

5 Reasons Shortcuts Take Longer and Cost More

With more than three decades in ministry now, I'm convinced there are no shortcuts in ministry that will help you in the long run.

Perhaps the temptation to cut corners comes from our time pressures, cool technology hacks, and our drive to accomplish more. Fair enough.

I've even heard some leaders slide "cutting corners" into the category of working smarter not harder. Don't believe it. We need to work smart and hard.

You might be tempted to cut corners just because you can. You are faster, smarter and more experienced than most others in the room — big mistake.

I was coaching a young student pastor who was a naturally gifted communicator, but he never prepared. He was *that* good. He taught from a few thoughts scratched on a 3x5 card. He winged-it every week, and in time it began to show. His wit and charisma would only carry his ministry so far, and in time it started to suffer. It was time to dig in, or his ministry would get stuck. (When the leader is stuck the ministry gets stuck.)

My challenge to him was about stewardship. God gave him talent, gifts, and responsibility, but he was stewarding none of them very well. The issue wasn't limited to just one talk or even to several years of student ministry. Shortcuts impact a whole life.

A friend of mine once said about the employees in his company, "*There are two groups on our staff. In one group there are people that when faced with a technical problem they don't know the answer to, they'll stay up all night reading complex and detailed manuals until they figure it out. In the other group, they just come and ask for an answer. You can guess which group rises.*"

The deeper you dig, learn, change and grow over many years, the greater the results.

Let's take something more basic, but still very important. If you exercise once a week for 20 minutes is that good? Yes! 52 workouts a year is good. If you exercise 3-4 times a week for 30 minutes, is that better? You know the answer.

Now consider the benefit of exercising 3-4 times a week for a lifetime. Shortcuts never help you.

My friend and mentor John Maxwell has spent a lifetime in personal development, intentional study, working hard, and paying the price. Today the results are extraordinary. His greatest joy is helping others succeed and generously shares his wisdom with leaders who want to grow and make a difference.

The promise of compounding return is true. The more you invest, the greater the cumulative effect.

Sometimes a few more minutes in a conversation, or taking some time to figure something out yourself rather than Google it, or praying till you get an answer on a big decision will make a much bigger difference than you imagine in the moment.

When you refuse to take shortcuts, the reservoir of what you will have to offer others becomes deep and rich. It's like a deep well of wisdom.

Sometimes more than a few extra minutes are required. There are things you're working on that need many more hours. You can't escape that if you want results, you'll be proud of.

What's the secret? It's about paying the price, but it's so worth it. It's the key to living without regret.

A practical help is to be laser focused. Do only the things you are required to do, and responsible for, then invest your time in what you do best. Figure out your lane and stay there for a long time.

My list is perhaps intuitive, but the brief content includes helpful practices and ideas.

5 paths where shortcuts don't work, and practical insights that do work:

1) There are no shortcuts to meaningful relationships.

There is no substitute for time with relationships, but there is a path to increased depth and significance. When it comes to relationships, it's not just about minutes; it's about meaning.

Being present and engaged in the moment is a game changer. Connecting at a heart level in honest and meaningful conversation is essential. That mixed with joy, laughter and experiences together will deliver what your heart longs for.

2) There are no shortcuts to spiritual growth that transforms your relationship with God.

No preaching needed here, and no judgment either. Grace abounds. Again, don't think in minutes, think lifestyle. Consider your lifetime and how you would approach things like prayer, scripture study and worship to be as close to God as you desire.

3) There are no shortcuts to investing in people with life-changing results.

When it comes to investing in people, love everyone, equip many, and deeply develop a few. Choose wisely.

You cannot microwave the development of people, especially leaders. It requires intentionality and the long view.

The good news is that leadership development is not like a weekly program. It's much more organic in approach. My mentors coach me a couple of times a year each. I spend the rest of the time practicing their wisdom.

I understand that developing *leaders* in your church requires some system and structure; however, I urge you to keep it simple.

4) There are no shortcuts to a career that makes a difference.

Let's look at one example of dozens we could pick from.

Most of us in leadership give talks regularly. Perhaps you deliver a Sunday message nearly every week, I teach some form of a leadership lesson most weeks. We get busy, juggle many demands and get tempted to cut corners. Candidly, it's better to say no to the opportunity or invite someone else to teach that week than to take a short cut and deliver poorly.

The important discipline on the weeks you don't teach is to invest deeply somewhere else. Don't use it to "catch-up" on little things that don't matter. Make that time count. One of the best ways to invest that time is to work on your craft of communication that week, even if for just a couple of hours. Over a lifetime, the reward is huge.

5) There are no shortcuts to character that people respect.

Your integrity is a lifetime work. You can damage your character in one careless decision, but it takes a lifetime to build so that others respect it.

Traits within your character that enhance your influence such as generosity, humility, and courage are the result of intentional deep development over the years. None come by accident. The good news is that they are not difficult if you set your mind to it.

So how does all this work? Do less. Go deeper, not wider. Going deep will lead to wide.

It's not easy, I'm still working on it and will never get it all right, but I've done it long enough to know it works.

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