

| FEATURED ARTICLE

COMMON LEADERSHIP MISTAKES

By Steve Lewis, Sponsored by SIOR Foundation





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We have been told that “To err is human,” and that “Everybody makes mistakes,” which is certainly true. And the fact that one rises to a leadership position in business does not immunize us from human error – in fact, it can often make those errors more visible and can certainly magnify their impact.

Business experts don’t agree completely on the errors most often made by leaders, but there is certainly some commonality. For example, communicating poorly is frequently identified as a common leadership mistake, as is taking too much responsibility on oneself and not adequately recognizing the value of teamwork. Other commonly cited shortfalls include failure to terminate poor performers, not properly balancing short- and long-term goals, and failure to manage oneself adequately.

In terms of communications, MindTools.com notes, for example, that “According to 1,400 executives polled by The Ken Blanchard Companies, failing to provide feedback is the most common mistake that leaders make.” Observers also cite both “being too hands-off” and being too friendly, emphasizing the importance of balance in a leadership position. And “failing to properly delegate work is the number one most common leadership blunder,” according to Kristopher B. Jones, CEO and founder of LSEO.com.

But what of SIORs who assume roles of leadership within their companies? Based on those who participated in this article, they are not unique when it comes to the mistakes they commonly cite. They include:

- Reluctance to terminate people not suited for real estate;
- Talking too much and listening too little;
- Focusing on themselves, rather than on the team;
- Not being authentic;
- Focusing on the short term, rather than the long term

While they were candid in admitting mistakes they had made in the past, these SIORs also shared the lessons they've learned about eliminating "repeat performances" of those errors. These include admitting those mistakes (and apologizing if necessary), keeping close track of "what works and what doesn't," and working hard to avoid repeating the same mistakes.

the company or them any favors by letting them stick around just because you would rather avoid conflict, or you think you can change their behavior," he says. Beyond that, he points out, they might even flourish in a different environment.

"I made the mistake of trying to please and be liked, rather than leading by making a tough decision that was needed at the time," says Jim Baker, SIOR,

Baker Commercial Real Estate in Jeffersonville, Ind. "One particular situation involved terminating someone due to their incompetence and bad attitude. The organization couldn't move forward until they were gone, but I was afraid to terminate them for fear of the backlash and criticism I would receive from them and others involved."

The lack of balance between the interests of the team and oneself were also

"I would say a common mistake I see all the time is people who are too wrapped up in trying to be interesting to clients and teammates rather than being interested," adds John J. Culbertson, SIOR, industrial and office Specialist, managing partner, Cardinal Partners, Charlotte, N.C. "They talk way too much instead of asking real good questions." People, he notes, have two ears and one mouth, and everyone needs to be reminded of that.

Gump agrees. "Almost every leader I've known is not spending enough time listening to the people you are leading and learning what's working and what's not working," he says. "There has to be a culture whereby the feedback being given can be done so without fear of reprisal. Also, it's important that when listening, not to argue; it destroys the willingness of anyone to ever speak freely."

He adds that he has seen leaders who are certain they're correct every time, and don't really care much what anyone else thinks. "My way or the highway leaders don't ultimately succeed," he asserts. "Leaders need to be authentic and transparent; otherwise people don't trust you."

Culbertson agrees that there's such a thing as having too much pride in your abilities. "I am good on my feet, so sometimes I felt I could go to meetings half prepared and get through them really well," he shares. "Inevitably, if they did not go well it may have been because I was not have prepared and failed to give key information."

"A mistake I have seen others make is being too focused on a single transaction or closing the deal and not building or fostering long-term relationships with clients," says Kolsrud. He advises that you approach business as a chance to create a relationship, not just a monetary gain. "This advice has been transformational in my career, and I try

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Making the Hard Choice

The leaders interviewed commonly cited failure to terminate a poor performer as one of the mistakes most often made by leaders. "In my role as managing director of a real estate office I made the common mistake of holding on to people that are not suited for the real estate business too long," admits Allen Gump, SIOR, executive vice president of Industrial Division, Colliers International, Dallas, and immediate past president of SIOR. "You're not doing

cited, which impact both communication and collaboration. "The biggest mistake I made early on in my career was being too focused on myself and my personal success; I believed that my success was dependent on my individual name and reputation — and while that is necessary in this industry, it should not be the only goal," notes Mark Kolsrud, SIOR, senior vice president with Colliers in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Working with a team, he has discovered, is far more rewarding.

to mentor others to have the same mentality," he says.

Lessons Learned

Even when one makes mistakes, the end results can be positive if we learn from them, say SIORs. "I believe it's best to make sure the people you're bringing on are suited for the business and have a track record of success," says Gump, sharing an important lesson he has learned. "We're all too quick sometimes to hire 'promising' people before we interview and test them properly."

Culbertson has learned the importance of journaling, which he began about 13 years ago. "I created a rubric, which was 'what went really well, and what didn't go well? If I could do it all over what would I do differently — and what steps can I put into place to make sure it will not happen again?" he shares. You've got to learn from your mistakes, says Culbertson, "and the sooner you do, the easier you'll get through life." The people who make a lot of progress in life, he asserts, are not necessarily the smartest, but the ones who have the ability to quickly learn from their mistakes and make sure they will not happen again.

"I eventually made the decision to let [the poor performer] go and realize I should have done it sooner," says Gump. "Not only did what I fear not happen, but instead I received thanks from the others involved in the organization who were glad to see that person leave. As a result, I have learned that being indecisive is a weakness that I need to overcome to become a strong leader." "As I have grown in my career, I have discovered that being collaborative and working as a team, to share in the relationships and the glory, grows the entirety of the business," says Kolsrud. "The joy of sharing the work is far more gratifying than a self-focused, individual pursuit."

Avoiding Future Mistakes

Sometimes avoiding the repetition of leadership mistakes can be challenging and complex; at other times, it only requires what at least on the surface seems like a simple solution. For example, while still having pride in his ability to think on his feet, Culbertson now prepares agendas for every meeting — "down to the minute."

Gump says he tries to be a better listener, although as a professional talker, "it's tough." He adds that "I also try to really care and listen to the people I work with, either at my office or within the SIOR organization such as fellow Board members. Being in leadership in SIOR, he continues, "I have come to realize I'm not the smartest guy in the room. Many times I've modified my opinion because people I truly respect have better ideas. We should remember to give that respect to everyone we work with — which makes it easier to listen to them."

The best way to deal with mistakes, he summarizes, is "admit them, fix it and move on. Learn to apologize when wrong; people appreciate your sincerity."

Culbertson agrees. "It's more than admitting it. If you truly have hurt someone you need to apologize, let them know you were wrong and make sure it does not happen again," he says.

"Avoiding [underestimating the importance of teamwork] in the future, at this point in my career, is all about educating the up-and-coming generation," says Kolsrud. "I aim to mentor and teach new team members to focus less on their 'personal brand' and more on creating a great team and building business collaboratively."

"I have tried to do what's best for the organization and to not fear the criticism that goes with making tough decisions," says Baker. "I'm not always right, but sometimes a decision has to be made to

move things forward and break the 'log jam' that is created by my indecisiveness."

How can past mistakes be avoided? "Care about the people you're leading — or don't be a leader at all," says Gump.

"I think making mistakes is essential -- honestly, it is the best and only way to learn to be truly good at your profession," adds Kolsrud. "Difficulties and mistakes should not be a frustration, but rather, they should be celebrated as learning experiences or opportunities to teach and mentor others. I think being authentic to who you are, not being prideful and as collaborative as possible, would be the greatest advice I could give." ▾



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