

Ten Ways to Kill A Good Ministry

I hope you find this helpful. I believe it will change the way anyone leads—not only in a church or fellowship, but at home, work, or anywhere a person provides leadership. It is not just for pastors! It is for assisting ministers, for lay leaders, or anyone who is in charge of a process that involves people under them. This list will only be as helpful to you as you are honest with yourself. Pray. Ask God to reveal the weak areas in your leadership, as well as the strong ones. Again, not the areas that you perceive to be strong or weak, but the ones God says are strong and weak. He is faithful to help you be successful!

1. Don't set any goals:

Proverbs 29:18 tells us that “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Workers lose momentum and enthusiasm when there is no clear objective to be attained.

2. Don't lead by example, and whatever you do, never admit that you are wrong:

People will not go where the leader will not go. Do not give expectations beyond what you personally are willing to achieve. Likewise, do not give unrealistic expectations. A leader must give workers manageable tasks that progress step by step, and must always be sure to *follow their own standards* times two. Ultimately, the greatest strength a leader is honesty, and sometimes that means admitting when you are wrong. A leader actually comes out stronger by admitting when wrong because it takes character to do just that. People respect that. They already know the leader is wrong, so why not just admit it?

3. Don't empower your people, and/or don't give them ownership in the ministry:

A leader who will not empower others will soon be doing everything—all alone. No one wants to sit around and watch one person run around frantically trying to “do it all” because “that person” is *responsible* for the ministry. Worse yet, *do not* give someone a title (say assistant _____ leader), and then take their decision-making process away by not consulting with them or overriding them continuously. Few genuine people volunteer just to get a title; rather, they volunteer to *help the cause*. If the leader takes their cause away, then the volunteer will not be long in finding another worthwhile cause.

Unfortunately, many leaders believe that they are losing control or authority by empowering or giving ownership of a task to others. This is simply not true. A leader who will not let go of the ownership of a task is crippling the assistant. A policeman is not the final authority. Nonetheless, take away the policeman's power to arrest, his gun, and his badge, and you don't have much of a policeman. What you have is chaos. The same goes with any ministry: Workers not empowered to complete the task given to them to complete equals chaos!

4. Don't train your people:

Never assume someone knows how to do a task (formally trained), that he/she has competence at performing a task (proficiency), or that they will always remember how to do a task (re-training). Take into consideration the competence of a certain person, but train from the bottom to the top. For example, an assisting minister may be ready to preach at an 80 member church, but someone from the congregation may not know how to formulate and properly execute a sermon at all. Therefore, the jump-in points are different for them. An assisting minister may just need to know the sermon topic, the direction to take the congregation, and how long the sermon will be, while the lay person may need to be taught the components of a sermon, good speaking techniques, how to create something that will capture the congregation's attention, and help with grammatical problems (not to mention tons of practice). *The key is this: It is imperative that he/she be properly trained to complete a task no matter what level a person enters into a position or what that person's ability is.*

5. Don't coordinate with your people and backdoor them continuously:

No one likes a "stingy" leader—one that gives authority but takes it away at the drop of a hat. Train a person, give that person ownership of a task, explain expectations, and then empower him/her to do it. *Never* go around a worker that is empowered to do a certain task. Always work *through* that person. Making a decision or coordinating a task that the leader has assigned to another is tempting for that leader to short circuit in a time crunch. Never justify doing a go-around on an assistant just for the sake of saving time. Always work a problem through the person assigned to the task! A leader who does not do this correctly with integrity will find him or her self making all the decisions alone once again. Why do we give people tasks to do in the first place? To take the burden off the leader. Don't pick it back up again!

6. Don't communicate with your people:

Even Spirit-filled Christians cannot read a leader's mind. Communicate with your people. Tell them what is going on—and often. Tell them what the expectations are, the deadlines, and the basic thought on how to complete a given task (the key word here is *basic*). It's OK if every minor detail is not exactly how the leader envisioned—that is called releasing ownership to someone else. The question here is this: Was the goal met by the standards given? If the answer is yes, then praise God.

7. Do not collect feedback from your people:

"I know something that you don't know." This is true concerning your workers and volunteers. Everything looks great on paper, but putting a process to task can present a whole other set of problems. Those people that serve under a leader know what's wrong. They may know the "who, what, when, where and how", and often times even know how to fix it. At the least, they always know when something is wrong. They're in the trench. They're engaged. Occasionally, a leader may feel weak for asking workers for their input when just the opposite is true. When leaders ask others for input, workers think, "Wow! That leader cares! That leader believes in me! That leader values my opinion! That leader values ME!" Asking for input doesn't mean the leader has to do it exactly as suggested, but every leader must be willing to listen to feedback, honestly step back and evaluate the process, and then change it as it requires change.

A leader may not want to collect feedback because it may come to them like a 12-gauge shotgun—like a blast to the face. What they don't understand is that they caused this reaction by not listening in the first place. Leaders who ask for feedback continuously collect energetic and optimistic feedback. Leaders who do not collect criticism—and this does not change over night.

8. Be unwilling to modify the ministry or to be flexible with the ministry course:

Serve one another in love (Ga 5:13). Times change, people change, and situations change. An 80 member church can become an 800 member church. The same processes and techniques will not work in both situations. Sometimes a ministry may be a good, valid one, but there may be no need for it. A benevolence ministry will not be necessary in a rich community, but divorce counseling could thrive in such a situation. "That's how we've always have done it" is fatal.

9. Give criticism without encouragement or Encourage without giving criticism:

Both of the scenarios above are misleading by lack of balance. All criticism tells workers, "I can't do anything right for that leader, so why bother" or "That leader doesn't appreciate what I do—ever." Likewise, all encouragement (or praise) leaves a person feeling like they are going fine, when the leader is really getting angry because they're not doing a task right. When you do finally criticize a person in the latter situation, they will be totally blindsided or crushed because they have been so praised up to now for their lack of performance! Therefore, both situations are destructive. Praise for the good points of a task, and then offer *constructive criticism*. Additionally, it's not always what a leader says, but how it is said. Instead of saying, "That was horrible", say, "I'd like to make this better. Can you think of a better way to do it?" or "I would love to see you reach your full potential. I believe you can. Could you do it this way for me?" Truth in all things is the answer.

10. Don't handle conflict or confrontation directly and quickly:

Handling such affairs takes great wisdom. It can be difficult at times to see what is major, what is minor, when is the proper time to deal with it, and where the proper place is to do it. The fact is that a true conflict is never going away. It may lie dormant, or go under cover for a while, but it will never go away. It will simply fester and get worse. When it again emerges, it will be with a vengeance and possibly un-resolvable. However, some leaders major on the minor things. They will nitpick to the point where no one wants anything to do with him or her. Some leaders simply do nothing at all. One leader is as bad as the other. However, the leader that can see the important things that need to be dealt with and handles them properly is a winner.

When problems occur, they must be handled quickly, but this doesn't mean they must always be handled on the spot. Rare is the situation where something must be dealt with immediately. Safety and security come to mind for the immediate category. It is nearly always best if the leader steps back, analyzes (and prays) about the situation, and even approaches senior counsel prior to addressing serious situations.

While problems must always be dealt with directly, this does not mean they should be taken care of in a forceful or a badgering manner. It simply means not to skirt around the issue. Keep everything out on the table. Pick a private, neutral place that's out of the public eye (such as an office) and discuss it with the individual. This doesn't mean someone else shouldn't be present (such as a man counseling with a woman), but rather not in the sanctuary or the hallway with everyone watching. Admonishing publicly will never work, and sadly many leaders find this to be an important tool in their toolbox. Unfortunately for such a leader, it is a broken tool.

Always give others a chance to tell their side. Things are not always as they seem.