

Seven Questions to Help Leaders Avoid

sins of omission

I confess. I shouldn't have this nagging fear, but I do: sometimes I am haunted by the possibility that I failed to make a critical decision as a leader. And, in so doing, that I missed the opportunity to make a difference in this world.

It can be easy to avoid taking decisive action by letting the perceived status quo shape our daily agenda. Instead of becoming leaders who acts as change agents, we can sink back and act like managers who carry out routine tasks.

Frankly, I don't want to live my life in a world of "what if's?" I don't want to look back on the brief time God has given me and realize that I failed to act or to make key decisions. I don't want to be guilty of one of the most damaging types of sins—the sins of omission.

So, how can we leaders make certain we are not seeking the comfort of sameness and committing sins of omission? What checks can remind us that we must be ever-vigilant, lest we fail to become leaders who take risks and act? I suggest we constantly ask ourselves these seven questions.

Confronting mistakes of omission

1. Do I take initiative or do I wait for an assignment to be given to me? Leaders who rarely want to make decisions or take action on their own are not leaders at all. It is a comfortable place when you are not responsible for any of your own initiatives. But comfort is the place where most sins of omission take place.

2. Am I constantly seeking ways to break out of the status quo? It is a cliché to say that this world and culture is changing rapidly, but it is true. Those who attempt to hold onto to the way "we've always done it" will be left behind. The irony is that the status quo is no longer a reality. Those who attempt to embrace it are holding on to an illusion.

3. Is my primary approach to leadership incrementalism, or do I occasionally seek to implement major changes? Leading by incremental change is okay for most seasons, but there are times when leaders must take major risks. I love the oft-told story of Thomas J. Watson, Jr., and the introduction of the IBM 360. On April 7, 1964 IBM introduced the 360, the first large family of computers to use interchangeable software and peripheral equipment. It was a bold and courageous departure from the monolithic, one-size-fits-all mainframe. Fortune magazine dubbed it "IBM's \$5 billion gamble." But the gamble paid off, and it changed the world.

4. Am I willing to make a decision even if I don't have all the facts? No one would suggest a leader make a major decision without the benefit of solid information. But many decisions must be made amid some level of uncertainty and without all the desired facts. Ultra-conservative leaders who keep waiting for all the details to emerge usually have a good rear view of other leaders who have passed them by.

5. Am I willing to accept criticism? You can play it safe and avoid criticism. In fact, you can join the legion of Monday-morning quarterbacks who take great delight in pointing out where risk-taking leaders failed. However, second-guessers have stopped leading when they make decisions to minimize the criticisms.

6. Am I willing to fail? You can choose not to act, not to take initiative, and not to take risks. In doing so, you will not fail at a particular task because you have attempted nothing. But you will ultimately fail as a leader. Every true and seasoned leader can attest to some failure in his or her life. That is the price we pay when we lead and take risks.

7. Do I really want to make a difference? If the answer is yes, there is a price to pay. I have briefly enumerated some of them. We can't merely declare that we want to make a difference. We must be willing to accept the pain that often stems from bold and courageous leadership. For the true leader, it is a price worth paying.

A sacred trust

We have such a brief time to make a difference in this life. If God has given you a place of leadership, consider that opportunity a sacred trust. Don't live this life wondering "what if?" Don't look back on key life points and realize you failed to act—that you committed sins of omission.

May the words God gave Joshua become His words for our lives today: "Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9, HCSB).

What are some of the common sins of omission you have observed in some leaders? What are some other checks we can employ to avoid committing these sins?

By Thom Rainer
Thomrainer.com