

Chapter I

Common mistakes that weak leaders make

There's no such person as a perfect or ideal leader. Every leader makes mistakes; the challenge is to know what the most common ones are so that you can try to avoid them. The most common mistakes made by weak leaders are:

Failing to learn from mistakes

Refusing to acknowledge mistakes is the worse in someone aspiring to be a leader. Religious leaders may declare their infallibility, but they're not right all the time. Dictators may trumpet their perfection, but that only makes their downfall more sudden when it comes. But you don't have to be a dictator or the head of a major religion to be guilty of failing to learn from your own mistakes.

Some leaders like to believe that they got to the top by being smarter than the people around them and by being right more often. A wise leader recognizes that more than climbing to the top, he or she has *survived* to the top by overcoming hardship, missed opportunities, blown judgment calls, and poor human relations. But the leader who won't learn feels that none of that matters. We've known leaders who talk about being "inside the bubble," protected from the realities of the world by the trappings that come with leadership. Guess what? The bubble can burst.

Failing to be flexible

A good leader has to be flexible. Situations change; the members of your team change; technology changes, the marketplace changes; everything changes. If you can't accept change and the fact that much of your leadership energy will be devoted to helping your team adjust to those changes, you can never become an effective leader.

The ability to change is essential. Holding on to old ways of doing things just because they've always been done that way, is a sure way to be unsuccessful. Changes are a part of the game, even if this means getting rid of a poor performing worker or product range that is no longer profitable.

As a leader you have to treat your business like a garden. Continue to water, fertilize and weed your garden and it will continue to reap a quality harvest year after year.

Failing to acknowledge your past

Natural leadership is a myth. Leaders are made through training, mentoring, guidance, and circumstance. Nobody wakes up under a cabbage leaf one day and appears at Camelot as the "perfect knight." And when people do come along seemingly from nowhere, their failures as leaders are out in the open and spectacular, such as Joan of Arc, a teenage girl who led an army but was captured and put to death at the height of her success.

Great leaders return to their roots repeatedly in order to replenish themselves. They go back to the people from whom they've learned, and they learn something more. They are aware of the fact that they don't know everything, and they get help from the people who have helped them in the past. Vain leaders and poor leaders make the assumption that appearing to lean on others is a sign of weakness, and so they refuse to acknowledge their past or even cover it up. Good leaders know that if you ask about something once, you appear ignorant only once, but if you don't, you remain ignorant forever.

Failing to carry people along

It is a big mistake on part of the leaders to start commanding instead of leading. The idea that commanding is leading is an archaic idea. Instead of working on commanding voice and presence, one has to work on cooperation skills.

Failing to listen

Leaders have to listen the voices of the group, outside voices clamoring for a solution to a problem, the voices of the higher-ups who are judging their performance, the voice of the marketplace, and their own inner voice.

Don't underestimate the importance of listening to your followers. While listening is as important in communication as speaking, it is also true that listening to followers is as important as listening to superiors and experts.

The most common complaint against leaders of all kinds who are turfed out is, "He or she wasn't listening to me."

Failing to accept criticism

Just because you're in a leadership position does not mean that you suddenly become immune to making the wrong decisions. As a leader you have to listen to constructive criticism and act on them. If a worker cares enough to share criticism, the least you can do is listen. Good leaders listen to their weaknesses but focus on their strengths.

Failing to be modest

Many leaders see their position as a privilege — an entitlement to the perks that go along with being at the top. The first thing a new leader should learn is modesty. If you've been given a large office, turn it into a reception area and use another room as your office.

Unfortunately, leaders all too often make a fetish of the perks that come with power and look for new trappings to confirm their authority. All these trappings are for show, and such show only makes people cynical about their leaders.

A good leader finds ways to put the needs of other people into the forefront. It is not enough to patronize a cause; as a leader, participate and promote those things in which you believe.

Failing to realize that leadership is not forever

Good leaders know that times and circumstances change and that they have a limited window of opportunity in which to be effective. When the window is open, they have to do everything in their power to achieve their visions. But when the window starts to close, they also have to know how to plan for a graceful exit.

It has to be realized that nothing is permanent and guaranteed, even Pluto lost its status as a planet after 75 years!

Failing to teach

Just as a leader needs to constantly add to his or her knowledge base, a leader also has to be a constant teacher. Many leaders make an assumption that there is an unbridgeable gulf between themselves and their followers, so they fail to impart what they've learned, allowing their followers to remain in the dark.

Groups succeed because their knowledge and skill bases rise faster than those of competing groups, so it seems obvious that learning and teaching are integral to the success of leaders. Leaders who think that teaching is beneath them are destined to fail.

Failing to delegate responsibilities

This is often a problem for small business owner/managers. One has to trust that the subordinates can do the things that he has been doing for so long. If they really can't do the job because a particular skill is needed, then get them the training required or hire someone who can. A big part of leadership and management is about making sure that things run smoothly and efficiently, and that does not mean running from job to job doing everything on your own!

Many of the world's greatest leaders are people of average intelligence who don't know all there is to know in their industry. But the crux is that they understand that they can't possibly know everything and they hire people that do know everything! The success of any business is in the hands of its workers and the leading managers and entrepreneurs of the world all strive to hire the best in their field. Good leaders know that they can't know everything.

Failing to Empower Subordinates

Delegation of responsibility and empowerment go hand in hand. There can be no rights without responsibilities and vice versa. Some leaders neither delegate responsibilities nor empower their team members. Failing to empower people results in a weak team or a "non-team." A strong leader trusts others and helps them to formulate strategies, solve problems, and make correct decisions.

Failing to have a sense of humour

John F. Kennedy was probably the first modern leader, someone who led by example rather than by command. Whatever may be Kennedy's faults as a man, or even as a leader, the one thing that no one can assail was Kennedy's remarkable sense of humour. Kennedy's press conferences, where he actively jostled with the White House press corps, make memorable viewing to this day, and set a standard for contemporary leaders.

Unfortunately, too many leaders become pompous when they assume the mantle of leadership. Leadership is stewardship: you are assuming a set of responsibilities, not getting your title carved in stone. If you can't laugh over the irony of your position and how you have become a target for every person who thinks he or she could do better, you will fail.

Failing to make fine distinctions

The world exists in myriad colors and subtle shades, and the leader who can learn to see the world in all its polychrome wonder and to make the fine distinctions in shadings that are required to solve problems without causing confrontations, is the leader who will ultimately succeed.

Failing to leave ego

The sin (and danger) of excessive pride (or an excessive ego) is admirably demonstrated in this simple fable:

A frog asked two geese to take him south with them. At first they resisted; they didn't see how it could be done. Finally, the frog suggested that the two geese hold a stick in their beaks and that he would hold on to it with his mouth.

So off the unlikely threesome went, flying southward over the countryside. It was really quite a sight. People looked up and expressed great admiration at this demonstration of creative teamwork.

Someone said, "It's wonderful! Who was so clever to discover such a fine way to travel?"

Whereupon the frog opened his mouth and said, "It was I," as it plummeted to the earth.

Failing to remember “You only get what you give”

Two boys were once climbing a mountain when one tripped and fell down. He grazed his knee and was in considerable pain. "Aahh", groaned the boy who had fallen down. "Aahh" resounded the mountainside. "Who are you?" asked the boy in anger, "Who are you" resounded the valley.

Considerably agitated by now, the boy got to his feet and swung his clenched fist in anger, "Show your face you coward, I will smash you to smithereens". "Show your face you coward, I will smash you to smithereens," came the reply.

By now the other boy was smiling sympathetically at his injured friend. "Why are you smiling?" asked the injured boy.

Lending him a helping hand the boy raised him to his feet and said "listen" and shouted "I love you", and the mountainside responded with a louder "I love you". "You are the greatest" and pat came the reply from the mountain.

"Understand the depth of Nature friend," said the boy, "you only get back what you give. Your life is a reflection of you, it will only show you who you truly are."

Failing to set right priorities and do right time management

Procrastination is one of the biggest enemies of leader. Putting something off till tomorrow that should be done today can totally change the future! Often procrastination is a result of having no plan or list of priorities.

Failing to accept personal responsibility and accountability:

A strong leader takes responsibility for the team when things go wrong, gives credit to the team when things go right, and is humble in the background. Strong leaders never blame a team member when speaking to their boss or others outside the team.

Failing to influence attitudes & thinking:

Trying to control results is like treating a symptom instead of the disease. Instead, realize that work performance improves in direct proportion to healthy attitudes and mental discipline.

Failing to breed positivity

Concentrate on what's going wrong and you'll breed an atmosphere of negativity. To avoid this, concentrate on the positive while still being aware of problems.

Failing to draw a line between a Boss and a Buddy

It is likely that you'll have to make a hard decision "against" your friend someday. Friendship cannot come first in matters of professional performance. Grant no extra privileges to anyone based on anything other than what is fair.

Failing to Set, Monitor, and Enforce Standards:

When a manager allows a standard to be violated, or personally violates it, then a new standard has been set. What the leader does will be justification for everyone else to "follow the leader" and violate the standard.

Failing to inculcate discipline

It happens so easily. An employee does a job inadequately and we choose to look the other way saying nothing. Wrong. Bite the bullet and confront the problem with discipline, not punishment. *In private*, talk to the person about his or her behavior with the intent of changing that behavior. This is discipline.

Failing to use Informal Recognition to Create Top Performers:

We all need to be told that we did a good job and the best leaders dole out informal and personal rewards regularly. Walking around and just saying to your people that they are doing well or a pat on the back will build a sharp team.

(Prepared on the basis of "Uninspiring Leadership: 13 Common Mistakes That Weak Leaders Make *by Robert Walsh*" and "Top 7 Leadership Mistakes" by Kristine Geimure)

Chapter II

Myths about leadership

A myth is something that is false, but believed to be true. As in many things in life, there are several myths surrounding the concept and practice of leadership. Unfortunately, these myths prevent qualified people from rising to the top. Leadership myths listed below, based on “leadership mythology” by Greg Smith, President of a management-consulting firm, Atlanta, Georgia, will help dispel many of the false beliefs:

Myth 1: Leadership is a rare skill.

Everyone has leadership potential, just as everyone has some level of ability in athletics, mechanical tasks, and the arts. Great leaders simply develop their potential just as great athletes train and talented performers rehearse. Leadership opportunities are plentiful and within the reach of most people. You can be a leader in one aspect of your life while having a different role in another part of your life. For instance, a teacher's assistant may also be an all-star coach; a driver/custodian may also be a Boy Scout or Girl Scout leader.

Most people have the potential to become good leaders. Leadership is not like a diet pill. Like most learned skills, it takes time, training, and lots of trial by error. The key ingredient making people good leaders is the *ability to care about others*. The second ingredient is *a sense of purpose, vision or mission*. A good leader charts a course and provides direction to those they lead.

Myth 2: Leaders are born, not made

Good leaders are made not born. If you have the desire and willpower, you can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience.

All of the leadership characteristics can be developed or attained. None are genetic, although some of the traits may be the gifts of wise parents to some very fortunate young people. For many of us, they are the results of hard

work over years of time (very slowly developed habits in most cases). Some have done it through formal classes or sessions with professionals, other through observation and practice; but all have worked at honing their abilities.

Can an average person become a leader? Yes, most certainly. People can transform themselves and make huge strides in leadership abilities just as they do in other areas of personal development. It starts with inner self-leadership and expands outward to influence and move others around you. Leadership is about self-direction and self-control and shows in what "we do." Become the right kind of person (passionate, responsible, doer, believer) and others will flock right into your lap, and not until.

But, like other areas of self improvement, it's no easy task, because man's natural instinct is mediocrity. Yes, mediocrity. It would be nice if we could all become leaders by simply following a few simple steps. But the path to leadership requires finding our own way. The direction we take will differ for each of us. However, there are a few key traits we can focus on.

So, the final step is to do some self-analysis and lay out a plan of personal development. When you have identified your strengths and areas of development you need to find ways to maximize your strengths and work on your weaknesses. One of the best ways to do the latter is to find a mentor who is strong in the areas of your weaknesses and have that person give you some coaching.

Several renowned leaders in the area of education and child advocacy had very modest beginnings. They attained leadership positions through hard work and experience. The major competencies of leadership can be learned through practice and experience.

This may not be easy, and there is no simple do-it-yourself guide to leadership. However, for those who have prepared themselves and are willing to put forth the effort, leadership can be learned.

To inspire your workers into higher levels of teamwork, there are certain things you must be, know, and, do. These do not come naturally, but are acquired through continual work and study. Good leaders are continually working and studying to improve their leadership skills; they are NOT resting on their laurels

Myth 3: Leaders must be charismatic

Charisma is not a prerequisite for success as a leader. Leaders come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and cultural backgrounds. There are no requirements for any certain type of physical appearance, health, personality, or style. Many leaders are charismatic, but closer scrutiny shows that most leaders are not. Some of the world's most famous leaders had some sort of shortcoming or personality issue. In a leadership role, people skills are very important--more important than technical skills. However, the best leaders are those who work toward a goal. Your cause, your purpose and your mission in life will make you charismatic, not the other way around.

Myth 4: The person with the highest position is the leader, leadership exists only at the top of an organization

Have you noticed that the most successful organizations have many people who are willing and able to assume leadership positions? Think about the programs and organizations in your community. Perhaps one or two stand out as strong models of quality. Many leaders may exist in those programs and organizations, not just the director or executive director. Do these programs and organizations have several staff members who are outstanding in their field? Strong leadership breeds leaders. All levels of programs and organizations have plenty of room for leaders.

True leadership is not based on position or rank. It is based on action, performance, ability, and effectiveness. We all relate to working for those people who were placed in leadership roles who did more to demoralize and destroy the business than anything else.

The best companies strive to develop and create as many leaders as possible. The practice of natural leadership "leadership by followship." They don't appoint people as leaders . . .they let the true leaders surface to the top. People naturally gravitate to those they want to follow, respect, and work with. There are no limiting job descriptions, job titles, and few rules and regulations. If a person comes up with a new idea, he or she puts a team together of people who have the desire and knowledge to make it work.

Myth 5: Effective leadership is based on control, coercion, and manipulation.

Leadership should not be seen as an exercise of power, but rather as the empowerment of others. Good leaders do not need to control and manipulate others because they have aligned the energies of the staff and community behind an inspiring vision. These leaders have breathed motivation into others so that they can create their own goals to fulfill the common vision. People should accept leadership, not be coerced into following it. Good leaders lead by pulling, not by pushing; by inspiring, not by ordering; by enabling people to use their own initiative, not by constraining or controlling them; by creating realistic goals, not by setting unreasonable expectations; and by rewarding progress, not by ignoring achievements. They should be able to command respect, not demand it.

Leadership is about the future, not the past. Joel Barker's has the best quote about leadership, "A leader is someone you would follow to a place you would not go to by yourself." Good leaders gain followers out of respect and their ability to cause people to work toward a particular goal or achieve a destination. People follow because they can relate to the vision or goal personalized by the leader. A good leader helps people become better than they are. A good leader creates a work environment that attracts, keeps and motivates its workforce.

Myth 6 - Good leaders have more education than other people

Educational degrees may mean you have a good education, but it doesn't necessarily mean you are a good leader. When it comes to leadership, experience is the best teacher. The U.S. military has the best leadership development program in the world. In the military, you start out at the bottom. You are placed in leadership positions and closely evaluated. As your experience broadens, so does your responsibility. This practical experience is reinforced with weeks and months of formal training throughout the individual's career.

The secret of success is those years of experience on the front-line. This is where a person learns to manage those interactions, experiences, and conflicts. You learn how to balance the needs of the mission versus the needs of the individual. The military model of leadership development may not be perfect, but remains unequalled by any other organization

Chapter III

Phases of leadership growth

In the “Law of process”, in his book “21 Irrefutable laws of leadership”, Maxwell has beautifully described the four phases of leadership growth. Whether you do or don’t have great natural ability for leadership, your development and progress will probably occur according to the following four phases.

A. I Don’t Know What I Don’t Know

Most people fail to recognize the value of leadership. They believe that leadership is only for a few – for the people at the top of the corporate ladder. They have no idea of the opportunities they’re passing up when they don’t learn to lead. This point was driven home for me when a college president shared with me that only a handful of students signed up for a leadership course offered by the school. Why? Only a few thought of themselves as leaders. If they had known that leadership is influence, and that in the course of each day most individuals usually try to influence at least four other people, their desire might have been sparked to learn more about the subject. It’s unfortunate because as long as a person doesn’t know what he doesn’t know, he doesn’t grow.

B. I Know What I Don’t Know

Usually at some point in life, we are placed in a leadership position only to look around and discover that no one is following us. That’s when we realize that we need to *learn* how to lead. And of course, that’s when it’s possible for the process to start. English Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli wisely commented, “*To be conscious that you are ignorant of the facts is a great step to knowledge.*”

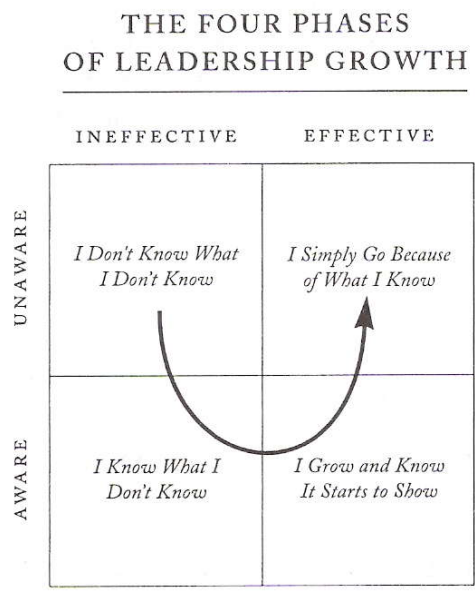
That’s what happened to me when I took my first leadership position in 1969. I had captained sports teams all my life and had been the student government president in college, so I already thought I was a leader. But when I tried to lead People in the real world, I found out

the awful truth. That prompted me to start gathering resources and learning from them. I also has another idea: I wrote to the top ten leaders in my field and offered them on hundred dollars for a half hour of their time so that I could ask them questions. (That was quite a sum for me in 1969.) For the next several years, my wife, Margaret, and I planned every vacation around where those people lived. If a great leader in Cleveland said yes to my request, then that year we vacationed in Cleveland so that I could meet him. And my idea really paid off. Those men shared insights with me that I could have learned no other way.

C. I Grow And Know It Starts To Show

When you recognize your lack of skill and begin the daily discipline of personal growth in leadership, exciting things start to happen.

A while back I was teaching a group of people in Denver, and in the crowd I noticed a really sharp nineteen –year – old named Brian. For a couple of days, I watched as he eagerly took notes. I talked to him a few times during breaks. When I got to the part of the seminar where I teach the Law of Process, I asked Brian to stand to stand up so that I could talk while everyone listened. I said, “Brain, I’ve been watching you here, and I’m very impressed with how hungry you are to learn and glean and grow. I want to tell you a secret that will change your life.” Everyone in the whole auditorium seemed to lean forward.



“I believe that in about twenty years, you can be a *great* leader. I want to encourage you to make yourself a lifelong learner of leadership. Read books, listen to tapes regularly, and keep attending seminars. And whenever you come across a golden nugget of truth or a significant quote, file it away for the future.

“It’s not going to be easy,” I said, “But in five years, you’ll see progress as your influence becomes greater. In ten years you’ll develop a competence that makes your leadership highly effective.

And in twenty years, when you’re only thirty-nine years old, if you’ve continued to learn and grow, others will likely start asking you to teach them about leadership. And some will be amazed. They’ll look at each other and say, ‘How did he suddenly become so wise?’

“Brian, you can be a great leader, but it won’t happen in a day. Start paying the price now.” What’s true for Brian is also true for you. Start developing your leadership today, and someday you will experience the effects of the Law of Process.

“The secret of success in life is for a man to be ready for his time when it comes.”- Benjamin Disraeli

D. I Simply Go Because Of What I Know

When you’re in phase 3, you can be pretty effective as a leader, but you have to think about every more you make. However, when you get to phase 4, your ability to lead becomes almost automatic. And that’s when the payoff’s larger than life. But the only way to get there is to obey the Law of Process and pay the price.