subdued. Leaders will become dangerously self-centered if they skip this process. If a leader views his church or business as a vehicle to advance his own agenda, he will view people as cogs in his machine and they will end up being used and abused. This is why Paul warned Timothy: “Do not lay hands on anyone too hastily” (1 Tim. 5:22, NASB). Leaders who have not gone through the fires of testing always end up hurting others.

**The cold professional.** Unbroken leaders don’t know how to build healthy relationships. They tend to be aloof, and they

are always in “business mode.” They are all work and no play. The organizations they build may seem successful, but there is no warmth. The churches built by these professionals focus on numbers, buildings, fund-raising and big goals, but they lack true fellowship. The focus is always on the performance, while people’s real needs are ignored.

**The angry tyrant.** There’s a reason Paul warned the early church never to put an angry leader in a top position (see 1 Tim. 3:3). Just as anger disqualified Moses from leading Israel into the Promised Land, the same attitude will remove God’s blessing from a leader today. Angry leaders use fear and manipulation to dominate people. Pastors with this problem can even use spiritual threats, unreasonable demands or even public humiliation to convince their followers to be loyal. Tyrants are driven by fear, so they are suspicious of people in their churches or organizations who are successful. Like Saul, they will feel threatened by younger leaders—and they will throw spears at them.

**The insecure know-it-all.** A healthy leader will seek out mentors and coaches to help him or her grow. But some leaders are too prideful to ask for help. They will instead use titles to create an aura of importance. Their lack of experience may even lead them to plagiarize or to invent fake credentials. Instead of asking a group of wise counselors to correct them, they will surround themselves with yes men who are equally as insecure as they are. They never seek input from their subordinates. And when things go wrong, the leader will always look for a scapegoat to blame instead of admitting his mistakes.

**The indecisive weakling.** Real leaders have strong spines. They know how to lead even in tough times. This should always be done prayerfully, of course, but a true leader will not drag out the process. Joshua, for example, was decisive; he swallowed his fears, figured out God’s strategy and motivated the people to march into Canaan. He didn’t let obstacles

paralyze him. Some leaders adopt one goal, then six months later they quietly bury that goal and shift the emphasis to something else. They tend to follow public opinions, the latest fads or the success of a competitor rather than their own convictions. After a few years the people feel they have been jerked around by a reckless driver.

**The closed-minded risk avoider.** Some leaders are scared of change. They love maintenance mode. But the leaders affirmed in Scripture did not play it safe. The apostle Paul, for example, risked his neck to take the gospel into new territory. Even when traditional believers pressured him to “keep it Jewish,” Paul knew the Holy Spirit was directing him to reach the Gentiles. True leaders know you can’t effect change without thinking outside the box. True leaders stay flexible. And true leaders are willing to follow God even when people criticize them for challenging the status quo.

Let’s pray that God will give us leaders who are broken, humble, courageous, loving, faithful and Christlike. And pray that He will give you those same qualities.