

7 Kinds of People You Cannot Afford to Keep in Leadership

Carey Nieuwhof

There's a secret fear most leaders have. Losing people. It can seem so hard to reach people and keep them that losing a customer, a client, a staff member, a person in your church, or even a subscriber to your email list can be heart-wrenching for many leaders.

I get that. I have wrung my hands and lost sleep over people walking away more than a few times in my time in leadership. There are times you should be really concerned with a great person leaving your team, or a fantastic leader exiting your mission. That should definitely make you think twice.

And as someone (or several people exit), the discussion at the leadership table will end up with someone saying:

- *Look, we can't afford to lose people.*
- Trust me, there's always someone at the leadership table who thinks we can't afford to lose anyone.
- That's simply not true.
- There are a few kinds of people you can't afford to *keep*.
- In fact, sometimes the people you are most afraid of losing are the people you can't afford to *keep*.

Here's the strange paradox of leadership: some of the people you think you can't afford to lose are the very people you can't afford to keep. So how do you know the difference? Well, here are 7 kinds of people you can't afford to keep if you want to move your mission forward.

1. Perpetual critics

This takes a lot of maturity, but a wise leader always gleans whatever he or she can from critics. There's always something to learn, and even if you have to discard most of it, there's usually a kernel of truth that can help you grow and flourish in the future.

Some people are just perpetual critics though. They rarely have anything to say. So, what should you watch for when you think you have a perpetual critic? Watch for what they *contribute*. I mean everything from positive ideas, to heart, to effort, to yes...dollars. Look for skin in the game.

Critical thinkers who make positive contributions to the mission are often your friends, not your enemies. But beware of perpetual critics. Perpetual critics are easy to spot—they contribute nothing and criticize everything. That kind of critic...you can't afford to keep. They're sucking your soul and everyone's soul dry.

2. People who are opposed to everything

This group is a slight variation on the perpetual critic. They may not have a steady stream of contrary ideas. In fact, they might say nothing. Until it comes time to change, that is. Then, quietly, or loudly, they'll let you know they're opposed. Now rattled, they block change, or at least try to.

Being opposed to *some* things is normal. Being opposed to *everything* is dysfunctional and destructive. You can't build a lasting future on what you're against. You can only build a lasting future on what you're for.

3. Toxic People

We're all a little unhealthy. I am. You are. And so is everyone we work with. But there's a key difference between a little unhealthy and *toxic*. Unhealthy people want to get well. Toxic people have no desire to get well, usually have a super low self-awareness and sometimes actually want to inflict harm. It's not that you can't afford to lose toxic people. The truth is you can't afford to keep them.

4. Chronically Underperforming People

We all have bad days. We're all late sometimes. But face it, you have people in your organization who only have bad days. Who are always late? Who invent a new excuse every 12 minutes? You know who I'm talking about. You can't afford to keep them. But wait, you argue, shouldn't we *help* them?

Let me guess. The person that popped into your mind when reading this is someone you've been trying to help for the last year...or two...or five, and they haven't changed a bit. So, what exactly are you accomplishing?

Exactly. Even if they have a solvable problem, they either don't want to solve it or you're not the one who's going to help them. Move on, friend. Go invest that time with your best people or someone in the middle who wants to grow...and watch them soar.

5. People with Hidden Agendas

In every organization, there's only really one agenda: the mission. Competing agendas is a problem...but if the competing agendas are out in the open, you can at least discuss them and reconcile them. Eventually, if someone won't align with the unifying mission, they may have to go.

Hidden agendas are a whole different thing. When someone won't be honest about what they're trying to accomplish, or won't discuss it, it corrodes the team and mission like few other things do. Hidden agendas make trust impossible.

6. People who only have a vision of what the future shouldn't be

As a leader, you have a vision of what the future *should* be. Some people only have a vision of what the future *shouldn't* be. That's a problem. You can't build a positive mission on a negative view of the future. If someone can only tell you what the future shouldn't be, you'll never get to a better future.

7. People who are married to their personal preferences

We all like things a certain way. Me too. But there are people who prefer their personal preferences over your organization's progress. The music's too loud. Too soft...too new...too old. Too...whatever.

Great team members will often sacrifice their personal preferences for the sake of missional progress. Others won't. If you have someone who continually lets their personal preferences stand in the way of organizational progress, you can't afford to keep them.