

**Top 10  
Mistakes  
Great Leaders  
DO NOT  
Make Twice**



Dr Oge Austin-Chukwu  
Reach Coaching

# TOP 10 MISTAKES **GREAT** LEADERS DO **NOT** MAKE TWICE

By Dr Oge Austin-Chukwu

Leadership Coach

Reach Corporate Coaching and Training

No part of this book may be reproduced, transmitted, or sold in whole or part in any form without the prior, written consent of the author

© 2014 Oge Austin-Chukwu. All rights reserved.

## Contents

A Word from Me .....	4
Mistake #1.....	5
Resist Change.....	5
Mistake #2.....	6
Play it Safe .....	6
Mistake #3.....	8
Don't Make Decisions .....	8
Mistake #4.....	10
Think You Can Do it Alone.....	10
Mistake #5.....	12
Ignore Wise Counsel.....	12
Mistake #6.....	14
Don't Communicate the Vision .....	14
Mistake #7.....	16
Always Take the Easy Way .....	16
Mistake #8.....	18
Work Till You Drop.....	18
Mistake #9.....	20
Fail To Empower Others.....	20
Mistake #10.....	22
Fail to prioritize.....	22
A Final Word .....	24
About the author .....	24

## A Word from Me

### TOP 10 MISTAKES **GREAT LEADERS DO NOT MAKE TWICE**

Much of leadership is learned behaviour that becomes unconscious and automatic over time. There is still debate surrounding the question of whether leaders are made or born. A study published earlier this year by Wake Forest University in the US seemed to suggest that leaders are born with certain traits that set them apart from others. This study scanned the brains of various ranks of officers from the US Military Academy at West Point. The scans showed that the frontal and prefrontal lobes (areas associated with decision making) of the soldiers deemed to be leaders, differed from others. However, Jonathan Gosling, Professor of Leadership Studies at the University of Exeter believes that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of nature and nurture. 'Some are bred to assume responsibility and authority,' he said. 'There is no evidence for a leadership gene but intelligence is important and is to some extent inherited – though not all smart people are good leaders’.

Whether leaders are born or made is however outside the scope of this book. Instead this book is about ten mistakes that great leaders do not make twice. These are by no means the only mistakes, but I chose them because they are common ones. Every great leader has made mistakes – some of them quite serious ones. The important thing is that they learned from their mistakes. And they certainly tried not to make the same mistake twice. That would be plain stupid. You don't have to make the mistakes that they made. You have the benefit of being in a position where you can learn from the experiences of others.

I am assuming that if you are reading this, then you must be a leader, or at least one in the making. For those of you who may be thinking 'but I am not a leader' you are not alone. I do implore you to read on, as the following sentences may change your mind.

Many people, even those in varying positions of influence do not see themselves as leaders. The truth is that "leadership is influence" according to John Maxwell. This means that if you influence someone else in some way, then you are leading that person albeit unknowingly. You may never lead a team of hundreds or thousands, but one thing everyone will have to do is lead themselves. Arguably, the most crucial person you may ever get to lead is yourself.

I have chosen to look at these lessons from great leaders from a slightly different angle. I am looking at mistakes because I believe we can learn from

the negative as well as from the positive. In the coaching world, we talk about the carrot and the stick. Some people are motivated by the positive – the carrot, while others are motivated by the negative – the stick. Regardless of your particular slant, this book will help you become a better leader. I have included some possible action steps at the end of each section because learning must be followed by action in order for transformation to occur.

What sets great leaders apart from average leaders? That's what we are going to look at over the next few chapters. Stick with me, and learn from those that have walked this road before you. Why re-invent the wheel?

## Mistake #1

### Resist Change

*“The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance” - Alan Watts*

Often the one thing that underlies resistance to change is fear of the unknown. If I let go of what I know and am comfortable with, what is the guarantee that something better will replace what I have lost? What if this new thing doesn't work? What if I lose everything? And the 'what ifs' go on and on. A real danger of resisting change is that you become irrelevant as a leader. If you are running a business, your business is in danger of becoming obsolete as your competitors move on while you remain on the same spot.

Take social media for example. Ten years ago, people communicated mostly by email, telephone or fax. These days social media is one of the most popular (if not *the* most popular) way that people connect with friends, family or fans. It is estimated that there are 1.19 billion active users of Facebook, 215 million active users of Twitter (500 million registered users) and 259 million users of LinkedIn. That's impressive statistics and any business or corporation that fails to embrace these statistics and do something with them, will find themselves on a downward slope to extinction. Resisting change can be dangerous. Instead of resisting change, embrace it, make it work for you and enjoy the journey of discovering new heights.



Yes, there is a possibility of running into new problems or challenges as you embrace change but growth is often preceded by problems that stretch you. What is to be gained is more often than not greater than whatever you think you might be giving up. It's all in your attitude. If you anticipate and prepare for change, you will handle it better than if you stick your nose in the sand and hope change will stay away.

So instead of dreading change, look forward to what it can bring. The best time to instigate change is when it is not necessary. If you wait until you need to change, the power will be taken from you and change will become an uphill task rather than the exciting, growth building experience that it should be. The most helpful book I have read about the subject of change is Dr Spencer Johnson's book "*Who moved my cheese?*"

It tells the story of two mice who were prepared for change and two 'little people' who were not. Not only were the 'little people' not prepared for change, but they also failed to respond appropriately even when it became obvious that change had been thrust upon them. This change required both their attitudes and strategies to change.

Great leaders realise that they live in a constantly changing environment and that in order to stay on top of the game, they need to anticipate change. At the very least, these leaders respond quickly to change even when it takes them by surprise.

**Possible action steps:**

- Look at the areas of your leadership that have remained static over the last twelve months.
- Are there any changes you may need to make in these areas in order to be more productive?
- Do something differently this week, even if it is as simple as taking a different route to work, or trying out a new recipe.

## **Mistake #2**

### **Play it Safe**

*“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear” - Nelson Mandela*

Playing it safe is a sure guarantee for mediocrity. Yes, it is important to carry out a fair amount of research before plunging into anything new. Weigh the pros and the cons. In the end though, the only way you will know for sure if your venture or idea will succeed is if you give it a go. Great leaders know this. This is why they will take calculated risks while others stay in the boat of predictability and comfort.

There is always going to be some degree of risk involved in aiming for something or someplace higher than where you are at the moment. ‘No risk, no reward’ is a well-known saying that has every ounce of truth in it. The people that go beyond their comfort zones on a regular basis are the ones that achieve great things.



Courage, as many people will agree, is high on the list of traits that make a good leader. The dictionary defines courage as “the state or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger, fear, or vicissitudes with self-possession, confidence, and resolution; bravery” (the free online dictionary).

Great leaders are not afraid to fail because there is just as strong a chance of success in any new undertaking as there is of failure. The question is, are you focused on failure or on success?

The lion is a symbol for deathless courage, strength, fearlessness, bravery and royalty. When a lion goes after its prey, it does it with relentless courage and determination. Lions will even attack other animals twice their size. Many times, they will succeed at overpowering their prey. Yes, they fail sometimes, but it never stops them from trying again. Playing it safe is not really top of their agenda when they see a prey that is potential supper.

Courage is a trait that can be learned. ‘Do it afraid’, is a maxim that many leaders live by. Courageous leaders will admit that often they take a leap of faith with their hearts pounding. Courage is therefore not the absence of fear but the overruling of that fear. The more you take action in spite of your fear, the better you become at it, and surprisingly, the less a threat your fear becomes.

Studies seem to suggest that every time you show courage in the face of fear, a part of the brain located in the sgACC (subgenual anterior cingulate cortex) is activated. The sgACC is responsible for fear, emotion, stress, perception, and a variety of other tasks. This action then cancels out some of the fear that is activated by the part of the brain that deals with fight or flight. In other words, your courage can cancel out your fear.

The next time you are tempted to play it safe because your victory is uncertain, consider what staying in the boat will achieve. Sometimes one has to face the consequences of not taking an action as well as the consequences of taking it. You'll be surprised at how suddenly the churning sea seems more attractive than the safe boat.

---

*No Risk, No Reward*

*Step out of the boat!*



### **Possible action steps**

- What untapped opportunities lie in front of you at this moment?
- Decide that you will take one bold step this week towards those opportunities.
- Tell someone you trust about your planned action. Ask them to hold you accountable by asking you after an agreed time has elapsed to see if you have completed the action. Make sure this is someone who you respect and value otherwise you may not feel the pressure to complete your desired action!

### **Mistake #3**

#### **Don't Make Decisions**

*"Whenever you see a successful business, someone once made a courageous decision" - Peter F. Drucker*

Often when we are taking a long time to make a decision, it is because we are hoping someone else will make it for us. We do not have the courage to make certain decisions because we are afraid of the consequences that may follow if our decision is the wrong one. Even great leaders make mistakes. The difference between them and the not-so-great leaders is that great leaders admit their error, learn from it and move on. One thing great leaders do not do is wallow in the mistakes of yesterday. Great leaders are decisive people.

As human beings we make decisions every day. These range from small decisions that have few consequences like what to eat for dinner or what to wear to a friend's dinner party, to more life changing ones like what career path to take. Our brains are constantly working and a lot of research has gone into trying to understand how the brain performs this all important task.

Different areas of the brain appear to be involved in this process depending on what type of decision needs to be made. The process seems to be the same every time, in the sense that the brain makes use of sounds, sights and other sensory input to come up with a judgement. This is rather like a jury that makes a judgement based on the evidence presented to it by the prosecutor and defending lawyers.



We are all different in the speed and manner in which we make decisions. Some people are very quick to make decisions because they rely largely on instinct. Others spend more time gathering information and looking at the data before they make a decision. Using the DISC personality profile (DISC is a very popular psychometric profiling tool used by many businesses and organisations) these would be the Dominant and the Compliant personality styles.

It is very helpful to know your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to decision making so I do encourage my clients to take the DISC personality profile assessment. This way you can discover what your natural leaning is, and learn to recognise when you are merely prevaricating rather than getting on and making the decision. (You can get more information about DISC by visiting my website - [www.reach-coaching.com](http://www.reach-coaching.com))

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with either method but the bottom line is that decisions need to be made. Often they need to be made within a certain time frame otherwise there could be some grave consequences. It is possible

to spend so much time deliberating on the pros and cons of a particular course of action that by the time the decision is finally made, precious time has been lost. This can result in an outcome that is not as favourable as it could have been if the decision was made earlier. Sometimes it is better to make the wrong decision in a timely manner than to make the right one too late. At least, having made a decision (even if it turns out to be wrong) there is often the chance to learn from the mistake and then take other actions that can correct whatever has been done wrong.

So by all means do all the research that is required. Ask yourself the tough questions. Seek advice from others when you need to. But in the long run, the buck stops with you as the leader. Make that judgement call. And be ready to bear the consequences, whatever they may be.

Here are some helpful questions to ask yourself when you are faced with tough decisions:

- What are the consequences of taking this action?
- What are the consequences of not taking the action?
- What more information do I need in order to be clearer about my options here?
- What time limits are there in making this decision?
- Who stands to benefit from the decision that I make?
- Who could lose?
- How can I make the outcome a win-win?
- What will happen if I do nothing?

#### **Possible action steps**

- If you have never had psychometric testing before, this would be a good time to get one done. Learn more about your decision making style and determine areas that you may need to work on
- Make a concerted effort to resist the temptation to leave the decision-making to someone else.

## **Mistake #4**

### **Think You Can Do it Alone**

*“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” – Helen Keller*

Leaders who think that they can achieve anything of considerable worth all by themselves, are making a big mistake. For starters, a leader can only truly lead if he or she has willing followers. I once watched a movie about geese. It was truly amazing to watch them fly in perfect V formation, without anyone falling out of the formation. I later read that sometimes, there can be as many as one hundred geese flying in this perfect formation, honking so loudly that you cannot help but notice them. Research has shown that an intense uplift is created for the geese behind when each goose flaps its wings. This teamwork has been shown to add just over 70% more flying range than if the goose were flying on its own.



While flying in this perfect formation, the lead goose will often go to the back of the formation when it tires and another goose will take the lead. If a goose were to fall sick, two other geese will leave the formation and fly beside the incapacitated goose until it either becomes able to fly again or it dies. This truly is team work at its very best.

What can we learn from the geese? First of all, when a group of people come together with a common purpose, they will achieve much. The team shares the load, each person contributing their expertise and talent, while looking out for the other team members. When this team is led by a strong leader that knows when to let go and let others lead, the results are even more remarkable.

Good team work produces synergy, the interaction of multiple elements in a system which produces an effect that is greater than the sum of their individual effects. True, there can be friction within teams, and conflicts often arise. However, a great leader understands the interactions between people with different personalities and knows how to manage these differences in order to get the best out of the team.

“Great leaders – the truly successful ones who are in the top 1 percent - all have one thing in common,” says John Maxwell in his book *Developing The Leaders Around You*. “They know,” he continues, “that acquiring and keeping good people is a leader’s most important task.” A great leader knows how to pick his/her team so that the individuals are complimentary to one another. When conflicts arise, a great leader is not afraid to deal with the conflicts in a timely manner so that the team’s goals are not jeopardised. This leader knows how to instil value in each of his team members so that they are willing

to give a hundred percent of themselves to make sure that the team succeeds.

When geese are flying in formation, they tend to honk quite noisily. Some believe that this is a way of communicating with the other geese primarily to encourage them. A culture of encouraging and looking after one another within a team will only happen if it is modelled from top down. Leaders are often visionary people who are so focused on where they want to take their team that they forget to nurture and care for their team members. Great leaders realise that they cannot achieve their goals alone. They must therefore make sure that their team members are fully on board during the journey from vision to reality.

In recent years much has been said in leadership circles about the importance of emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to identify, assess and control one's emotions as well as to understand, interpret and respond to that of others. While some claim that it is inborn, others maintain that it can be learned and developed. The different ways in which Emotional Intelligence is expressed and how to measure how much you have, are both beyond the scope of this book. Suffice it to say, it is worth finding out more about this concept because it is an intrinsic part of effective leadership.

#### **Possible action steps**

- Schedule some time to meet with your team members individually and get their thoughts on how you can interact and care for one another better.
- Carry out a 360 degree assessment on yourself. This gives your team members and colleagues an opportunity to express their opinions about your leadership. The assessment is often a scary but very worthwhile exercise to carry out as it exposes your blind spots.

## **Mistake #5**

### **Ignore Wise Counsel**

*Plans succeed through good counsel; don't go to war without wise advice –*  
**Solomon**

There is often a fine line here. On the one hand, leaders must learn to ignore the voice of the crowd and take the course they believe in their hearts is the right one. Leading will often mean going down a path no-one else has

walked; going north when everyone else is heading south. But, on the other hand, it takes a great leader to recognise wise counsel and act on it. And it is not just enough to recognise wise counsel when it is offered. You must on occasion, seek it out.



It takes humility to admit that you don't have all the answers all of the time. In his book *Good To Great*, Jim Collins describes the level 5 executive (the highest level of leadership) as a leader who "*builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.*"

Most people will have had the experience of being led by an arrogant, pig-headed leader who thinks he or she knows it all. Everyone else (but the unfortunate leader) knows that this person really doesn't know it all. For the leader, it's a blind spot they are not even aware that they possess.

Wise counsel comes in many forms and through diverse sources. It does not always come from the mentor or senior colleague as you would expect. Sometimes it will come from team members, even from the very junior ones – as the saying goes "*out of the mouth of babes and sucklings...*" Occasionally, it will even come from the opposition – disguised of course, but good counsel none the less. Great leaders develop such an instinct for wise counsel that regardless of where and how it presents itself, they recognise it for what it is. And they pay heed to it.

Sometimes counsel doesn't come directly from people but from books, articles or other information media. People who are devoted to life-long learning and personal development will allow themselves to be corrected about old beliefs or concepts that no longer serve the current state of affairs. They are not so close minded that it is impossible for them to change their mind. Great leaders are quick to admit when they have got it wrong because they are more concerned about the good of the people they are leading than about "losing face".



I got it wrong!

### **Possible action steps:**

- Write a list of people that you consider 'wise', people who you would be comfortable to ask for advice when you need it.
- If you don't already have one, consider asking someone you know and trust to act as a sounding board/mentor. It is helpful if this is not a close friend or relative as it is best if they can speak frankly without fear of hurting your feelings.

## **Mistake #6**

### **Don't Communicate the Vision**

*"The very essence of leadership is [that] you have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet."* — **Theodore Hesburgh**

Leaders often have a picture of the future that they are pursuing before anyone else does. It is difficult to journey towards a destination that you have little knowledge of. This is why great leaders paint a vivid picture of the future for their followers to see. They don't just do this once. They keep communicating this vision in as many ways as they can until everyone else sees what they see. Because we humans are quick to forget, the leader must take every opportunity to remind his followers where they are headed.

Many people think that casting vision is just about putting together a powerful presentation that outlines the need to move purposefully towards a desired future. Certainly vision casting involves this element. However, leaders need to understand that different personalities have different ways of learning and assimilating information. This is key to finding creative ways of presenting the vision in ways that will appeal to every member of the team.

While some people's attention will be caught by words alone, others are visual learners and have to 'see' a picture of the future in order to be motivated to pursue it. Still others are kinetic learners and this group can sometimes be a challenge to envision.



In 1955 Walt Disney's dream of a clean amusement park where families could have fun together was realised when Disneyland Park was opened. Prior to this, no one had imagined that a theme park based around a cartoon character called Mickey Mouse would be any success. But Walt was optimistic and determined not to be dissuaded by other people's lack of imagination. By the beginning of its twenty fifth year, Disneyland had entertained more than 200 million people, including presidents, kings and queens, and royalty from all over the globe.

The ability to see possibilities that others around you may not be able to see is a characteristic of great leaders. It is easy to get on the band wagon after everyone else but it takes foresight to be the one to start the train. Some leaders have failed to realise their vision simply because they were unable to persuade others to go along with them. Having a vision is not enough. Your vision must be communicated in such a way that others 'catch' it.

We have seen earlier that greatness is often a result of a great team led by a great leader. Therefore, even if you are a great leader and you have great vision, you are unlikely to realise that vision if no-one is prepared to work with you. People will only commit themselves if they can see the benefits of whatever it is you are asking them to sign up for. Invariably, a lot of hard work and sacrifice will be required during the pursuit of the vision. It is therefore important that your team members are constantly being inspired and motivated as they work towards this vision.

Tips on casting vision and maintaining momentum:

- Create a clear and compelling picture in as many ways as possible, taking into consideration different learning styles and personalities
- Create buy-in by encouraging participation and feedback from the team members.
- Be clear about what they stand to gain - personally as well as corporately - in realising this vision. Make sure it ties in with personal and organisational values.
- Keep team members motivated by rewarding hard work and milestones reached.
- Create regular reminders about the destination and make this accessible to everyone on the team.

**Possible action steps:**

- Try and encapsulate your vision in one short, memorable sentence.
- Explore different ways of communicating this vision with people based on their personalities.

- Carry out a survey with your team that is aimed at finding out what means of communication gets their attention the most.

## Mistake #7

### Always Take the Easy Way

*One should never take the easy road, but rather the right road, no matter how long the travel – **Scott Cerreta***

I read an inspiring story<sup>1</sup> about a young lady whose passion from the age of 8 was to become a professional surfer. She spent every available moment she had pursuing that dream, until at the age of thirteen she was attacked by a shark while she was surfing. Her arm was severed in the attack, and although her life was saved through a brave rescue and subsequent surgery she was left with one arm. Surfing was no longer going to be an easy task. Bethany was not about to accept defeat.

Not long after the attack, she returned to the water to take up surfing again. Anyone would have understood if she never surfed again. But that was the easy road, a road that this young lady was determined not to take. Instead she put aside fear and the possibility of failure, and taught herself to surf in spite of her disability.

Months after the vicious attack, she came 5th at the 2004 National Scholastic Surfing Association Nationals Championships and later she won the Open Women's Division of the NSSA's Hawaiian conference season opener. She later went on to secure a spot on USA's National Surfing Team.



As a leader, there will come a time (and probably more than one time) when you will have to make a choice between the easy road and the hard road. Often the road to success is paved with challenges, difficult decisions and opportunities to give up. A great leader will always make the choice to take the right road even if it is the harder road. Interestingly, this decision is often taken even before the need to make a decision arises.

What do I mean by this? If you determine that you will be a person that does what needs to be done even at the expense of personal comfort, *before* you

are faced with challenging circumstances, then you are more likely to stick to your principles. If you wait until you are under pressure, it will be more difficult for you to make the right decision. Preparation is of utmost importance here. Remember that what seems like the easy road now, may turn out to be the harder road in the end because you have to undo actions that have led to unwanted results.

For example, deciding not to challenge a team member that is not pulling their weight just because you want to avoid conflict may mean that you end up tidying up the mess they leave. Putting up with their inadequacies hoping they would improve even when it was apparent that they were not suited for the job might have seemed like the easy road. This turns out to be worse in the long run when you are left with lots of loose ends to tie up. No-one relishes difficult conversations, especially when they involve telling people that they are not measuring up. However, you do people a disservice when you do not give them the opportunity to improve themselves, or find a job that suits them better.

Integrity is a quality that most great leaders possess. Integrity requires that you do what is right for the right reasons. Everyone else will not always agree with you and you will not always get the majority vote. This can be a lonely road to walk. But if you are convinced that your intended action is for the benefit of the common good and not to serve any one person (yourself included), then hold your ground. Integrity does win in the long run.

Sometimes, taking the right road means that it takes you a lot longer to get to where you are headed. That's ok. Perseverance develops character. The journey itself is every bit as important as the destination. The important thing is that however long it takes, when you do get to your destination, it will be worth all the hard work. The people who stood against you when you made the decision to choose the right way, will be proven wrong. Wisdom is proved by its actions, is a quote from the Bible. How true this is.

So, make up your mind today which way you will choose. Hold on to your principles. Set your face like a flint and refuse to be moved. Then wait patiently for the result.

**Possible action steps:**

- Make the decision today that you will do what needs to be done, regardless of the hardships this may involve.
- Keep a list of your 5 top values somewhere handy. When challenges arise, ask yourself which option(s) is in keeping with your values.
- Read about people who had to make tough choices in their lives. Learn how they succeeded in spite of the odds.

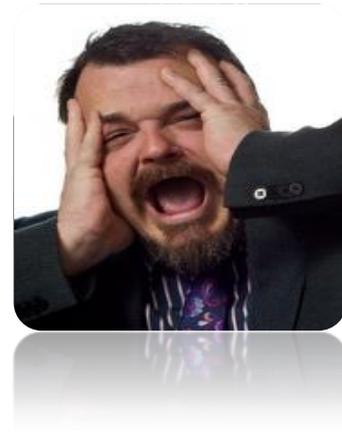
<sup>1</sup>Bob Harrison: *Power Points for Success*, published by Whitaker House January 2005, pg 28-29.

## Mistake #8

### Work Till You Drop

*“Work hard, but give time to your love, family and friends. Because, nobody will remember presentations, meetings, degrees & overtime on our death” – Unknown.*

Leaders are by nature hard workers. So the challenge is not usually about finding ways of working harder, but about finding ways of balancing hard work with hard play. Not surprisingly, burnout is more common in hardworking, committed, passionate and successful people. This is probably because these people believe so much in what they are trying to achieve that they give themselves wholeheartedly to it and end up devoting long hours to work. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this; in fact the reason they are so successful is because of the hard work they put in. When this hard work is not balanced by play, though, problems can arise.



I know this may seem to contradict what we talked about in the previous chapter – not taking the easy way. But like most things in life, there is always a balance. Working too hard can be just as detrimental, if not more so, as always looking for the easy way out. “All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy” is an adage we are all very familiar with.

Ayala Pines and Elliot Aronson define burnout as “A state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations.” Another definition alludes to the fact that in burnout, there is disillusionment brought about by devotion to something that “failed to produce the expected reward.” So there is physical exhaustion, as well as mental and emotional effects involved. These all lead to a state of being unable to function effectively.

Very often the people concerned do not recognise the signs of an impending breakdown and keep on working until suddenly, it seems, they crash. It is also interesting that the event that precedes this crash may have been a

relatively minor one. This may make people wonder how it could have been the cause of the breakdown. It wasn't. Like a storm that is preceded by signs that only the astute and experienced recognise, burnout is usually preceded by symptoms that only those that have knowledge of the condition recognise.

Physical symptoms of burnout include:

- Fatigue
- Sleeplessness
- Unexplained headaches, backaches or other aches and pains
- Lack of appetite

Emotional symptoms of burnout include:

- Feeling disillusioned
- Feeling irritable or being excessively critical of others
- Anger towards whoever you think is the cause of the problems you are facing
- Reduction in commitment to work
- Unnecessary harshness towards team members
- Drug or alcohol addictions
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness

Great leaders do not wait until these symptoms are already present before they take action. No, they take action to prevent burnout happening. They do this by making sure they have things in place that balance the very long and hard hours that they work. One of my aims as a Leadership Coach is to help my clients enjoy the journey to the future they are trying to create. What is the point of achieving your goals if the journey is so soul-destroying that you are not even able to enjoy success when it happens? Or worse still you find that you have achieved your dream at the expense of losing the very people that made your dream worth achieving?

Sometime ago, my husband and I spent a weekend with some dear friends of ours. We had great fun and engaged in deep conversations about life. Our time together made me realise that too often, in our pursuit of our goals and dreams, we forget to enjoy today on our way to tomorrow. While it is imperative that we constantly keep our eyes on the prize ahead, this should never be at the expense of enjoying every stage of the journey to your Promised Land. Otherwise you could get to that future you have dreamt of and discover that you have missed out on precious moments, moments you missed because you were too focused on the future to even notice those moments.

Life is not meant to be one big slug. It is meant to be lived to the full every single day. Great leaders know this. So what can you do in order to ensure that you enjoy the journey as you lead yourself or your teams?

**Possible action steps:**

- Don't take yourself too seriously. Learn to laugh often. This includes laughing at yourself.
- Break your goals into small steps and reward yourself every time you complete a step. Your reward doesn't have to cost the earth – a pamper session, a small gift to yourself, a favourite meal etc.
- Make sure what you are pursuing is in keeping with your values – the things that are important to you.
- See setbacks as an opportunity to learn and grow. Don't allow yourself to be discouraged by them.
- Take up a hobby or develop an existing one. Make time in your diary regularly for this and don't feel guilty about spending this time doing something you love.
- Recognise special moments in your day and savour them. Examples of such moments include a chance meeting with an old friend, a child wanting a cuddle, unplanned space in your diary because a client has cancelled. Don't be in such a hurry that you miss life's blessings however small.
- Practise random acts of kindness. These are things you do for people, even strangers, expecting nothing in return. Giving of yourself in this way leaves you feeling fulfilled and increases your sense of wellbeing.

## **Mistake #9**

### **Fail To Empower Others**

*“Leaders instil in their people a hope for success and a belief in themselves. Positive leaders empower people to accomplish their goals.” –Unknown*

One of the characteristics of great leaders is that they are not threatened by other leaders. In fact they are so committed to developing leaders that no sooner are they in a position of leadership than they are looking for someone who could take the reins from them in the future. This takes a great deal of humility and foresight. It takes humility because the leader recognises that it is less about him/her and more about the team as a whole and therefore they cannot afford to make themselves indispensable. The team should be able to go on if something happens to the leader otherwise it means that the leader has not done their job properly.

There are several reasons why it is beneficial to develop leaders around you. One of them is that other leaders help lighten the load so that you don't have to do everything. As we saw in the story about the geese, they take turns in leading the formation and that way each leader gets the chance to recuperate. This means that they remain effective for longer. Developing other leaders also shows the people you work with that you see value in them and are prepared to spend time and effort helping to put that value to good use. Thirdly, by mentoring potential leaders around you, you multiply your effectiveness and therefore increase your productivity

You have to be intentional about empowering others. Although some of your leadership behaviours can rub off on others as they interact with you, this does not replace structured and deliberate mentoring of others around you. As a leader you have to recognise and take advantage of opportunities to encourage and challenge the people in whom you see leadership potential. You can create opportunities for growth where you can, hold them up when they fall and give them hope that they can succeed.



John Maxwell says that *“Leaders create and inspire new leaders by instilling faith in their leadership ability and helping them develop and hone leadership skills they don't know they possess.”* So a leader is only really successful when they are reproducing even better leaders than themselves, knowing that it is not about competition but about co-operation.

I am very grateful to the people that saw something in me and took the time to help me become better at what I felt I was called to do. They did it mostly without expecting anything in return. – I certainly did not pay them any money. They suggested resources that they believed would help me and when it was appropriate, they gave me opportunities to try out skills they felt I had. Yes, it was risky business, but I believe the risk paid off. Having the benefit of these experiences makes me even more committed to help develop leaders around me as best as I can.

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself to determine if you are empowering the people that you lead:

- How much time am I intentionally investing to help people on my team with leadership potential?
- Who on my team has leadership potential that I can help develop?
- Am I creating an environment where my team members can grow?
- Do I feel threatened by anyone on my team?

- Am I committed to modelling good leadership to my team?
- Am I affirming and building up the people on my team?
- Do I have an idea of who could succeed me when I leave?

**Possible action steps:**

- Schedule time to mentor someone on your team who has leadership potential.
- Become more intentional with delegation for the purpose of stretching people on your team.

## Mistake #10

### Fail to prioritize

*“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.” - Stephen R. Covey.*

It is interesting that although we have the most advanced time saving technologies of all generations, we are the ones that seem to have the least time. Information overload is a term that was once confined to cognitive psychology. It has since evolved as a metaphor that is widely used to describe the enormous amount of information that we are bombarded with and its detrimental effects on us. What was meant to lighten our load has indeed done the opposite and many find themselves stressed and overworked. It has therefore never been more important to make sure we get our priorities right.

Time management is a skill that leaders are required to possess. I don't believe it is as much about time management as it is about priorities' management. You can learn to be extremely good at managing your time but still end up spending your time on the wrong things. Great leaders spend the majority of their time on what is really important rather than on what is urgent, but less important. It is not just a one-time decision that they make, but on a daily basis they brutally hack away at their to-do list, streamlining it as best as they can.



It is no secret that people who are seen as hardworking and successful are given more and more work to do. The Pareto principle (the 80-20 rule) is still very much at work today. If you don't make a habit of regularly reviewing

what you are spending your time on, you may find that you are spending valuable time on things that are not really important. One of the things I often do with my clients is to get them to look at what a typical day looks like for them. Sometimes they are not even aware that the very things they say are important to them are not getting much time allocated to them. Instead, demands from other people and seemingly urgent distractions encroach on valuable time that can be spent on things that really matter.

A common example of a seemingly urgent distraction is the telephone. How many times have you been interrupted in the middle of an important task by the telephone ringing? Due to its incessant nature, your first instinct is to pick it up only to regret your action seconds later when you find out that it is Aunt Jane calling to remind you about the family reunion the following week. She wants to be sure you are still able to bake the cake you promised you would bake. Nothing is wrong with that, except that she takes 30 minutes to tell you this. By the time you put the phone down you are irritated, your concentration has somewhat reduced and it takes you another thirty minutes to get re-focused.

What could you have done? Well you could have let the answer phone take the message, listened to it later, and called Aunt Jane back later that day if you needed to. The phone ringing was urgent, but it really wasn't that important. Making the right judgement call is required on a regular basis and great leaders know how to do this well. The nature of urgent things is that they are often insistent and the temptation is to drop everything else in order to attend to them. Important things, however, can be more subtle, yet they are the ones that produce the results that you want.



Another example of a time management challenge is the tussle between work and family. You should make time for what is of value to you and if that is family, then you will do this as a priority. Many a successful business person or leader has built a monumental company or organisation only to have their family fall apart because they have not given time to building family relationships. That really is a shame because you don't have to sacrifice one for the other. If you managed your time well, you can have good family relationships and a great organisation or business.

**Possible action steps:**

- Don't just have a 'to do' list, make sure you assign priorities to the items on your list

- Keep a log on what you actually spend time on, not what you intend to spend time on
- Regularly review the items on your list and ask yourself, “do the things on my list still reflect my values and aspirations?”
- Learn to say ‘no’. Be courteous but firm; don’t be tempted to go back on your word when pressure is exerted on you.
- Make sure you schedule the important things during the times when you are most effective. Don’t leave them until you are physically tired and emotionally drained. You will not be giving them your best.

## A Final Word

Well, we have come to the end of what I feel are the top 10 mistakes that great leaders don’t make twice. I hope that you have found the information of some benefit to you and that reading this book has made you more committed than ever to great leadership.

I would love to hear what you think about this book. Any feedback is welcome. Please contact me:

[info@reachcorporatecoaching.com](mailto:info@reachcorporatecoaching.com)

Connect with me:

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/OgeAustinChukwu>

**Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/ReachCorporateCoaching>

**LinkedIn:** <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/oge-austin-chukwu/37/9a9/2b8>

## About the author

Dr Oge Austin-Chukwu is a General Practitioner, and a Corporate & Executive Coach specializing in Leadership Coaching and Career Management. Founder and owner of Reach Corporate Coaching & Training, she is committed to helping people reach their full potential while enjoying the journey at the same time. Through workshops, individual coaching and motivational speaking, she helps people see what is possible and then supports them as they reach for it.