

## 5 Common Reasons Church Leaders Stop Leading

By **Thom Rainer**

I am having an amazing time reading through the book of Joshua. My pastor (who happens to be my son, Jess) is also preaching through the early chapters of the book in our church.

I just can't seem to get enough of Joshua. Among the many reasons Joshua is my favorite biblical character other than Jesus is his uncanny leadership. For example, in Joshua 1, he transitions from becoming Moses' servant to becoming the leader of Israel. It's an amazing thing to read. Joshua was one incredible leader.

We have many incredible leaders in our churches today. But, perhaps more often than we admit, some church leaders stop leading. I have spoken with hundreds, probably thousands, of them over the years. I hear common themes of why they put their leadership in neutral. Here are the five most common reasons:

1. **They are weary of conflict and criticism.** These leaders have died the death of a thousand cuts. They know when they provide real leadership, the critics and naysayers will come out of the woodwork. Some of the leaders have lost their jobs because they led. They thus move into a defensive posture.
2. **They don't know how to lead.** Joshua had the mentorship of Moses for a generation. He was instructed. He was prepared. He was ready. Many of our church leaders know their Bible. They know theology. But they have never been trained or mentored to lead.
3. **They overreact to autocratic leadership.** We all know examples of when the pastor became a dictator instead of a leader. Sadly, that reality takes place in some churches on a regular basis. So some pastors decide they will never be a dictator. That's good. But some pastors take it to an extreme and fail to exert leadership at all. That's bad.



4. **They don't have people speaking into their lives on a regular basis.** Any good leader seeks the counsel and wisdom of others. Unfortunately, pastors can become loners as they live on the islands of their own ministries. A few years ago, I began a ministry called Church Answers that provides a place for pastors and other church leaders to speak into one another's lives in a safe place. It has been transformational for many of them.
5. **They always seek consensus.** I want to be careful with my words here. It is wise to seek input and counsel. It is a good thing to listen to some outside voices. But every leadership decision ultimately needs a leader deciding. We can't always lead by committees, consensus or critics. It is cliché to say, "The buck stops here," but the buck does have to stop somewhere.

When leaders fail to lead, a leadership vacuum follows. And any vacuum will be filled. It might be filled with a culture that turns inwardly looking after its own needs. It can be filled by disparate, divergent and disagreeing voices. The people of Israel certainly went through that period: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judges 21:25). Or the vacuum can be filled with individuals or groups who insert themselves for their own power and agenda.

Some church leaders view leadership as an endeavor to be delegated to others. Such is a path toward an inward focus, competing groups, disharmony, muddled direction and overall frustration.

It's basic. Church leaders must lead.