

5 Career Mistakes Every Leader Should Avoid



No matter their experience level and knowledge, at some point in their work life, most leaders make one or more mistakes that have the potential to derail or stall their career path. Understanding the fallacy inherent in these mistakes, or beliefs, is crucial to positioning oneself to be offered and to accept growth opportunities that can satisfy the goals and desires of both the organisation and the individual.

1) Even though the definition of “success” is not clearly defined or communicated in your organisation, you still expect to be fairly promoted.

Success means different things to different people. Consequently, it is extremely important to view the definition under a reality microscope. For example, some businesses define success as 3% to 5% growth per year, while others cite 10% to 15% or even 20%+. Accelerated career opportunities happen mostly in fast-growing business environments. That said, since the growth rate is a key indicator of career progression in any organisation, there is no point in expecting fast movement if your business is in a slow-growth industry.

Exacerbating the situation, some businesses do not provide transparency on what success means in terms of leadership career progression, as well as the company’s financial viability. Without clear communication of the goals to which one should aspire, the chance to discover and take advantage of growth opportunities becomes exceedingly difficult.

2) You are not close to the centre of the “success” party, but you still think you are a key participant.

Watch carefully who are the hosts at the centre of the success party in your organisation – and observe your distance from the centre of the party. If you are at the periphery, you are simply a guest. Rather than waiting for an invitation to each party, leaders should take responsibility in determining how to transform their roles from guest to host. Discover the rules of the game, make the right connections within successful networks, take the steps to move from the periphery and ever closer toward the centre, and organise your own parties.

And in any situation, guests come and go, while hosts remain the same. If you cannot be a host in your organisation, and desire real growth opportunities, then you need to find another home.



3) Although the same players are passed the ball all the time, you are still waiting for someone might pass the ball to you.

Picture this scenario: You think that you are as talented as others in the organisation. In fact, you attend the same training sessions, participate in the same meetings, contribute the same way and as much as others do, and present yourself as part of the same leadership team. But when it comes to new career opportunities and initiatives, no one is talking to you. In fact, no one even mentions your name.

Most of the time, management passes the “opportunity ball” to the same players in the team. Nobody gives you the opportunity to grow a business or drive a strategic project that is critical to the success of your organisation. You never get to touch the “opportunity ball” or even approach it. In fact, you are simply a spectator. Actual players and spectators enjoy the game in very different ways. Don’t ever make the mistake in assuming that because you are part of a team, you will eventually get to play.

4) Others silently stop supporting you, but you still believe that receiving no feedback is a good thing.

The most important point to recognise in your career is the precise moment when others “silently” stop supporting you. Failing to acknowledge this point, because of any reason – such as having a stable position, a slow but consistent salary progression, or a happy office environment – will trick your mind falsely and hamper your career.

You need to be serious, conscious, and realistic at all times on how others communicate with you and provide feedback – particularly if there is no feedback. If others silently stop supporting you, understand that it means they will not stand up for you when you need help. In truth, they may abandon you to your own devices when you are in most need of support or assistance – resulting in you getting stuck in avoidable situations. After all, successful leaders go nowhere without the support of other people.



5) You are not developing your career like an entrepreneur, yet you still believe that someone will develop it for you.

You are not learning or doing anything to continuously improve your knowledge, expertise, and exposure to networks outside your organisation. In addition, you naively believe that just being employed actually increases your level of employability.

Don't accept mediocrity. Whatever you decide to learn, go deep so that you are able to bring fresh insights to others and receive recognition not only within your organisation – but most importantly, outside of it. After all, you may decide to leave the company, or perhaps your employer decides to let you go. In either case, remember that your personal brand needs to be much better than your employer's brand. Although conventional wisdom dictates the opposite – that is, if you work for a good brand, it should be easier to find another position – it is absolutely not true in today's context. As jobs become more and more scarce, the importance of impactful individual contribution increases exponentially.

Others outside your organisation need to first recognise your brand, then your employer's brand. In fact, you are part of your current employer's brand. That said, if you are currently working for a good organisation, management already acknowledges that truth because they could not build a good brand without treating you as an essential component of their brand.

Repairing the Damage from Your Misunderstandings

The bottom line is simply as follows: It is inevitable that leaders will make one or more mistakes in advancing up their career ladder. But these errors in judgment are avoidable – or, at least, repairable – if one understands why such thinking doesn't work. Leaders must take responsibility for understanding what success means to their career growth and then go after it. To achieve desired goals, leaders should consider themselves as entrepreneurs, even within the confines of an employer's organisation.

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Never, ever stop learning to renew yourself to become a key player. The future is so bright for those who deeply understand how important it is to believe a simple truth: It is never too late to discover new opportunities, and the only person who should care about you is actually you.

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