

Twelve Common Mistakes Young Pastors and Leaders Make

Having started in full-time **ministry** at the age of 22 and pioneering a local congregation at the age of 25, much of this article comes from the “school of hard knocks.” Either I have made each of the following mistakes or I have observed them made by other pastors in my 30-plus years of full-time ministry.

My definition of “young” for this article is somewhere between the ages of 20-40. But, of course, this varies with each person’s degree of maturity or immaturity. There may even be many leaders between the ages of 50-80 who exhibit some of these same qualities.

This is not meant to categorize every young person; it is meant to illustrate some of the most common mistakes. But not every young person makes each of these mistakes. Following are some of the most common mistakes.

1. Not receiving counsel from older, more experienced leaders

First Kings 12 tells the sad story of when King Rehoboam, son of King Solomon, refused to listen to the counsel of the wise old men who served with his father and instead listened to the advice of his young friends regarding an ultimatum from the people to lighten the tax load on the nation. His refusal to listen to the advice of the older men resulted in the division of the tribes of Israel and Judah!

Often, young people become arrogant and cocky thinking they know better than the previous generation. Thus, they only hang out with peers instead of having close relationships with those who have already paid the price with many years in the pastorate.

2. Being too dogmatic in doctrine and worldview

I've heard it said that none of us should write books until we're at least 50 years old. This is because when we are younger we think we know it all and we tend to be very dogmatic in our belief systems. We are not very open to dissonance and varying views, but tend to view everything (out of fear and insecurity?) through black-and-white lenses. Truly, the older I get the less I know.

Also, many young pastors make a big issue of certain doctrinal controversies that are not considered essentials of the faith. (Examples of essentials of the faith include the divinity of Christ, salvation by faith, repentance, and the judgment to come for the lost.)

3. Having zeal without knowledge and operating in presumption

Romans 10:2 says that people can operate in a passion for God without knowledge. Psalm 19:13 tells us to pray to be delivered from presumptuous sins.

Many young ministers exhibit great passion and compelling vision that is not very well thought out. The result: their work soon flatlines and fizzles out.

We have to know the voice of the Lord which can only be fully discerned, in most cases, in the context of the church with other trusted leaders who will give the senior leader feedback. Unfortunately, many go from one vision to the next every six months and wear out their churches and discourage their people from trusting their judgment again.

4. Being driven by ambition and a need to succeed more than serving for the glory of God

It has been said that during the first half of our lives we are driven to succeed while during the second half we are driven to be significant by pouring into others and leaving a

legacy.

Truly, ministers between their twenties and mid-forties have the temptation of accomplishing something great and making a mark in the world. This is because our culture teaches that our self-worth is derived from our “doing” and not out of a healthy self-image of “being.” Sometimes it takes years to realize that all of our accomplishments are not really as satisfying as we thought they would be, and that what really matters in the end is what we do for the glory of God that empowers the people of God.

5. Using people as objects to get to the next level

Often, because of their great need to prove themselves and succeed on a grand scale, young leaders view every person in their churches as mere objects to get them or their churches to the next level. This is the reason why some pastors badmouth those in their congregations or treat them with indifference and disdain! This displeases the Lord, because every person has value as an image-bearer of God, and because He shed His blood for each and every person in our midst, whether we deem them important to our vision or not! We need to love, honor and respect each and every person whether or not they will ever be used to help serve us in fulfilling the vision the Lord has given us.

6. Rarely living in the present

Young leaders who are driven to succeed are always looking for the next big thing on their agendas. They very rarely enter into the world of those they are speaking to; during the moment they are with one person they are already thinking about the next person they have to meet or the next thing they have to do on their agendas! This causes great stress and robs them of the joy of God’s presence in the routines of each moment of their lives.

7. Preaching what has not yet been personally experienced or

encountered with God

Many young pastors and leaders preach what they have not yet practiced in their lives. This makes them open to hypocrisy and compartmentalization.

There are certain subjects in which they will not be able to minister with authority for years to come. This is because of the intense dealings of God that accompany certain messages and/or lifestyles. Subjects such as successfully raising children to adulthood, emotional health, and marriage should be approached with fear and trembling—not with a calm assurance that comes with dogmatism. In some cases it would be better if a young pastor brought in older ministers to teach on certain subjects that take a lifetime to learn well instead of trying to teach these subjects superficially.

8. Neglecting emotional health and maturity

Many young leaders spend their formative years focusing only on accomplishments, mission and activities while neglecting their interior lives. Unfortunately, if we do not take time for the proper reflection needed to process pain, disappointment, and failure—and offer up our brokenness to God—then we will experience severe leakage in the future that will negatively affect our families and key relationships, even resulting in moral and spiritual failure!

9. Gifting that exceeds character development

Most of society—including the body of Christ—are enamored with the gifts, talents and abilities of others (for example: *American Idol*, *Dancing with the Stars*, etc.)

Young leaders, more than most, tend to overemphasize the development of their gifts and abilities which sometimes places them in high-pressure responsibility situations that exceed their character capacity. The result is spiritual and emotional meltdowns, and even a dependence on unhealthy things

to medicate themselves and alleviate their pressure (for example: excessive entertainment, substance abuse, pornography, overeating, illicit relationships, inordinate amounts of time on social networking websites like Facebook, etc.).

One rule of thumb is to build our lives upon the foundation of character development (2 Peter 1:5-9) and not upon the faulty foundation of gifts and abilities.

10. Driving the church instead of leading the flock

In my 30-plus years of ministry I have witnessed many young pastors drive their congregations to the point of burning out young married couples who are trying to raise their new families. Their zeal to succeed in their mission has blinded them to the needs of their congregations!

As a general rule, I don't believe we should expect folks to be out to church more than three nights per week. (During certain short seasons of time or during emergencies this can be exceeded.) Those driving their people to attend meetings four to seven days per week will not be able to keep stable people who are attempting to nurture their careers and families. This kind of schedule will only fit with a church demographic of mostly single people who need a lot of fellowship and activity, and/or a church of those coming out of substance abuse who also need to avoid boredom so they don't fall back into their past bondages.

11. Sacrificing children and family for the work of the ministry

In their drive to succeed, many young pastors and leaders put so much on their schedules they neglect precious time with their spouses and children. In our attempt to win the world often we lose our very own children and marriages. This is why many children of pastors never want to be involved in full-time ministry and very rarely attend church or serve God once

they reach the age of 18.

I tell young pastors all the time to work their schedules and calendars around spending good quality time with their families. Once we have strong families then God can build into us a multi-generational family blessing that will be a model for our churches, which are really each a family of families.

12. Not honoring spiritual fathers and mothers

Many young pastor leaders sever ties with their spiritual fathers and mothers when they enter into the ministry because they want to facilitate a different vision or philosophy of ministry. It's fine to have a different vision but we should obey the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12) and always honor those the Lord has used to nurture us spiritually and bring us to faith, even if we are no longer under their spiritual leadership. How we treat our spiritual fathers and mothers will be the way our spiritual sons and daughters treat us when they are older because whatsoever we sow we also shall reap!

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