6 Really, Really Bad Ways to Respond to Problems

Naturally, there are things you love about the ministry or organization you lead. Probably lots of them.

But chances are there are also a few things you don't love. Maybe even a few things you see that bother you deeply. Being discontent with things comes with the territory for most leaders. In fact, an ability to spot problems is in part what makes a leader a leader.

After all, it's often a deep discontent that drives us to want to make things better and makes us leaders in the first place.

But that discontent can also hurt us and hurt others if we mishandle it.

In fact, *most* leaders fall into a variety of traps when trying to figure out how to respond when they see something they don't like. When you respond inappropriately to something you don't like, you can end up:

* Hampering your ministry or organization
* Hurting good people
* Stunting your own growth and development

Here are 6 terrible (but common) ways to respond when something upsets you as a leader.

1. Failing to take responsibility

It's just so easy to blame other people or other factors when you see something you don't like.

While laying the blame on external factors is a problem (I wrote about that here), sometimes we blame others inside our organization for the problem. Great leaders never do that.

If you're the senior leader in your organization, everything you don't like about it is your responsibility.

Great leaders never blame. They take responsibility instead.

Sure, it's not your responsibility to handle all the problems personally. But it is your responsibility to ensure your culture stays healthy, people remain on mission and that the problems you're facing get solved well and in a timely manner by the right people.

For years I've had to remind myself: I'm the leader. I'm responsible. It's no one else's fault but mine.

2. Not taking action

The fact that something bothers you is natural.

But too many leaders let the problem linger. They walk in and allow themselves to be bothered by it day after day after day.

Don't do that. Deal with it, or else decide it's actually not a problem (sometimes you just need an attitude adjustment).

And if it actually is a problem, DO something about it!

Getting upset over the same issue again and again and not doing anything about is futility and a failure in leadership.

Change the situation. Work on a solution. Or be quiet about it.

3. Failing to get a proper diagnosis

Just because you see the problem doesn't mean you understand the problem.

I've caught myself on this more than a few times.

I've caught myself on this more than a few times: Thinking I understand the problem and actually understanding the problem are often two different things.

The best way to avoid this trap is to ask people around you for input.

Sometimes all that's missing between your observation and the right diagnosis is more information.

4. Bypassing proper channels

The bigger your organization, the more of a temptation this becomes for leaders.

Because leaders are often doers and fixers, our temptation is to by-pass several layers and just fix something. In other words, the people who created the problem are three or four 'layers' removed from the situation and you just decided to bypass all their managers and deal with it yourself.

When you do that, you undermine the leadership of everyone who stood between you and the problem. Not to mention the fact that you have likely just traumatized the person you just dealt with (see point 5).

5. Saying too much to the wrong person

Your words weigh a lot as a leader. When you walk into an environment and point out five things that are wrong with it, the people who worked hard to put it together can easily become devastated.

As we've grown, I've learned to keep a few people around me who I can say *anything* to. They act as a sounding board and often tell me I'm wrong, or I don't have the right information, or explain to me why something is the way it is.

Once I have all the information, I often change my mind.

But sometimes, if I'm right, we'll get someone else to take action because they'll either say it better than I will or will be the person who has to fix the problem anyway.

The larger your organization, the more important it is that you say mostly positive things to the people who work with you and keep your criticism for your very tight inner circle.

Because I started the church and teach most weekends my words weigh a lot. I need to remember that.

6. Not articulating a clear alternative

It's one thing to spot a problem. It's quite another to create a solution.

If something is bothering you, that's understandable.

But real leadership happens when you can work with your team to create an alternative. That's far more work, but it's so important.

Simply telling people what's wrong is of very limited value. Helping them work toward what's right – a preferred future – is far better.

As a leader, your highest value comes when you help your team find constructive alternatives.

What Do You See?

Those are 6 traps I see leaders fall into when they find something they don't like in their organization.

Which ones snag you? What are other traps you've discovered?