

Five Mistakes Leaders Make And How You Can Avoid Them - Guest Post By Joel Garfinkle



This week guest post is from Joel Garfinkle, author of 7 books and recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the United States. You can learn more about Mr. Garfinkle at the bottom of this post.

You've got both feet on the corporate ladder and you're moving up. How can you avoid a slip-and-fall that could take you down a rung or two, and cause permanent injury to your career? Here are five common mistakes that potential leaders make and what you should do instead:

- Laying bricks
- Acting like a manager
- Staying in the zone
- [Taking credit](#)
- Listening to yourself

Mistake #1: Laying bricks. It's an old legend but it makes an excellent point. Two bricklayers are laying bricks at a building site. A passerby stops to chat and asks what they're doing.

"I don't really know," responds the first bricklayer. "I'm just laying one brick on top of the other, day after day."

The second bricklayer looks skyward and smiles enthusiastically. "I'm building a cathedral," he declares. "Someday you'll see the spires and the bell tower, right up there."

Are you laying bricks or building a cathedral? Today you're a junior accountant or a new sales rep. That's what *you* do. What does the *company* do? What are its goals? Get the big picture and put yourself in the middle of it.

Mistake #2: Behaving like a manager. There are managers and then there are leaders. A manager organizes functions. A leader inspires people. A manager maintains the status quo. A leader innovates. A manager uses tactics. A leader develops strategy. If there's a parade starting, get out in front of it. That's what leaders do. Be conscious of the bottom line, but keep your eye on the horizon.

Mistake #3: Staying in the zone. It's comfortable in there--that's why we call it the comfort zone. Nothing wrong with having one. The danger is in getting stuck there. I'm not suggesting that you take up sky diving or bull riding, at least not literally. But when was the last time you volunteered for a new assignment? Are you building a file of accomplishments so you'll be ready for the [next promotion](#)? Think of a project that's been languishing and take it on. Look at what's burdening your boss and

volunteer to grab a piece of it. We stay in the zone because we're afraid to fail. In reality, there's no such thing as failure—there is only success or a valuable learning experience.

Mistake #4: Taking credit. The project you took on is a raving success and you're getting kudos from the people who count. Bask in the glow and then look around to see who helped you along the way. Acknowledge them publicly, in staff meetings, emails to other managers, or casual conversations. Leaders share the glory every way they can.

Mistake #5: Listening to yourself. Self-confidence is great and good leaders have it. But don't stop there. Seek advice from people you respect. Look for mentors, advocates, [executive coaches who can help you get to the next level](#). You need input from people who know things you don't, who see things about you that you don't see, and who will be partners in your success.

Joel Garfinkle is the author of [Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level](#). As an executive coach, Garfinkle has worked with Wells Fargo Bank, Cisco Systems, Oracle, Deloitte, Amazon, Microsoft, Google, Starbucks, Citibank and The Ritz-Carlton. View his 7 books and over 200 free leadership articles at [Garfinkle Executive Coaching](#).

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