

5 Reasons to Stop Imitating

If you're like me, you like to track with people who are ahead of you in what they've accomplished, both in terms of their lives and in terms of their leadership.

Chance are you do this in real life (I hope you have mentors). But the online world has changed the imitation game.

Thanks to social media, our phones, and other devices, we have access to anything anywhere all the time. As a result, almost everyone tracks with more than one 'celebrity' type leader.

Please hear me. This is a great way of learning and growing. I do it too.

But have you ever found yourself imitating others—in style, in content, and in strategy? I mean sometimes you can hear preachers who sound exactly like their 'hero'. They've adopted the same style, same approach, and even the same cadence in their voice as the leader they admire.

Why do people do this? They might think, *If I imitate a great leader, I'll become a great leader.*

Well, yes and no. *Learning* from great leaders can make you a better leader.

Constantly imitating other leaders can actually do damage.

Imitate often enough and guess what happens?

You'll kill something God-given inside.

Chances are the person you're imitating didn't become a great leader by mimicking someone else. Far more likely, they developed the gifts God gave them to their fullest potential.

Which leads us to the first problem with constant imitation of leaders: Envy of someone else's gift will cause you to neglect your own.

It will do other things that will permanently hamper your leadership if you're not careful.

Is Imitation Always Bad? No...

Imitation isn't all bad. There are instances when imitation is just wise and expedient. Here are a few:

When someone else has done something better than you could and you are free to use their material, strategy or approach.

When someone has figured out a smarter, faster way to get things done.

No one on your team has the creativity to create a better mouse trap.

In those cases, imitation can be a good thing. And, naturally, it's good to adopt best practices from great leaders.

But persistent imitation goes deeper than that. And that's why it's deadly.

Here are 5 ways imitation hurts your leadership.

1. Constant Imitation Kills Innovation

Leaders who constantly imitate rarely innovate.

Imitate long enough, and imitate hard enough, and there won't be much innovation left in you or your organization.

Constant imitation means you'll rarely take risks. It means you will wait for someone else to blaze trails.

Imitators are always one, two or five steps behind. They have to wait for the next product, approach or strategy to be revealed. Then they madly copy.

If you are always imitating, your trajectory will never be greater than the person you're copying. Ever. It will always be a shadow of theirs.

Remember too, that the last thing the innovator you're copying thought about when creating what you're looking at was "Now what should I imitate next?"

2. You'll Never Really Be Creative

If your creative meetings essential consist of "what did so and so do?" and then adapting it to your service, you're not very creative.

I totally believe wisdom has many counsellors, and I learn from a ton of people and a ton of organizations.

But there's a world of difference between spring boarding off others and relying on others to think for you.

True creativity is risky. It means you don't know how it will turn out. It means you have to trust God and trust your judgment.

If your creativity consists of copying what other people have done, you're not that creative.

3. You'll Never Grow Past Your Insecurity

So we're all a little insecure as leaders.

I am. You might be too.

True innovation forces you to stare down your insecurity for about 1000 reasons, not the least of which is that innovation almost always seems like a dumb move at the time.

When I look back on my life, many of the decisions I've made that turned out to be good ones looked dumb at the time.

I walked away from law to pursue ministry. I left a prestigious church in Toronto to come north of the city and start with three tiny, rural churches.

We left an almost paid-for new building to start over again as a portable, non-denominational church to reach unchurched people.

Even in starting my leadership [podcast](#) 2 years ago, most people thought a 1 hour, long-form interview format would never work in the church space. Attention spans were shrinking. Shorter was better. And nobody was doing an interview mix of well-known guests and completely unknown guests. Most people thought it wasn't a great strategy. (It's a little hard to believe now because there are many interview-based podcasts in the church space...but that was 2014.)

I wasn't sure it would work either except for a feeling deep in my gut that it would. 2 million downloads later, I'm so thankful I pushed through the uncertainty.

Innovation is messy, uncertain, scary and fraught with failure. Which is why it's so much easier to imitate. And so less rewarding.

Some of the best ideas you'll ever have seem dumb—to you or to others—when you first have them. And sometimes they stay dumb. Then you discard them and start over again.

But often they don't...what's crazy to begin with can become powerfully effective.

Key insight? It's way safer to imitate than to innovate, until you innovate.

4. You Won't Discover Your True Voice

So here's an obvious but often-missed truth: if you are always trying to be someone else, you will never be yourself.

And that's a shame, because God actually created you.

Your voice always sounds worse to you than anyone else's voice (unless you're an egotist). I get that.

But God created you. He knew what he was doing when he put you together.

There are two parts to using your own voice: discovering it, and developing it.

Neither happens when you are obsessed with imitation.

Can you be influenced by other voices? Of course. Should you imitate them? Nope.

Not if you want to develop yours.

The greatest communicators are influenced by other voices, but never imitate them.

5. You'll Stifle Your Relationship With God

Not only does innovation often look dumb at the time, it can make you afraid.

Personally, fear moves me in one of two directions: I either back off on the idea, or I trust God.

Imitation never pushes you to trust. You just blindly adopt and strategy believing it will work.

I think there is a push-pull in listening to others versus listening to God.

If you listen mainly to others, you'll eventually stop listening to God.

So...two questions for you personally: **what (or who) are you imitating? And what's it costing you?**

Imitating is also dangerous for your organization. [Talk with an Auxano Navigator to learn how to discover your uniqueness.](#)

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