

Avoiding 12 Hazards of Executive Leadership

As somebody who has served in executive leadership and with senior-level leaders for many decades, I have observed the following 12 hazards of executive leadership:

1. Constant stress. Stress is unavoidable. Every time a person has a responsibility to fulfill, some stress comes with it. Not all stress is bad. However, there is often a high level of mental and emotional stress that never lets up and can cause physical, spiritual and emotional harm. Leaders must take regular time off to decompress and unplug, or their effectiveness in life can be cut short.

2. Maintaining boundaries. Often, it is difficult for leaders to distinguish between home and work. A boundary is an invisible marker that creates safety zones for each component of a person's life. For long-term sustainability, each component of our life should be protected with an intentional plan by carving out the necessary time to devote to that particular assignment.

3. Relational conflict. The higher a person goes up the leadership ladder, the more conflict and tension they will experience with others. It is inevitable and unavoidable, especially when the senior leader upholds standards of excellence and challenges others to excel. Furthermore, leaders must navigate through many egos, logos and agendas and are often misunderstood, judged and spoken against behind their backs. If a leader is not careful, he or she can easily get discouraged because it can seem as though there is always an issue with somebody.

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4. Loneliness. It has often been stated, "It is lonely at the top." This is a true saying because many times, nobody can understand what it is like to be in the shoes of the top leader—and few care to know. This causes many leaders to feel lonely. Lonely leaders can aid themselves by seeking out peers in the same industry they can relate to for input, encouragement, prayer and accountability.

5. Being misunderstood. One of the most difficult things about serving in senior leadership is when your words or actions are taken out of context, misunderstood or both. I have found that we can limit this by having a culture of transparency and dialogue with fellow workers—however, no matter how hard a person tries, being misunderstood is bound to take place at times.

6. Competing agendas on the team. The key to a successful enterprise is developing oneness on your team. This is a very difficult process since every person has their own perceptions, way of doing things and agendas when they come into a new position. Often, a leader has to play politics just to get things done so as not to offend the sensitive egos around him or her. Lack of unity, fragility of egos and competing agendas make being a senior leader very difficult at times.

7. Lack of soul care. Most senior leaders are so busy that it is very challenging for them to take care of themselves. I have met many leaders who have terrible diets (to save time, they often consume fast foods), rarely exercise, rarely take days off and rarely do things that give them emotional and spiritual life. I have found that I have to prioritize prayer and seeking God every day, or my plans will go awry. I also force myself to eat right, exercise and spend quality time with friends and family. Practicing things that give me life will sharpen my focus, give me more energy and make me more effective in my divine assignment.

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8. Constant transition. Over the past four decades, I have learned that “the only thing that never changes is that change is constant.” It seems I am always in either a minor or major transition. This is typical for entrepreneurial leaders who always create new things and challenge the status quo. Although I have come to expect transitions in life, it still doesn’t take away from the uncertainty that will either instill fear in me or inspire me to have more faith in God. This is a constant struggle for senior leaders.

9. Feeling underappreciated. Another thing I learned a long time ago is that most people are only concerned with being appreciated rather than showing appreciation. Furthermore, most people do not care about your accomplishments and sacrifices—unless what you do is blessing them directly. Consequently, the sacrifice it takes to lead an organization or church is so great that most people will take your work for granted.

10. The lack of proper compensation. Most pastors are underpaid, and most small business owners work inhuman hours and put most of their capital back into their company to sustain it. Not having compensation commensurate with the amount of work a person puts in can cause relational stress with a spouse and incite great feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.

11. Lacking self-awareness. Senior leaders can often have tunnel vision and not notice their mistakes. Intense focus on one thing can blind leaders to many areas of their lives; this lack of self-awareness results in many casualties in key relationships and productivity. Leaders can protect themselves from this by having the right people around them who will speak honestly and help them map out strategic plans for the

future.

12. Being surrounded by indifferent people. One of the greatest emotional challenges a leader faces is when those around them do not exhibit the same passion and commitment as they do. Constantly being surrounded by people like this causes the senior leader great frustration, stress and resentment. Truly, it is a hazard to their emotional and spiritual health. Leaders can avoid this by regularly reviewing performance standards and group accountability so the senior leader is one of many correcting those who fail to perform at an excellent level.

Finally, whether in the marketplace or church, all senior leaders need to be filled with His Spirit and grace and depend upon His mercy every day. Only by depending upon Him, learning from mistakes and listening to wise counsel can leaders avoid getting hurt by these 12 common hazards.

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