

Beware of These 12 Hazards When You Lead in the Church

As someone who has served in executive leadership and with many senior-level leaders for many decades, I have observed the following 12 hazards. By “hazard,” I am speaking about a common proclivity all executive level leaders need to monitor, lest they stumble.

1. Constant Stress

Stress in and of itself is unavoidable. Every time a person has a responsibility to fulfill, some level of stress comes with it. Not all stress is bad. However, often there is a high level of mental and emotional stress that never lets up that can cause physical, spiritual and emotional ailments. Leaders need to make sure they 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 make a distinction between home and work. A boundary is an invisible marker that creates safety zones for each component of a person's life. For example, if one person's spouse is constantly interrupting and calling them at work during business hours, they will not be effective on their job. Also, if a person is constantly bringing the problems and challenges of work and ministry into their family life, it will interfere with their ability to connect emotionally with their key relationships and may cause longterm damage. For longterm sustainability, we all need boundaries (and set hours whenever possible) for work, family, personal renewal and seeking God. 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. Relational conflict is inevitable and unavoidable, especially when the senior leader upholds standards of excellence and challenges others to excel. Furthermore, leaders have to navigate through many egos, logos and agendas and are often misunderstood, judged and spoken against behind their back. If a leader is not careful, he or she can easily get discouraged because sometimes it seems as though there is always an issue with somebody.

4. Loneliness

It has often been stated, "It's lonely at the top." This is a true saying, because often, nobody can understand what it is like to be in the shoes of the top leader. Fewer still care to know! This causes many leaders to feel lonely. Lonely leaders can aid themselves if they seek out peers in the same industry they can relate to for input, encouragement, prayer and accountability.

5. Being Misunderstood

One of the hardest things about serving in senior leadership is when your words or actions are taken out of context and/or misunderstood. I have found that we can limit this from happening 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 from time to time.

6. Competing Agendas on the Team

The key to having a successful enterprise is by 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. This lack of

unity, fragility of egos and competing agendas makes 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 personally found that I have to prioritize prayer and seeking God every day, or else 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 actually sharpen my focus, give me more energy and make me more effective for my divine assignment.

8. Constant Transition

I have learned over the past four decades that “the only thing that never changes is that change is constant.” It seems as though I am always in either a minor or major transition. This is typical for entrepreneurial leaders who are always creating new things and challenging the status quo. Although I have come to expect transitions in life, it still doesn’t take away from the fact that it creates a level of 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 have learned a long time ago is that most people are only concerned with being appreciated and not in showing appreciation. Furthermore, most people do not care about your accomplishments and sacrifice unless what you do is blessing them directly. That being said, the level of sacrifice it takes to lead an organization or church is so great that most people will take the work you do for granted. Feeling underappreciated can be corrected by creating a

culture of honor, service and celebration in your church or organization. However, at the end of the day, we need to get our full affirmation from the Lord and not from other people.

10. The Lack of Proper Compensation

Most pastors are underpaid, and most small business owners are working inhumane hours and putting most of their capital back into their company to sustain it. Not having compensation commensurate with the amount of work a person puts out can cause relational stress with a spouse and incite great feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. In light of this, a spiritual leader has to always know if they are focusing on what God has for them, because Jesus promised that seeking first His kingdom will eventually release His reward (Matt. 6:33). This reward can come in the form of financial compensation, favor, or things too numerous to mention based on the ways of God.

11. Lacking Self-Awareness

Senior leaders can often have tunnel vision and fail to notice their mistakes. Intense focus on one thing can often make a leader blind to many areas of their life. This lack of self-awareness results in many casualties, both in key relationships and in productivity. Leaders can protect themselves from this by having the right people around them who will speak honestly to them and help them map out strategic plans for the future.

12. Being Surrounded by People Without Passion for the Mission

Last but not least, one of the greatest emotional challenges leaders face is when those around them do not exhibit the same passion and commitment. There is nothing worse than having people with a mere title without a concomitant function or who want the perks of the job without investing the time necessary to get the job done. 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 having regular reviews regarding standards of performance, along with group accountability, so that the senior leader is not the only one correcting slackers.

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. {eoa}