



Five Ways To Lead When You Are Too Busy To Lead

By Jones Loflin

Helping You Make The Best Choices With Your Time



One of my favorite lead questions when starting a training program or talking with a potential coaching client is, "In your struggle to get it all done, what's NOT getting done?" While the answers vary greatly, among leaders the responses center around three key areas:

- People development
- Strategic planning
- Awareness of change

It's not that they are consciously avoiding their responsibilities as a leader. They just have so many tasks in front of them and their default response is to work like mad to get as many of them done as possible. Their brain is happy to comply because it likes the simple tasks that can be done quickly instead of working through complex and uncertain areas like building capacity in others and planning for the future.

The uncomfortable reality, however, is that you can't always wait until things "slow down" to set things right with your team. They need something from you NOW! If you find yourself nodding in agreement that you feel like you are too busy to get to your most important responsibilities as a leader, try these five strategies:

Be honest and open.

While you know the reason for your lack of time with your team members, don't assume they know the truth. Tell them what circumstances are keeping you from spending more time with them. Thank them for their patience and let them know when your current crazy schedule will become more normal. This action teaches them the importance of accountability and transparency.

Build blocks of time just for them.

While it might have been easier in slower times to handle their requests throughout the day, you're in a different place right now. You need periods of uninterrupted time to more deeply focus on handling your heavy load of tasks. Talk with your team about when they most need your attention and determine up to two 30-minute blocks of time when you can commit to

being fully available. And if they aren't coming to you during these times... go to them! Whether face-to-face, by phone, or by an electronic means, use this time to stay connected. Demonstrate how important these blocks of time are to you and you show your team how much you value them.

Ask yourself "stretch questions."

When you've got too many "elephants" you're trying to juggle, it's hard to see beyond the end of the week... or maybe even the end of the day. Force yourself to look beyond the status quo by asking yourself some "stretch questions" before you plan your day or week. They could include:

- Who most needs me to help them grow?
- What needs to change so I'm not in these same circumstances 30 days from now?
- Where should I pay more attention?
- How could I work differently to get better results?
- Why can't I keep leading in this way?

Increase the specificity in your communication.

Burdened by a heavy workload, it's easy to say things like, "I'll get to it when I can," or "Get back to me with your answer ASAP!" The irony is that both you and your team need deadlines more than ever when you're overloaded as a leader. It helps them prioritize their work and keeps you from getting lost in your current chaotic schedule. If you tell someone to send you an email about something and you'll look at it, give them an idea of how long it will be before they hear from you. Don't be vague about when you need information either. Tell your team to challenge you if they think you have given them an unreasonable request. You're teaching them to negotiate and manage expectations, which are two critical skills needed for leaders. For more about how to improve the specificity in your communication, check out [my blog](#) on the subject.

Ask for help.

If there's one mistake I see new (and seasoned) leaders consistently make, it's feeling like they have to be able to handle everything on their own. "I've got to prove to them that I can do the job!" they say to me. They fail to recognize their greatest asset to "doing the job" is their people. Unless you are in a completely toxic workplace, many, if not all of your team members are pulling FOR you. They want to learn new things, expand their capabilities, and know they make a difference. If you're holding onto tasks that others could do, you're saying to them, *"I don't trust you to get the job done."* Sure it will take some time to train them, but

that's where you can use those blocks of time you established. And do you really want to rob them of the joy of knowing they helped you breathe a little easier?

The irony is that even when you are too busy to lead... you ARE leading. You're leading your team to believe that tasks are more important than trust, that growth is optional, and that when things get tough you should rely solely on yourself.

How does that compare with what successful leaders do? Colin Powell's words give us a strong clue:

"Leadership is about solving problems. The day your people stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."

And to me, it brilliantly highlights why you can NEVER be too busy to lead.



Jones Loflin is a virtual speaker and coach helping people make the best choices with their time so they can thrive. He is the author of several books, including *Always Growing* and the award-winning, *Juggling Elephants*. You can learn more about Jones at www.jonesloflin.com

