

7 Saboteurs of Business Success

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) in May 9th 2012



Harvard Business School is one of the oldest, most-acclaimed MBA-granting institutions in America. Its success relies heavily on case studies. Students read exhaustive write-ups of both monumental successes and abject failures, with the point being to learn what works—and *what doesn't*.

In the spirit of HBS's "*what doesn't*" case studies, here's a list of the most common saboteurs of business success:

1. **Accepting what's available.** Everyone loves convenience, so we often settle for what's available. But what's available usually isn't anywhere near what's best. In fact, it's safe to call availability the foe of innovation. Good leaders look beyond the obvious and convenient and create their own new options.
2. **Distraction.** We're living in one of the most distracting business environments of all time. Not only must we contend with personal interruptions—cell phones, YouTube, email, and more—but business itself is full of distractions: data overload, constant marketing, fickle consumer polling trends, political debates, and contingency plans. The best leaders learn to focus their attention on only what's most important and relevant.
3. **Decision-making by committee.** There's nothing wrong with using committees (or other forms of teams) to gather information or develop proposals. But the best leaders understand that being the ultimate decision maker is part of their job description. It's tempting to shirk responsibility by hiding behind a committee, but it's not good leadership.
4. **Comfort.** Who needs a Nobel Prize when they have satellite TV, always-on Internet, 10,000 frequent flier miles, and Angry Birds? It's hard to criticize comfort, but it certainly doesn't drive us to greatness. The most successful entrepreneurs and business leaders push past their comfort zones and learn to embrace risk and uncertainty.
5. **Riding momentum.** Success is sweet, and it's tempting to ride out your accomplishments for all they're worth. Unfortunately, finding something that works and then only doing that is a great way to dig yourself into a rut. The most successful leaders take a moment to relish a victory and then move on to their next even bigger project.
6. **Uncertainty.** Most leaders like to think of themselves as decision-makers, but it's not uncommon for some to become paralyzed by discovery, research, analysis, and planning. There's nothing wrong with making educated decisions, but leaders who put too much emphasis on completely eliminating risk are likely to miss the biggest opportunities.
7. **Undervaluing technical skill.** "A good salesperson can sell anything," is a favorite quote of... salespeople. Likewise, some managers believe that management is all about

emotional intelligence, and some say good teachers can teach anything. In reality, little gets done in the business world that doesn't require technical expertise. The best leaders have a solid grasp of how their company's products or services work.

Good leadership isn't always fun and easy. After all, who likes ignoring the convenient, embracing the uncomfortable, and staying up late to study? Still, that's what good leaders do—and it pays off in the end.

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About Joel Garfinkle

JOEL A. GARFINKLE is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S. and the author of seven books including [Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career To the Next Level](#) and 300+ articles on leadership, executive presence and getting ahead at work. View his books and FREE articles at www.garfinkleexecutivecoaching.com and connect with him via his LeadChange member profile. You can also subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work E-mail newsletter and receive the FREE e-book, 40 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"

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