

5 'Normal' Things That Are a Total Waste of Time in Leadership

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All leaders constantly deal with how they use/invest the limited amount of time they have. What they decide to do or not do. What they say yes or no to. Who they meet with or decide not to meet with?

You know the scenario. You get to the end of a meeting, an experience or a project and say to yourself, "That was a total waste of time." What's scary is how often you and I end up saying it. So how do you eliminate things that are a total waste of time as a leader? I think the best way is to rule out things *categorically*.

How do you do that? Just look at the patterns you see that waste your time and simply decide *I'm not doing that anymore*. The key is to identify what 'that' is.

So here are 5 things that are a total waste of time for any leader.

1. Worry

So many leaders struggle with it. And it is almost wholly unproductive. It's understandable that leaders have a lot they could worry about. As I've told my team many times, our job is basically to help solve the problems nobody else has been able to solve. That's why you're a leader.

Consequently, leadership can be a breeding ground for worry. But you should do everything in your power to eliminate it. There's a world of difference between thinking about a problem and worrying about a problem. Thinking about a problem will lead you to a solution. Worrying about a problem leads you nowhere.

Plus, most of what you worry about will never transpire. As 16th Century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne put it, "My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened."

Leaders should think about problems, but not worry about them. If you're stuck in worry, how do you get out? Although I'm not an innate worrier, when I do worry, this has helped me immensely: I make my logic trump my emotions. If that's not working, I take it to a group of leaders I trust and lay out the problem for them and get their insight.

Worry hates the light of day. Once I've thought about it and even shared it with others, then I do one more thing: I focus on what I *know* to be true rather than what I *feel* is true. In a season of worry, feelings are your enemy. Logic and community are your friends. So, to beat worry, focus on what you KNOW is true, not what you FEEL is true.

2. Meeting with someone who doesn't need to meet with you

When someone asks you to meet with you, my guess is your default is to say yes. So is mine. But play that out. As your church or organization grows, that means you would spend all week every week meeting with people—many of whom didn't really need to meet at all and most of whom don't need to meet with *you*.

Deciding who you need to meet with *in advance* helps. Most leaders waste time meeting with people who don't need to meet with them. Do I meet with other people? Yes, but only after those key people have the time they need and after my other priorities are done, which means I do say no a lot (I still hate that, but it's necessary).

While it may sound harsh, it's liberating, and you will get more done. Plus, your church or organization will be positioned to grow as a result.. And finally, are you addicted to meetings?

3. Over-managing things that don't need managing

The start-up phase is wonderful and crazy in any venture. When you're starting up, everything happens in a frenzy and making it to your next weekend or next milestone is itself a victory. You don't have time to manage well because you're so busy creating. But eventually, every organization gets out of start-up phase. Which means you have more time for managing.

But too many leaders end up not just managing, but over-managing. Great management adds value. Over-managing sucks value (and life) out of an organization. You know those dead-end meetings where you spent forever talking about something that truly deserved 5 minutes? That's over-managing. Stop that.

If you can manage something in 5 minutes, manage it in 5 minutes, not 50 minutes. What should you do with the rest of your time? Create something new that will lead your church or organization to the next opportunity. Start leading...stop managing the things that will manage themselves.

Over-management, by the way, is one of the reasons so many organizations plateau. Leadership builds something new. Management organizes what's already built. So go build something new.

4. Inefficient email

Email is the currency of business communication today. Spend as little of this currency as you can. It's amazing how many hours each day disappear answering mostly pointless emails. How do you know email is mostly pointless, you ask? Great question. Think about the last time you went on vacation and put your autoresponder on. Yes, there were 700 emails waiting for you when you got back.

But after attacking your inbox for an hour, you realized you only needed to reply to about 10-20% of them. True? The world moved on without you. Why not make that dynamic a reality every day?

Here are some tips to make your email less of a waste of time:

- Eliminate reply-all's unless necessary
- Skim read and only reply if you're adding value to the conversation
- Move conversations to face-to-face meetings. Instead of answering 90 emails on a subject, you can clarify the issue in about 9 minutes in a meeting.
- Answer long emails with short replies. (This almost always brings an out-of-control conversation back into line)

Nobody gets points in heaven for saying "I answered email all day long." Let the truly mission-advancing emails get your attention. Minimize everything else.

5. Working when you're exhausted

A lot of us have more control over our lives than we realize. If you work in an office setting that doesn't have fixed hours, exert some control over your workflow. When you're exhausted, take a nap. Or go for a walk. Or go home. Or call it a day.

Sure, occasionally, you need to push yourself well past your personal reserves. But too many leaders try to do this every day. They show up exhausted. They work exhausted. And they go home exhausted. Stop that.

Why? Your brain doesn't even work properly when you're exhausted. What took you 3 hours to do at 7 p.m. might take you only 30 minutes at 7 a.m. after you wake up from 8 hours sleep.

That problem you couldn't figure out all day yesterday finally solved itself in your mind when you went on a walk or took that bike ride. The next time you find yourself staring at a blank computer screen, walk away. And come back when you're fresh. A key ingredient in all this is sleep. Remember this: A rested you is a better you. Don't just show up to work. Bring your best to work.

In great organizations, nobody gets paid for showing up. Take An Honest Look at The Pace You're Currently Living. Would You Want to Do This Forever? Looking at the past 12 months, did your habits help you accomplish everything you set out to do last year?

Here's the truth: no matter how successful, every leader I know struggles with their productivity and priorities at some level. Sadly, it adds to the universal and seemingly unavoidable "burnout culture" we find ourselves in. But that doesn't mean **you** have to live like that. So, what's separating your current life from the one you imagine?