



8 Blunders in How Leaders Think

By Mark Sanborn

Leader, are unexamined assumptions and outdated thinking holding you back?

Leaders need the intellectual courage to challenge their own thinking. And rather than fearing or resisting opposing points of view, leaders need to use those ideas to test their thinking and stimulate new insights.

Henry Ford famously said, “Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason why so few engage in it.” Thinking well is even harder.

As I work with leaders in organizations large and small, I find beliefs and ideas that are popular, but that fall short of the ideal or are just plain wrong. I call them thinking blunders. Here are eight I’ve identified for you to consider:

1

SETTLING FOR BEST PRACTICES.

Best practices are a ticking time bomb. Today’s best practices are next quarter’s second best practices, and obsolete next year. The only way to win is to look for and develop better practices and next practices – those that change the game and redefine the rules.

2

LEADING WITH CLICHÉS.

Transformational Leadership or Muddy Boots Leadership or (you fill in the adjective) Leadership—clever clichés aren’t always practical reality and can be off-putting to followers. Real leadership is based on timeless truths and although the application of those principles often needs to change with the times, they never become cliché. Make sure that your leadership approach is substantive and grounded in the timeless truths.

3

WASTING TIME AND MONEY ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

Can you honestly say you are driving revenue with the hours you spend on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the like? Many are wasting time and money on social media simply because they feel a vague compulsion (“We’ve got to have a presence!”). Digital marketing is only effective when it is the right fit for your brand and it is done effectively. Sending more advertising messages through the global web is a waste. Listening to your customers and prospects, engaging them and giving them information they can use—that is what effective leaders do.

4

MANAGING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.

Everyone with customers provides a customer experience—there’s no competitive advantage there. Instead, you’ve got to elevate the experience and give customers something they can’t get elsewhere. That means getting creative in differentiating how you deliver your products and services in a way that really matters to your customers so that they leave happier (yes, you need to manage their emotions) and tell others.

5

TRADITIONAL MENTORING.

Traditional mentoring is passive: lots of discussing, listening and suggesting. Top performers want and deserve more. Active mentoring is about advocating, questioning and guiding. It is the difference between telling someone to improve their relationship skills and showing them just how to do it.

6

AVOIDING CHANGE FOR THE SAKE OF CHANGE.

You’ve heard it said, “Don’t change for the sake of change.” But is that really true? Neomania is underrated and staying the same is the fastest way to get left behind. Sure, purposeful change is best, but even switching things up to reinvigorate the troops trumps slogging along with business as usual. (Watch the typical instant uptick in a sport team’s record when a new coach is brought in for proof that sometimes any change can break a slump.)

7

PURSUING SINGULAR SOLUTIONS.

Having an exceptional sales effort won’t save you if your customer service and operations suck. Dominant companies know there are a lot of interconnected, moving parts to success. Effective leadership is relentless across all areas and those who demand high performance from a smooth economic engine realize it can only happen if you’re hitting on all cylinders.

8

IGNORING EMERGING LEADERS.

Even self-starters appreciate a program that will accelerate their development. Don’t leave it up to your best talent to raise their hands and find their own way to develop as leaders. Identify your future leaders and invest in their growth with a solid program suited to their needs and the needs of the organization. If you don’t develop your emerging leaders, they’ll find someone who will, and it could be a competitor.

Other thinking blunders?

What did you once think was true about leadership that you’ve changed your mind about? I invite you to share other thinking blunders that hold leaders back.

About the Author

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 authority on leadership, team building, customer service and change.