

Ten Signs of a Leadership Crash

I found best-selling author and speaker Stephen Mansfield's book *Ten Signs of a Leadership Crash* to resonate deeply in providing the backstory to the leadership downfalls that I have witnessed over the years in the public square, but perhaps even more heartbreakingly, the ones that are up-close and personal—those in my own circle of relationships. I found myself challenged personally by these ten warning signs, knowing that none of us should ever consider ourselves bullet-proof—exempt from choices that lead to compromises...and compromises that all too often blows up a leader's life and impact.

Read this book reflectively...with a mirror handy, bravely asking the “could-this-be-me” questions. Do it for yourself. And do it for those who look to you for a leader worth following.

Chuck Olson
Founder | Lead With Your Life

Title: *Ten Signs of a Leadership Crash*

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Book Description:

For years, I had been taking notes on what those around a crashed leader would point out as the “signposts” on the road to the crash. It was fascinating. I don’t mean this callously. It was fascinating because in almost every case, people around a leader who crashed saw important signs very early on and simply did not act. What is important for the moment is not that they didn’t act. It is the fact that they saw trouble coming, even if they didn’t know what to do when they saw it. The point is there were signs. People saw them. Things might have turned out differently.

I began to compile what people had told me and what I had seen for myself about the signs that signaled a crash. I compared notes with consultants who handle these types of high-visibility crashes. We all saw that while we might have been using different language, we had become aware of the same signs of a personal decline.

I realized that while I will always help fix crashes—it is important work, particularly in our time when moral failures among leaders do so much damage—I could help even more by teaching what I had learned about the signs of an oncoming crash. I started calling this “lessons from the leadership crash post-mortem.”

In other words, if I could show people what to watch for in their friends, family, and associates that warned of a crash, I could do far more good than by repairing institutions and lives after the explosion. I could give corporate cultures and leadership teams of every kind—even husbands and wives—language to use for what they saw but couldn’t describe. I knew this could help stave off expensive, humiliating, life-ruining crashes.

This is exactly what I’m doing in this little book. I am going to describe the Ten Signs of a Leadership Crash. I’m going to list the lessons of the leadership crash post-mortem. I’m going to explain the ten very common

behaviors that are almost always evident in the downward journey of a leader. Not all of these are involved in every crash story perhaps, but most of them are, and knowing just a few of them could save the millions of dollars, years of humiliation, hundreds and sometimes thousands of jobs, and much lost good that might have been done.

What if someone had stopped Bernie Madoff? What if a friend knew what to watch for in Tiger Woods? What if someone had courageously confronted Bill Clinton before that first time? What if friends and family had known what to watch for in Bill Cosby's life, or Lance Armstrong's, or Richard Nixon's, or Jim Bakker's, or Brett Favre's, or the pastor of that 3000-member church in Detroit, or the CEO of Stanford Financial? What might Penn State have been spared by some courage and ethics once the signs appeared?

We can always fix things after the crash. My team and I are good at this. So are many others. Far better is to recognize the signs of a looming crash and intervene. This can save billions of dollars from lost production, the costs of repair and, even more, what is often lost to human lives.

Book Quotes:

1. Being Out of Season

The first and perhaps most important sign of a leadership crash is not usually something people notice about a leader. It's usually something a leader notices about himself. It is often missed because it's hard to define and almost mystical, but it is one of the most important indicators in a leader's life. It is simply this: being "out of season." LOCATION: 130

Most of this knowing when you are in season and when you are not, though, is about feel. It's about realizing that there are invisible seasons that define our lives—not just biological seasons or relational seasons—and that part of the art of happiness and greatness is to identify your seasons and conduct yourself accordingly. LOCATION: 163

Don't get out of season. Don't overstay your welcome. Don't blow past that inner sense that the current arrangement is at an end. Don't ignore the invisible seasons of your life and leadership. It leaves you vulnerable, set up for trouble, out of sync with every important person in your life, and apart from the best version of you. Be in season. LOCATION: 169

2. Choosing Isolation

In every single case that I've ever consulted in, the leader being out of season was part of the matrix of trouble. Second to it in importance—and in the number of times it has been mentioned to me—is some form of isolation. LOCATION: 174

The wise man empowers his band of brothers. He relies on them for their radar about his life. He realizes that these people can be an early warning system, that if they are allowed to speak freely their affection and insight will make them valuable guardians of his soul. He sticks close to them, asks them to always speak the truth to him—just as he will do for them. He builds a culture around himself of honesty, loving confrontation, and permission to intervene. LOCATION: 180

Leaders usually isolate themselves for three reasons. The first is their view of authority. The arena of religion is where we see this played out most often. Perhaps you've watched a situation where a local pastor suddenly decides he's an apostle, or a bishop, or the Lord of Lords. His view of his spiritual authority elevates him in his own mind and in the minds of his sycophants into an almost unreachable state: "I'm an apostle and you're not. I hear the voice of God, and you don't." LOCATION: 199

If a leader comes to believe that he is in some way unapproachable because of his title, his gifts, or some other form of superiority, he's giving in to pride, and that pride is positioning him for a crash. LOCATION: 205

Remember: Isolation insulates from information, inviting infamy. LOCATION: 208

A second reason for isolation is hurt. Human beings are like most animals: when wounded, they curl around their wound to protect it. They don't want the wound touched, reopened, or exposed to further damage. With human beings, there is also a pride factor. I'm hurt. I'm weak. I don't want you to see me like this. LOCATION: 209

Finally, there is guilt. When we do what we know to be wrong, we isolate so we aren't found out. LOCATION: 223

Here's the deal: Isolation is a distress flare. LOCATION: 229

3. Defining Episodes of Bitterness

The soul has a memory like an elephant. Either we forgive offenses or they will cycle in us through the years, gaining strength and recruiting still other offenses. Bitterness is the snarling, vengeful feeling that lives in us as a result. It's poison. It permeates all we do. It can destroy us.

LOCATION: 277

When we are bitter, we feel justified in treating other people harshly. When we are bitter, we feel entitled to any pleasure or privilege. When we are bitter, we rehearse the wrongs done to us and press their imprint deeper into our souls. When we are bitter, we drive the very people we need away. LOCATION: 279

4. Evading Confrontation

Please hear what I am about to say: There is no healthy person, family, or organization of any kind without well-intended confrontation. It is essential. Without it, chaos and our lesser natures rule the day. LOCATION: 315

Confrontation is an extension of love. It's an extension of leadership. It's an extension of caring about the world around us and the people entrusted to us. Without it, we are just cowards in a declining universe. LOCATION: 326

The truth is that low-level confrontations keep the big confrontations from being necessary.

LOCATION: 327

A culture of healthy confrontation is a culture of growth, trust, and achievement. A culture of cowardly avoidance is a culture of death to every area of life. LOCATION: 347

5. Losing Trusted Friendships

Yet my consultant friends agree with me that the clearest indicator of a man's decline is the state of his friendships. LOCATION: 353

Most people in the Western world today are living lives that are relationally a mile wide and an inch deep. They find themselves awash in a sea of casual relationships. LOCATION: 362

For those who have friends—and most leaders are magnetic enough to have accumulated many friends through the years—the state of these friendships reflect the state of the leader.

LOCATION: 389

6. Forgetting Fun

You may be surprised when I say that one of the indicators of a nearing crash is when life as we are living it has no room for fun. Actually, I mean more than fun. I mean wildness, rowdiness, full-bodied abandonment, letting the soul roar through the body. LOCATION: 412

7. Perpetuating an Artificial Image

8. Serving the Schedule

Once the schedule ceases being a method to sanely achieve predetermined ends, the leader has stepped on a conveyor belt—or a roller coaster—over which he feels he has no control. The schedule becomes an animal we ride each day hoping not to fall off and be trampled. It is not a tool. It is not the planned fine-tuning of a vision. It is not the product of goals. It is a cruel master. LOCATION: 514

9. Building a Third World

This is one of the most common patterns of unfulfilled leaders. They create Third Worlds. They usually have enough money to pay for it and enough mobility to allow for it and enough skill at lying to hide it. LOCATION: 549

10. Losing the Poetry

The final of our ten signs of a leadership crash is really the early warning sign of all the rest. It can be a sign of its own, but it more usually anticipates—even creates—all the other conditions that indicate an oncoming crash. It is simply this: losing the poetry of what you do. LOCATION: 566

But hear this: Every leadership crash I've ever seen came after the leader got so numb he couldn't find the poetry with a flashlight. It was then one of the other dynamics I've described in this little book kicked in. LOCATION: 597

In truth, what I'm describing is a form of gratitude for what we get to do. If we can get up in the morning and say, "Look what I get to do" and say it with excitement, gratitude, and joy, we're safe. I get to lead these people. I get to guide a great company. I get to steer the direction of my city. I get to produce wealth and fashion young executives along the way. I get to teach. I get to write. I could be digging ditches. I could be gutting fish. I'm going to go to the 54th floor and write a check to put inner city kids in elite colleges because I get to work for that kind of company. LOCATION: 604

More to the point of our theme here, leadership crashes start in the hearts of leaders unprotected by gratitude and love and the call of the poetry. LOCATION: 611

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle "location" is provided after each entry.