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THE FIVE WAYS LEADERS LOSE THEIR EDGE

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Whether the economic times are flourishing or floundering, many leaders get stuck in the same trap: they don't take time to stop and reflect on what they're doing. Because there's so much for them to do and they have so much responsibility and accountability on their shoulders, they're constantly on the go, striving to deliver results.

However, their non-stop action only feeds the underlying problem – that there's no alignment between what's important to them and what's important to their company. As a result, they feel unfulfilled, stressed out, and yearning for something different. That's why they need to take a step back, a time out, and give some serious thought to what they're doing and why they're doing it. Only then can they see what they bring to their leadership position and how it can help them reach both their personal and professional objectives.

The fact is many leaders often get so fixated on the success of their team and the results of their efforts that they forget to focus on themselves. Yet it's their own ability to sustain a high level of effectiveness that is one of the biggest contributors to the company's overall success. So if you ever feel that you're working harder and harder but feeling less and less fulfilled, you may be making one these top mistakes. Take the steps to correct them today so you can reap bigger rewards tomorrow.

1. THEY IGNORE THE VISION

Having a vision means you're clear about what you want. You are able to describe it in vivid detail. You know a little something about what it will take to get there and how it will feel to arrive. When you have a clear vision, you can connect to an inner source of inspiration that will call you forth and compel you to achieve your goals. Therefore, you need to get a vision not only for the company, but also for your own role as a leader. Who do you want to be as a leader? What do you want to achieve? What strengths do you bring to the role, and how can you capitalize on those strengths to meet your own goals and the goals of the company?

2. THEY LOSE THEIR FOCUS

Once you know your vision and what you want to achieve as a leader, you need to stay focused on it. As Harvard Business School Professor Robert Kaplan commented, "Having fifteen priorities is the same as not having any at all." There's only so much you can think about at once. Finding

focus is about choosing where to put your time, energy and attention. It means highlighting, combining, minimizing, and even deleting priorities so your choices fit neatly in the greater context of your life. Once you know what's most important, you can let other things drop. So, if you really want what you say you want, what areas do you have to focus on to get it? What areas will help you achieve your vision?

3. THEY TAKE INEFFICIENT ACTION

After you decide where to focus, make sure your daily action plans reflect that priority – not just the 25 other things on the list. While many leaders are taking care of the needs of the business, their employees, the other people in their lives, and their existing responsibilities, they're not taking action on the things that matter most to them. Therefore, stop asking, "How can I do everything I need to do in a day?" and start asking, "What are the most effective actions I can take to move toward my vision, and how can I ensure that I take those actions now?" By investing just minutes in the planning process and then taking targeted action, you can shave hours, weeks and even months off the time it takes to reach your goals.

4. THEY DO THINGS THE HARD WAY

In business and in life, you always have a choice. You can continue to do things the hard way, the usual way, the way you've always done them. Or, you can do things your way – the way you were made to do them. The key is to identify, maximize and leverage your unique attributes so you can be an effective, higher achieving leader. When you focus on your strengths, you do things your way based on where you naturally excel. To begin finding your strengths, answer these questions: Where are you especially talented? What do you love to do? At work, what are you recognized for? Given the freedom to do things your way, how do you do them?

5. THEY BECOME DISCONNECTED FROM THEIR WORK

To be successful, you need to connect not only to your work, but also to an inner sense of vitality. For many leaders, much of their energy goes into striving. They want to get ahead. They want to achieve. Finding fulfillment and alignment with your work means understanding what you're striving for. The meaning. The purpose. The essence. When you lack fulfillment, you lose your edge. Your energy goes down while your stress goes up. You may even feel guilty and resentful. You might be bored, either in an "I-can't-take-this-anymore" way or in a dull, channel-surfing kind of way. You might get short-tempered or edgy. So the questions to contemplate are: What do you want from your work? Do you want to be happy? Are you trying to reach your full potential? Do you hope to make a difference? Do you want to feel at peace? These are some of the experiences leaders seek when they seek "success." The key to finding fulfillment at work is to identify what success means to you – not the results but the spirit of a life well lived.

RECLAIM YOUR LEADERSHIP EDGE

While these five mistakes are by no means all-inclusive of all the pitfalls leaders need to be wary of, by avoiding these common mistakes you're laying the foundation for exceptional leadership results. The fact is that every day, millions of people drive onto the fast-lane and race their lives away – ironically missing the fact that everything they are doing to try to improve their life is actually running them into the ground. The work weeks get longer, the stress levels rise, and talented leaders burn out or move on. It doesn't have to be this way.

So as you go forward into the future, know that every step you take to improve your leadership is going to enrich your life and the lives of others. By avoiding these top five leadership mistakes, you will be on the path to becoming the kind of leader who changes the world ... the kind of leader others will follow ... the kind of leader you were meant to be.



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