

Default Leadership: Two Significant Gaffes Leaders Make

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by Joel Garcia

Leaders are responsible for many things; acquiring and shaping vision, personal and corporate communication, strategic planning, budgeting, training, supervision, executing the plan and the plan's results. These are basic functions that all leaders can identify with. But there's a missing ingredient from this list. What is it? It's the way leaders treat and relate to team members, a key indicator of one's ability to lead effectively. This is why most people in leadership positions are not leaders; some are more focused on tasks but limited in people skills. Some in positions of leadership lead for selfish reasons, to achieve a personal goal or to advance themselves. Then there are those leaders who don't know how to lead because they've never been trained properly. Leadership is not that complicated; it's simply being a genuine person who connects well with others on a personal level, then leverages followers' talents, skills and energy to achieve organizational goals.

Organizations today are in desperate need of good leaders who prioritize relationships. There are times when leaders get so busy in the daily grind of work schedules that they fail to build relational value with their followers. As a result, relationships wane and even dissolve substantively because the mission becomes more important than developing community. Leaders cannot allow relationships to suffer; they must learn to be intentional and diligent to work on their people skills continuously. In the thirty years of my workplace experience, I have personally seen leaders, including myself, default in many areas, but there are two significant gaffes that stand out the most.

Long on vision, short on relationship

A leader who has a lot of vision but lacks the skills or time to build solid relationships will eventually live alone in the future. Leaders need to have a vision for where they're taking a project or organization, this much is true, but they also need relationships to bring the vision to fruition. Leaders

who “drive” hard tend to make this mistake; they don’t take the time to value and build meaningful relationships, which empower the vision for the long haul. In turn, the vision suffers a dose of malnutrition because the synergy required to build and sustain momentum becomes sluggish, in some cases nonexistent. It is not good to toss out idea after idea without building meaningful relationships, nor is it wise to hurry people to get things done quickly and miss what’s truly important – relationship. What can a leader do to bring balance into his or her life? First, understand that the future isn’t going anywhere; you’ll get there soon enough. You may even have to put up with a little delay. Delay is better than decay. Delay is a slowdown, whereas, decay is a meltdown. Second, be intentional and strategic about developing relationships. Depending on the size of your staff, take the time to connect with everyone at a personal level at least once a week; some relationships take more time than others to develop. Therefore, learn to schedule times of connection with your staff on your calendar. Maximize this time of connection by asking questions about their life. As they open up, show genuine concern and follow up within a few days. Be open to offer assistance when it’s in your power to do so. Third, show them you’re a real person with feelings and vulnerabilities. A vulnerable boss is better than a shielded one. One who is honest is better than one who is unapproachable and distant. These are a few strategies you can put in place to close the relational gap. Within time, you’ll see results as people become easier to lead and the vision becomes more appetizing for all involved.

Neglect: Love gathers – Inattention scatters

A second default is when leaders fall short in loving their followers unconditionally. When this happens, people become disengaged and eventually scatter. Employees and followers will leave your organization, and find an alternate place where they can be nurtured, developed, appreciated and celebrated. People will tolerate a leader to a certain point, especially when the relationship never seems to advance from superficial to deeper levels. This is evident in the biblical story of King Saul when he was persecuting David. Saul’s power grip as a king was weakening, while David’s leadership influence was gaining momentum among the people. The storyline goes like this:

David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father’s household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader.

(1 Samuel 21: 2 NIV)

What King Saul was unable to do – build meaningful relationships, and help them solve their problems – David accomplished. Why? It comes down to one simple thing – the ability to love others unconditionally by helping them resolve their problems. Love has a powerful gathering effect. When someone genuinely loves people, they'll attract and garner support much quicker than those who don't.

There is nothing worse than a neglected employee who carries his or her workload everyday but is relationally deprived. You cannot neglect your team members for too long. In *The Way of the Shepherd*, authors Dr. Kevin Leman and William Pentak offer this advice:

You have to really care about your people. You can go through all the right mechanics but if you don't genuinely care about the people who report to you, you'll never be the kind of leader they'll drop everything to follow. If they're nothing but stinking sheep to you, they'll never do their best work for you and they don't stay in your fold for long.

As a leader, you have to take time for your people, and at times, deal with their problems if you're going to be respected and followed. Love is the relational tonic that soothes, heals and restores, while possessing the potency able to increase relational capacity. Neglect, on the other hand, causes relationships to become lean. In time, people will look somewhere else for a leader who will lead them with love.

Leaders, your first priority to any organization is building relational value. It's out of relational value that production increases. When people are loved, they'll put out more effort for you. King Solomon, the sage of the ages, confirms this principle:

Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds... [then] the lambs will provide your clothing, the goats the price of a field. You shall have enough goats' milk for your food. For the food of your household, and the nourishment of your maidservants. (Proverbs 27:23, 26 & 27 - NKJV)

In simple terms, people are like sheep, when a shepherd-leader builds relational value by exercising love and attending regularly to team members,' production increases, long-term commitment builds and loyalty develops among team members. In sum, love gathers but inattention scatters.

About the Author

Joel Garcia is an ordained minister with the Evangelical Church Alliance and, for the past 16 years, has served as a senior executive pastor at the International Church of Las Vegas (ICLV). He has been involved in most facets of church ministry and has experienced various levels of church growth ranging from a membership core of 250 to a roster that now exceeds over 5,000 in weekly attendance. Joel's experience includes strategic development of ministry teams, and the planning and planting of ICLV church extensions in the Las Vegas community. Joel earned his graduate degree in organizational leadership with an emphasis in executive coaching and mentoring from Regent University.

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