



# Why Leaders Fail

*Donald Trump, paragon of the real estate world, files for bankruptcy. Richard Nixon, 37th U.S. President, resigns the presidency over the Watergate scandal. Jennifer Capriati, rising tennis star, enters a rehabilitation center for drug addicts. Jim Bakker, renowned televangelist, is convicted of fraud.*

***In the recent past, we've witnessed the public downfall of leaders from almost every area of endeavor—business, politics, religion, and sports. One day they're on top of the heap, the next, the heap's on top of them.***

Mark Sanborn, CSP, CPAE, is president of Sanborn & Associates, Inc., an idea studio dedicated to developing leaders in business and in life. Mark is an international bestselling author and noted expert on leadership, team building, customer service and change. In this recent article, he describes the Warning Signs of failing leadership. [Click here](#) to read the entire article.

## **WARNING SIGN #1: A Shift in Focus**

This shift can occur in several ways. Often, leaders simply lose sight of what's important. The laser-like focus that catapulted them to the top disappears, and they become distracted by the trappings of leadership, such as wealth and notoriety.

Leaders are usually distinguished by their ability to "think big." But when their focus shifts, they suddenly start thinking small. They micro manage, they get

caught up in details better left to others, they become consumed with the trivial and unimportant. And to make matters worse, this tendency can be exacerbated by an inclination toward perfectionism.

A more subtle leadership derailer is an obsession with "doing" rather than "becoming." The good work of leadership is usually a result of who the leader is. What the leader does then flows naturally from inner vision and character. It is possible for a leader to become too action oriented and, in the process, lose touch with the more important development of self.

What is your primary focus right now? If you can't write it on the back of your business card, then it's a sure bet that your leadership is suffering from a lack of clarity. Take the time necessary to get your focus back on what's important.

## **WARNING SIGN #2: Poor Communication**

A lack of focus and its resulting disorientation typically lead to poor communication. Followers can't possibly understand a leader's intent when the leader him- or herself isn't sure what it is! And when leaders are unclear about their own purpose, they often hide their confusion and uncertainty in ambiguous communication.

Sometimes, leaders fall into the clairvoyance trap. In other words, they begin to believe that truly committed followers automatically sense their goals and know what they want without being told. Misunderstanding is seen by such managers as a lack of effort (or commitment) on the listener's part, rather than their own communication negligence.

## **WARNING SIGN #3: Risk Aversion**

Third, leaders at risk often begin to be

driven by a fear of failure rather than the desire to succeed. Past successes create pressure for leaders: "Will I be able to sustain outstanding performance? What will I do for an encore?" In fact, the longer a leader is successful, the higher his or her perceived cost of failure.

When driven by the fear of failure, leaders are unable to take reasonable risks. They want to do only the tried and proven; attempts at innovation—typically a key to their initial success—diminish and eventually disappear.

## **WARNING SIGN #4: Ethics Slip**

A leader's credibility is the result of two aspects: what he or she does (competency) and who he or she is (character). A discrepancy between these two aspects creates an integrity problem.

The highest principle of leadership is integrity. When integrity ceases to be a leader's top priority, when a compromise of ethics is rationalized away as necessary for the "greater good," when achieving results becomes more important than the means to their achievement—that is the moment when a leader steps onto the slippery slope of failure.

To read all six Warning Signs from Mark Sanborn's article, [click here](#).

*"It's fine to celebrate success, but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure."*

*- Bill Gates*