

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



# *7 Signs*

**CHURCH LEADERS ARE JUST BUSY, NOT EFFECTIVE**

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As one season rolls into the next, it's a natural time for us to step back and evaluate whether we are being as effective as possible in our churches. As I think about my own performance over the years and consider how I serve my communities, I'm always drawn back to this question: *"Am I just busy or am I actually being effective?"* When I reflect on those periods when I'm just busy (and not necessarily being effective), a variety of behaviors come to mind. I recall habits or approaches that I have come to recognize as signs of me just doing busy work rather than pushing the mission of my church forward.

Each mission that God has called us to is incredibly important. **It is my desire that your church reach its full potential, and part of seeing that happen includes you and your team leading at the highest possible level.** In an attempt to be transparent, I'd like to share with you several signs that appear in my life when I'm busy but not effective. I'd like you to compare and contrast these to your own life and comment below if any resonate with you.

### **You wing your schedule.**

We have to order our days. God has given us a 24-hour day in order to complete the tasks that He's given to us. However, if you simply wake up in the morning and take the day as it comes without any thought towards a schedule, you'll see how inefficient your day will be.

**I once heard a time management guru say that if you don't plan your schedule, your schedule plans you.** It's so true. If you don't take time to carefully plan how you're going to spend every day and every hour in your day, your highest priorities and those things that drive the mission forward will be pushed outside of your schedule.

What system are you using to manage your time?

Are you allocating your highest energy to the things of greatest importance in your schedule?

My challenge for you would be to find a system and live within it.

### **You haven't really rested.**

I know I'm not being effective when I feel like I'm running at the very end of my energy. The more tired I become the clearer it is that I'm spending most of my time on busy work rather than working towards the most effective ministry outcomes because, **ironically, it takes less energy to be busy than it does to be effective.**

If you find yourself running ragged and not resting or taking downtime, chances are you're just randomly investing your time rather than intentionally investing your energy in the most important things.

**The work we do requires creativity and a fully engaged mind, and the only way to do that is for you to get your rest.** That means lots of sleep and lots of recreation.



Dr. Ruth Haley Barton said, "Possibly the most spiritual thing you could do today is go have a nap." When was the last time you had a great nap? Church leaders can often be dangerously tired, which eventually prevents us from achieving what God has called us to do.

**You don't know your one thing.**

Over the last few years, I've been asking myself, **"What's the one thing I can do that makes everything else become easier or obsolete?"** Each of us have something that can be the greatest contribution to our church. We do certain things that make the biggest difference in the mission and life of our community.

If we get into the phase where we are just busy-busy-busy—doing the work rather than leading it—and if we get caught in the trap of working *in the ministry* all the time rather than *on the ministry*, we lose clarity of the one thing we can do that ultimately pushes the church forward the most.

For me, over the years, this has been focusing on our growth efforts. It's taken my time, effort, and energy to think through how we are going to reach the next group of people who aren't here today. What is it for you? What is the one thing that you can do this week that has the maximum impact on the life of the church? If you don't have clarity on that, chances are you're not being effective.

**You spend your day in your inbox.**

Email is a double-edged sword. It's an incredible way to easily communicate with a vast number of people and to hold simultaneous conversations. At the same time,

a new email arriving in your inbox is just someone else's checklist for you. Your inbox management should be contained to a few periods during the day—it shouldn't be open all the time as a constant distraction.



All of those emails are requests for your time and they reflect how other people think you should spend your time when you could be reflecting on what it is that God has called you to do in your church.

**Get out of your inbox and get back into the ministry.** You are paid to push the ministry forward, not to respond to emails.

**You're trying to multitask.**

Stop trying to multitask. It doesn't work. Research has shown time and time again that this notion of multitasking is a false construction of the human mind. We think that we can focus on multiple things at once, when in reality the cost of switching from one task to another is very high as it brings down your overall effectiveness on everything. Research has shown that the cost of switching between all those different tasks subsequently reduces the ability to focus and make a difference. [[ref](#)]

An approach like the [Pomodoro Method](#), where you focus on individual items for short bursts of time, will increase your overall effectiveness greatly. Take 25 minutes to work on a task, then take a five minute break, then take 25 minutes to focus on the next task rather than trying to focus on several things at once.

**You stop asking for help.**

You can't do it alone. In the New Testament, Paul makes it pretty clear that the church is a body. We're made to be a community of leaders, not one sole person making it all happen. This idea of the lone, entrepreneurial,

start-up church leader is a terrible idea, and it isn't biblical.

If you find yourself trying to make everything happen at your church by yourself, then you have fallen into one of the greatest deceptions today. You can't do it all. **You weren't designed to do it all.** It doesn't work best when you do it all, and it's a lousy idea to try. You just cannot make that happen.

Instead, why not spend more of your time calling other people into ministry and raising up leaders? In an [Ephesians 4](#) sort of way, your job is to train and equip those people around you and then release them to do the ministry. If you find yourself constantly working by yourself on projects, then you need to call a timeout, pull back, and ask yourself, "Who can I do this with?" Throughout scripture, we see God demonstrating this pattern whenever He wants to get something done. The first question He poses is, "Who do I need to call to do this with me?"

### You are lonely.

Ministry can be an isolating affair. It can be a line of work where you find yourself unable to develop life-giving friendships. It can suck relational connection out of your life because you're constantly giving to others.



If you find yourself feeling lonely in the midst of ministry, you have fallen into the trap of being busy rather than being effective. Running from one relationship to the next, you haven't been able to slow down and develop friendships with people in your community and church, and maybe even beyond your community, who tend to be mutually beneficial to you as you develop and grow together.

There's a weird dynamic in church ministry that has a dangerous downside. Our charge is to develop relationships with the large number of the people we interact with; these relationships serve as the bridge we use to help them grow. **The danger here is that every relationship we have can become about what we can get out of other people rather than how we can give back to them. Rather, we need to consider how those people impact us and help us grow as individuals.**

### Are you just busy or are you truly effective?

My hope for you is that this will be an incredibly effective season of ministry, that this will be a time for you to impact more people than you ever have before, and that you'll be able to develop and grow in your relationship with Jesus and see amazing things happening all around you.

However, if we don't focus our time, effort, and energy on being effective rather than just being busy, we'll find ourselves in a trap that will eventually limit our both short-term and long-term ability to make an impact in our community. Leave a comment below and let us know what signs in your life have shown you that you're just busy and not effective.

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