

Blatant Signs of a Power-Hungry Leader

God-ordained public service should never be about a person's desire for power and prestige, 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 and Mark 10:43). Of course, we have power-hungry leaders in every sector of society—not just in politics—and this includes the church.

I believe power-hungry people in general are the cause of numerous problems and divisions within the marketplace and church, and we need to be honest with them and speak into their lives when necessary, lest they sabotage great organizations. Since their drive for power to achieve their ends will stop at nothing, more mature leaders need to counter their dangerous ambitions, instead of continually feeding into them. Following are some signs of power-hungry leaders:

(I believe that 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. They only relate to other “power” people.

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

2. They are constantly dropping names and speaking about their accomplishments.

There are certain leaders whom I have heard speak several times; every single time they have spoken, either to me in private or in public gatherings, they mention prominent academic institutions where they received their degrees or drop the names of high-level leaders to whom they have access. After a while, it becomes obvious they are attempting to flaunt 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.

3. They are in competition with other peer leaders.

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

Power-hungry leaders often are like chameleons that 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 anti-biblical 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. They are driven by selfish ambition instead of love for people,

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 elected office. But pastors and church leaders have also fallen into this trap and act this out in the context of their own denominations or congregations.

6. They 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 at every event, party and gathering they attend.

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

7. They often compromise their ethical values.

Whatever ethical values they have go out the window if they believe it will help them get into a position of power. For example, some prominent political leaders in our nation (former Vice President Al Gore and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, to name a couple) were once pro-life when it comes to abortion, but turned pro-choice when they thought it would help them gain traction in their political party. Also, I know of a prominent pastor who once believed in the inspirational integrity of Scripture but jettisoned his biblical beliefs when he became the senior pastor of a prominent, historic

landmark church. What good is your position of power if you are not going to follow your convictions of right and wrong?

8. They have few boundaries to maintain personal and family health.

Power-hungry people are constantly on the go and have very little time for personal reflection, renewal or emotional health. Furthermore, they often are so driven that they cheat their spouses and children out of the precious quality time their family needs. They are always on the phone cutting deals, solving problems and trying to accomplish the next big thing!

9. They are only loyal to themselves.

Power-hungry people are narcissists who have a need to control their environment, their friends and their futures, which means that ultimately, they are only loyal to one person: themselves! They only have people in their inner circles who flatter them and never challenge their egos. They usually don't have close friends, hobnobbing mostly with other power people. In such associations, both people know they are merely using one another to obtain or maintain their power.

10. They head up organizations for stature rather than service.

They will go from one church to another or one position to another based on which organization will give them the largest platform and most influence. It is never about God's calling but more about influence, public exposure and proximity to power.

Money is another important issue to them; however, they deem position and influence as more important than money because they believe in the long run, more influence will bring in more money anyway.

11. They exaggerate their value.

When I am with power-hungry people, I usually take every word they say regarding their influence and accomplishments with a grain of salt. Their main objective is to impress me rather than give me an accurate picture of their lives. For example, I have been with leaders who told me about how large their organizations are, but I have never seen them able to draw a crowd of people anywhere near the numbers they tout. They have erected a symbolic house of straw that they tout as if it were the new Freedom Tower that stands in lower Manhattan.

12. They have a superficial inner life.

Power-hungry people usually live in denial as to their real motives and, thus, usually do not allow the searing hot conviction of the Holy Spirit to operate in their souls.

Consequently, they do not have much of a prayer life, do not enter into deep worship, and rarely read the Scriptures—except if they need to put a sermon together or quote passages for a political speech. Furthermore, they attempt to use God for their own ends instead of dying to self and serving God for His own ends and glory. Many actually are so deceived they think God is playing this game with them and is actually empowering them to get more and more attention and power. Little do they realize that Satan is also involved in their lives and setting them up for a huge failure or fall in the future, which can decimate their lives, families, careers and organizations.

May the Lord help us all to see the above issues we are all grappling with. May all of us be honest with ourselves and our God so we can be delivered from our unholy ambitions and lay down our crowns at the feet of Jesus.

May we also avoid the trap of seeking such power and influence that we become the worst of leaders: abusive, domineering and controlling people who personify the old adage “My way or the highway!” That is the subject of the next chapter.

This article is Chapter 12 from *Poisonous Power*, Bishop Mattera's latest book. For more like this, you can purchase your copy on Amazon [here](#).