

What Kills Leaders

Isolation, Complexity, Exhaustion, and Discouragement (ICED) are a debilitating combination for any leader. Let all of them arrive at once (as they often do) and many go under. This becomes more likely when we have been in leadership for 15 years and as we approach our mid-40s. The first rule of leading anything is that we have to be spiritually alive. Come and explore how to remain fresh in the Lord when the wearying pressures start to rise.

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I. 5 foundations of biblical leadership

- A. It is a spiritual gift for administering God's grace, for the common good (Rom. 12:8)
- B. The point is building up the body in maturity, love and effectiveness (Eph. 4)
- C. We do this by working with people for their progress and joy in the faith, so their joy in Jesus overflows (Phil. 1:25-26)
- D. In practice this means: teaching, shepherding, modelling and spiritual parenting (1 Thess. 1-2)
- E. We lead out of weakness, not strength, to demonstrate the sufficiency of God's grace (2 Cor. 12)

II. What kills leaders - common draining factors

- A. Pressure on family and friendships
 - People are happy for me and my family to make sacrifices that they aren't prepared to make
 - There should be no line between personal life and church life. Lack of boundaries damages my family life by making my family public property
 - The church has inappropriate expectations of the role my spouse should play
 - Loneliness. I am expected to not have any friends among those I lead in order to avoid favouritism

B. Feeling devalued

- My work skills are trivialised. Everyone else has a view on how I should do the job, but it would be inconceivable for me to tell them how to do theirs
- There is no sense of honouring and obeying leaders, as the Bible teaches
- I am regularly accused of not delivering what people want
- My congregation compare me to their favourite preacher on the internet or the God Channel. Or to the previous person in the job, or to their favourite historical preacher – always unfavourably
- A large percentage of congregation members think the role of leaders is simply to run all their favourite activities

C. Feeling unable to lead

- People won't follow my leadership, or actively resist me
- I have multiple competing interest groups in the church with incompatible wishes and demands
- My congregation is full of passive receivers and consumers. They expect me to do everything while they don't do anything
- The church is made up of people who may be believers, but for all the different it seems to make in their lives they might as well be atheists. The only functional difference is that they attend church on Sunday
- A large percentage of people are long-term spiritually stalled and do not wish to leave the rut they run in. Everything I do to encourage them to take next steps is resisted as unwelcome
- Whenever I face down opposition it only ever gets worse. To try to wear me down people will query procedures, then question my wisdom and integrity, then suggest that I have hidden motives, then threaten to split the church, then write me hateful letters

D. Feeling the job is too big for me

- The job is simply too big for me. I am exhausted all the time. I reach the limit of my time and abilities long before I reach the limit of people's expectations
- I am spiritually drained
- I feel out of control, spinning too many plates
- I don't have an evaluative process or any other way to know whether I am doing the right things as a spiritual leader
- I am judged exclusively by visible work. Therefore I am tempted to squeeze out my personal devotional life
- I try to develop structures such as home groups for everyone else's spiritual help. However, I am the only person who is expected to not participate as my presence would intimidate a group

E. Feeling spiritually isolated

- I can't talk to anyone about doubt or sin without losing my job. I am the only person in the church whose job depends on an appearance of sinlessness
- I am expected to take responsibility for everyone else's spiritual growth and health. No one expects to take responsibility for mine
- I connect what I do and who I am very closely. When what I do is challenged, resisted or fails, my personal sense of self-worth is damaged
- I see two different stories: the church as it ought to be and as it really is; me as I ought to be and as I really am. Therefore, I have to live behind a mask all the time so that nobody really knows me. My church expect pretense and a veil of superficiality
- I can't express fears, frustrations or sins to a denominational supervisor because they have power over possible future ministry opportunities
- Whenever I lead worship I don't really get to worship myself. I regularly teach others but don't have opportunities to be taught myself

III. Underlying issues that cause long-term over-extension and drain

A. Imposter syndrome

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them
Matthew 6:1

B. ICED – Isolation, Complexity, Exhaustion, Discouragement

C. The downward spiral:

- Feeling unsupported
- Insecurity
- Subjectivity – only listening to internal dialogue
- Viewing things through false evaluative lenses that magnify the bad
- Paranoia
- Filling up all our time trying to deliver what the think people expect
- Hiding anything that goes wrong, increasingly sensitive to even constructive feedback
- Becoming increasingly aware of all the things that are necessary to deliver that you are unable to deliver
- Not knowing how to break the cycle and thinking that if others don't provide the help you need they clearly are not concerned about you or your ministry
- Our spouses feel obliged to collude in our feelings in case we start to see them as part of the problem

D. Avoidance, evasion, escape

I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Ps.55:6

E. The cliff

IV. The way out

A. Intervention – to break us out of the downward spiral

And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God 1 Samuel 23:16

B. Repair and recovery

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things Philippians 4:8

- Relational factors – spiritually encouraging friends, counsel, support to combat isolation
- Spiritual factors – rest, reintegration, prayer, worship
- Emotional factors – refocusing, reenergising
- Physical factors – sleep, routines, habitual routines that promote healthiness
- Cognitive factors – recalibration; understanding, constructing positive things, dismantling warped and unhealthy strategies
- Practical / situational factors – revising and reforming the conditions and historical situations that have provoked fear, renegotiating impossible demands, repairing situations of breakdown where you have done damage
- Repentance

C. The future

V. What support do you need?

Suggested Readings:

The Emotionally Healthy Leader – Peter Scazzero

Dangerous Calling – Paul Tripp

Fruitful Leaders: how to make, grow, love and keep them – Marcus Honeysett

The Spiritual Formation of Leaders – Chuck Miller