

How do I deal with an incompetent leader?

Dear Mr. Smalling,

I work with a Christian organization where my supervisor gives me directives, forgets he said them, and blames me for the result. He once told me I was a leader in training and recently asked, "Who told me I was a leader?" I do not care if I am a leader or not. I no longer trust him and need to know how to deal with him.

I have always felt it is God who appoints leaders over me, so if I oppose my supervisor, I will go against God. I know I am supposed to share in the sufferings of Christ and do not want to grieve the Holy Spirit. I just need to know how to submit to authority over me that seems incompetent.

Rachel

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Dear Rachel,

Been there.

Parts of my book *Christian Leadership* were inspired by the stress of having to work under incompetent leaders. The only stress I can imagine being worse is a terminal illness.

I said, "Having to work," because that was my assumption. Eventually I realized I did not have to do any such thing. I had chosen to because I thought it was my Christian duty to submit to incompetent leadership. I see no command in the New Testament telling Christians to submit to such leadership if it generates stress and unhappiness in our walk with Christ.

Someone once counseled me, "Put the stress back on those who cause it. If you cannot find ways to do that, then leave."

Fortunately, I had ways to put the stress back because our denomination has a system of church courts. I was able to use the threat of courts, along with documentation, to get results. Apologies followed. Stress is relieved.

In another circumstance, a friend advised me, "Roger, you need to start praying that God will lead you to men of integrity with whom to work." That was a divine wind to my spirit. I knew God was indicating, "You do not have

to work with men lacking integrity.”

That’s how I ended up in another organization. We treat each other with the courtesy and respect due our dignity as images of God and as fellow ministers. A genuine oasis.

In short, understand your rights in Christ. No one has a moral right to disregard your God-given dignity or abuse you. Correction for mistakes is another matter.

Your rights

1. To be addressed with the respect and courtesy due any human being.
2. To be happy. Christ purchased that for you. Do not let anyone steal it.
3. To be free of unsubstantiated accusations or blame shifting.
4. You have a right to a mediator and to present your problems to your spiritual authority, such as your husband and the leadership of your church. This is not gossip. This is accountability, both for you and the organization. You have no obligation to suffer in silence.

Rights your leader does not have

1. He has no right to treat you with disdain.
2. He has no right to shift blame for his mistakes.
3. He has no right to claim spiritual authority over you or to be your spiritual adviser. That is a function of your husband first, then your church leaders. Your supervisor has administrative rights only. The organizational status as a Christian organization is irrelevant.

Some tips:

Clarify to your leader that you need directives in writing to avoid misunderstandings. Keep a paper trail as a record of incidents.

If the time comes that you must defend yourself against him before the higher ups, you will have a portfolio of facts. You will not need to accuse him before his superiors. The papers will show the truth, and the superiors will draw their own conclusions about his competency.

You said, *I have never let anyone know that he does this*. Why not? You have the right to a personal advisory group to counsel you about this problem. That is not gossip. Your husband and maybe a couple of mature believers could agree to be your personal advisory committee to help you.

If you find yourself accused, just say, *I’ll get back to you when I discuss it with my personal accountability group in my church*.

In short, I question some of your assumptions.

Your analogy about Christ and his sufferings is erroneous. Whose sins are *you* dying for? Jesus suffered persecution for the sake of the truth. You are not suffering persecution. You are suffering the incompetence of a leader in an institution that happens to be Christian. Its status as Christian does not excuse incompetence nor grant the leader exemption from accountability.

You said you do not want to grieve the Holy Spirit. It is possible the Holy Spirit is already grieved for reasons you may not expect. He may be grieved because you are allowing the image of God to be abused. That image is you.

Another questionable assumption was, *I just need to know how to submit to such a person.*

No you don't. You need to deal with the abuse. It is just as wrong for you to submit in silence to abuse from a Christian as it is for him to abuse you. Jesus said, *if your brother sins against you, rebuke him...*

One of the best supervisors under whom I have worked said he was once in a dilemma of the same sort I went through. He said, *I realized I had three options: Change the other person, change myself, or change my circumstances.* In his case, he realized the first two were impossible, so he left that work and became a department head with a better ministry than before.

It will take a good dose of moral courage, whatever you do. That may be what the Holy Spirit is teaching you.

I appreciate your commitment to the Lord's work. We will pray for you.

In Christ,
Roger

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