

Managing Leadership Anxiety

Yours and Theirs

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You Can Learn to Handle the Onslaught of Internal and External Pressures

Does anxiety get in the way of your ability to be an effective leader? Is your inability to notice when you and those around you are anxious keeping you "stuck" in chronic unhealthy patterns? In *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, pastor and spiritual growth expert Steve Cuss offers powerful tools to help you move from being managed by anxiety to managing anxiety.

You'll develop the capacity to notice your anxiety and your group's anxiety. You will increase your sensitivity to the way groups develop systemic anxiety that keeps them trapped. Your personal self-awareness will increase as you learn how self gets in the way of identifying and addressing issues.

Managing Leadership Anxiety offers valuable principles to those who are hungry to understand the source of the anxiety in themselves and in the people with whom they relate. Readers will be empowered to take back control of their lives and lead in mature and vibrant ways.

My Synopsis:

One of the hardest and most complex books I've read in a while, but that's the point. As a young leader, both at home and in the marketplace, I struggle in different areas I wish I didn't. The tools and ideas Steve shares here, while focusing specifically for those in Christian organizations or positions, will help anyone who is serious about growing their leadership and connecting to people better.

Managing Leadership Anxiety Yours and Theirs

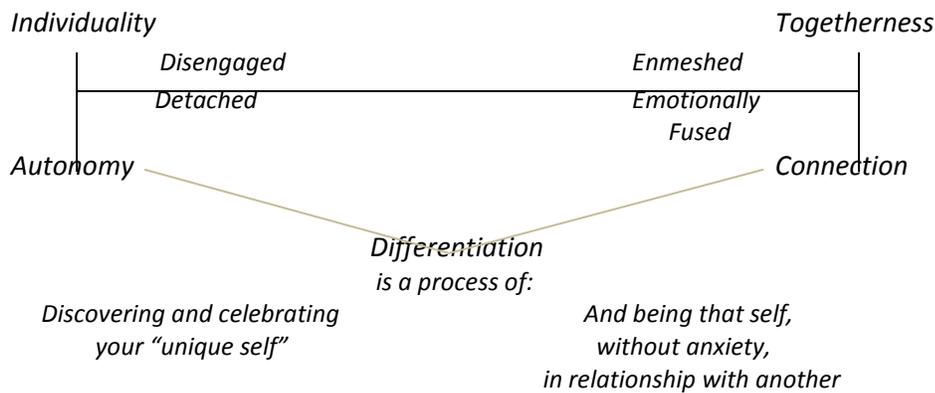
- p. xiii All people should strive to learn before they die, what they are running from, and to, and why.
– James Thurber
- p. xiv Awareness is critical to be sure, but it is not the path of growth, it is simply the gate.
- p. xiv If you become not only self-aware but also group aware and lead beyond awareness, you can create a healthy culture for people to thrive.
- p. 1 **The Anxiety Gap**
- p. 1 Between stimulus and response there is a space. In the space there is the power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom. – Viktor Frankl
- p. 4 What do you do when you don't know what to do? Leaders are faced with countless situations where they only have a notion of what to do or partial information yet are required to act anyway.
- p. 4 One of the simplest ways to know you are the leader in a group is that people look at you when they don't know what to do.
- p. 5 Leadership is almost always intuitive because leadership situations are fluid and dynamic.
- p. 5 Because leadership involves at least one other person...leadership becomes about the emotional context: yours and theirs.
- p. 6 Burnout has less to do with workload and more to do with internal and external leadership anxiety.
- p. 8 A leader can only handle the internal and external pressure to do something for so long.
- p. 10 When I feel stupid, I feel exposed, as if everyone around me knows I'm stupid.
- p. 11 Leadership is vulnerable; it exposes a leader's blind spot and his shadow.
- p. 12 When we are under pressure, tired, anxious, or feeling threatened, our tendency is to depend on ourselves rather than on God.
- p. 13 Any group of people, whether it is a family or a staff, takes on relational patterns and becomes a system.
- p. 14 The healthiest teams are not the ones where only the leader is fully aware of these internal and external dynamics; they are the teams where the leader has equipped the entire team to be aware and to communicate freely with one another about them.
- p. 14 People who are motivated to not only think about the way they think, but courageously walk down new pathways can experience connection with God in a deeper way.
- p. 15 No matter how much you train, you're going to lose a few, you're going to get it wrong, or you might lead your team down a path that ends in a brick wall of defeat.
- p. 15 An essential part of our leadership journey is being kind to ourselves as we navigate these challenges.
- p. 17 **Anxiety, Freedom, and How the Gospel Works**
- p. 17 The more a man dies to himself, the more he begins to live unto God. – Thomas A Kempis
- p. 17 Anxiety blocks our awareness of God because it takes our subconscious attention.
- p. 18 Anxiety is a signal, not a root cause...Getting to the root cause is key to transformational and systemic health.
- p. 18 ...I believed I had to appear smart to be okay, so when I didn't know what to say, I was managing my own feeling of inadequacy rather than connecting with the people in the room.
- p. 18 I was managing my own anxiety rather than paying attention to God.

- p. 18 Anxiety shrinks the power of the gospel because it presents a false gospel – one of self-reliance rather than reliance on God.
- p. 19 The consistent witness of the New Testament is that freedom and life come when we deny, crucify, and are wary of something inside us that shrinks the gospel.
- p. 19 (The Apostle) Paul challenged us to beware of the power *anthropos* and *sarx* can have over us.
- p. 20 Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. We are not very good at recognizing illusions, least of all the one we cherish about ourselves – the ones we are born with and which feed the roots of sin. – Thomas Merton
- p. 20 Anxiety is a sign that the false self is demanding we nourish it instead of dying to it.
- p. 21 In our zeal to become the landlords of our own being, we cling to each achievement as a kind of verification of our self-proclaimed reality. We become the center and God somehow recedes to an invisible fringe. – James Finley
- p. 21 When we are under pressure, feeling threatened or anxious, we depend on this false self rather than depending on God.
- p. 22 ...we can simultaneously be free from the power of sin, yet still struggle with sin.
- p.22 Paul is implying that sin gains power over us the more we engage in it.
- p. 23 Whatever we give ourselves to is what has our attention and devotion.
- p. 23 Paul wasn't saying that God punishes us when we sin, he was saying that *sin punishes us when we sin*.
- p. 23 We have a choice all the time: give ourselves to sin, which destroys, or give ourselves to God, who gives life.
- p. 24 Sin, death, exhaustion, shame, and anxiety are bred from being a slave to the wrong thing.
- p. 25 The miracle of salvation isn't that Jesus stops us from sinning or being tempted to sin, it is that Jesus changes what our hearts want.
- p. 28 We can keep propping up the false self, but it will never ever lead to life.
- p. 28 Walking by faith, then, is the lifelong habit of trusting God's story over the story we tell ourselves.
- p. 28 Prayer is the way we work our way out of the comfortable but cramped world of self and into the spacious world of God. – Eugene Peterson
- p. 28 Trying to become like Jesus is a path of anxiety and death.
- p. 30 Jesus does not call us to mimic him but to manifest him.
- p. 31 There is a canyon-sized gap between trying to become like Jesus and dying to self.
- p. 31 Our job: die to false self. God's job: transform us into the likeness of Christ.
- p. 31 When we try to become like Christ on our own, we end up back on the path of death.
- p. 32 Stop expending energy trying to become like Christ; instead, put your energy into dying to self and following and worshipping Christ, which is what God has been calling us to do all along.
- p. 33 What you focus on determines what you miss. – Ian Cron
- p. 33 Every human being is gifted by God to serve for God's glory, but every gift has a shadow side that can take over if left unchecked.
- p. 35 Self-awareness isn't self-absorption or self-centeredness, the fruit of true self-awareness is being more present to others.
- p. 36 ...the battle for freedom is an ongoing battle.
- p. 36 So many people are self-aware but still unhealthy.
- p. 37 We are never free floating, free to do whatever we want, free from control. We are, in fact, always connecting to someone or something. Freed *from* and freed *to*. And this freedom involves an ongoing battle.

- p. 37 We will still struggle, still fail, have a shadow, give in to self.
- p. 37 God speaks life and identity. Anxiety and failure speak death and condemnation.
- p. 39 **Sources of Internal Anxiety**
- p. 40 Anxiety is a tangle of emotions that can be overwhelming to get through.
- p. 41 ...unaddressed anxiety blocks effective leadership because a leader gives too much energy to the anxiety rather than to the situation or person at hand.
- p. 42 ...the first step in noticing anxiety is to list how it manifests in your body so you can begin intervention early.
- p. 43 You cannot be present to people when you are creating a protective distance from them.
- p. 44 I could bring the peace of Christ with me rather than my own fear, and I could attend to the anxiety of the people rather than managing my own.
- p. 44 ...the peace of Christ was not something I brought with me, it was already present and at work before I arrived.
- p. 44 ...we think we're bringing God into a situation rather than remembering that God is already ahead of us in the situation.
- p. 44 All leaders make mistakes, but part of our anxiety is attached to how we respond to making a mistake.
- p. 46 Mistakes hurt. They bruise the ego. They can also damage good people. But for our organization to thrive, I have to be willing to risk again, open up the possibility of failure again.
- p. 46 Making a public mistake hurts because leadership is vulnerable, it is "putting yourself out there," and so when you make a mistake and then don't process it, you'll be tempted to play it safe next time when God is calling you to put yourself back out there.
- p. 46 How much leadership horsepower are you withholding by playing it so safe?
- p. 47 Fear of failure keeps too many leaders from walking by faith.
- p. 49 Knowing and naming the giants on your shoulders can relieve you of feeding and giving energy to them.
- p. 51 Judgement limits the scope of our leadership because it shrinks the array of people we can lead.
- p. 54 Exceptionalism is one of the deadliest ways to kill a team culture and is an entrenched form of self-righteousness.
- p. 55 The Imposter Syndrome: the plaguing feeling that you don't belong in this leadership role.
- p. 57 Orientation, disorientation, reorientation...but so often the disorientation comes suddenly, and the reorientation takes longer than we want, especially when we're reorienting to a place we've never been.
- p. 58 Doubt is a constant companion, but like many of these other triggers, getting it out in the open where there is oxygen and blue sky keeps it from debilitating me.
- p. 58 When a leader's private life is significantly incongruent with their public life, the leader is in grave danger.
- p. 59 ...faithfulness to God will involve doing things that are way outside your wiring and personality.
- p. 59 Our God-given capacity might be beyond what we think, and the task at hand might require us to move well outside our wiring.
- p. 61 **Idols, Vows, and the Stories We Tell Ourselves**
- p. 61 It ain't what you don't know that gets you in trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so. – Unknown
- p. 62 When we are under pressure, exhausted, or feeling threatened, we revert to the stories we tell ourselves rather than the story of God.
- p. 63 The story you tell yourself is often forged in pain and suspicion and can significantly limit your leadership score.
- p. 66 An idol is anything other than Jesus that you must have to be OK.
- p. 71 The false self is anchored in the vow rather than in the good name of Jesus.

- p. 72 A vow suffocates your future and increases your anxiety, because you are living out of that vow rather than by faith in God.
- p. 73 ...words not only have emotional power, but also spiritual power...
- p. 76 Vows and idols are oppressive, but Christ is freeing, and our battle for freedom may be an ongoing battle, but definitely a worthwhile one.
- p. 79 **Sources of Relational Anxiety**
- p. 87 Putting yourself in lose-lose situations takes an unnecessary amount of emotional and intellectual energy.
- p. 93 If you find yourself “in trouble” for a decision that impacts your work or you have to clean up a mess not of your making, it may be because you have responsibility but no power.
- p. 94 Rather than speak directly to the person, they speak about him or her to everyone else.
- p. 96 All these relational sources can be extra challenging because the solution to them almost always involves engaging the person you’re anxious about.
- p. 99 **Applying Family Systems to Leadership**
- p. 99 All that is necessary to create an emotional system is spending time together. – Roberta Gilbert
- p. 99 To get to the other side of anxiety and experience genuine freedom, we make the courageous move from diagnosis to action.
- p. 100 Thinking about the way you think is one thing. Bravely forging a new path with vulnerability and openness is an altogether different level.
- p. 100 ...if the top leader is chronically unhealthy, the whole system suffers.
- p. 101 The first step in systems thinking is paying attention to the way people are relating (process) while also listening to what is said (content).
- p. 103 You only need the person motivated to change to be willing to change the system.
- p. 103 When a system is stuck, one disrupter is all that is required to break free and potentially heal the problem.
- p. 104 This is often what keeps us stuck: the inability to see our own culpability in a system.
- p. 106 If you are in a system that has been stuck for years, or a system that has many people in it, systematic change will be much slower and more painful, but the approach is exactly the same.
- p. 107 Leading a productive, non-anxious conversation about a difficult or sensitive topic is essential to process-level change...you’ll have to be prepared for an anxious response and your ability to be non-anxious will be key.
- p. 108 If you are attempting to solve a problem with “more of the same”, you can be assured that you are making the problem more entrenched.
- p. 108 Just keep doing more of what isn’t working now and you will entrench a systemic problem into stuck-ness and your system will increase in anxiety.
- p. 112 ...reversals, prescribing the problem, and absurdity are three powerful tools to help break a stuck pattern.
- p. 115 If you are frustrated at a team member who is not pulling his weight and your solution is to pick up the slack, you will only entrench the problem.
- p. 115 Three forms of resistance you can expect as you lead: Sabotage, Scapegoating, Imaginative Gridlock.
- p. 118 If leaders truly want change, working on their own composure will bring about more change, then trying to get others to do something.
- p. 119 Differentiation is the ability to be fully yourself while being fully connected to people. It is gaining clarity on where “I” ends and the “other” begins.

- p. 119 A differentiated leader offers non-anxious presence.
 An enmeshed leader offers anxious presence.
 A detached leader offers non-anxious absence.
- p. 121 You can't negotiate with a tiger when your head is in its mouth. – Winston Churchill
- p. 121 Differentiation is the courage to lead people to a difficult place while still being deeply connected.
- p. 122 Sometimes God has a growing opportunity for someone that an anxious leader shortchanges by trying to carry it for them.
- p. 123



- p. 124 The dividing line of differentiation isn't agreement; it is relational connection and trust.
- p. 127 **Tools That Diffuse Anxiety**
- p. 127 Anxiety, like sobriety, is best tackled on day and one step at a time. The important thing in either case is to not lose heart and be kind to yourself. – Brian W. Foster
- p. 127 Anxiety shrinks your world.
- p. 128 Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap. – John Ortberg
- p. 128 Too much doing for God, not enough abiding in God. It's a chronic problem most of us battle.
- p. 131 When is God calling you to pour it all out, and when is God calling you to fill yourself first and serve out of the overflow?
- p. 132 We all take on projects or tasks that we have no business doing...
- p. 134 Someone must have the last word. It no longer must be me.
- p. 134 You get the final say. I will sit here being misunderstood, and it is okay.
- p. 134 Look your mistakes right in the eye, repent of them, learn from them, and forgive yourself. God forgave you long ago.
- p. 136 An apology without an acknowledgement of impact isn't enough.
- p. 136 Recognize who is moving toward you and who is not.
- p. 136 ...you can only lead people who are moving toward you.
- p. 137 The colossal misunderstanding of our time is that more insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. – Edwin Friedman
- p. 139 You will become a more powerful leader if you can...learn to communicate with a greater range of intensity. When everything is important, nothing is important.

- p. 141 Could it be that Jesus commanded us to love our enemy because he knows that proximity is what helps you see more of someone's humanity and more of her image bearing?
- p. 142 What would your meetings be like if you paid as much attention to people's energy as you did to the agenda?
- p. 143 A major criterion for judging the anxiety level of any society is the loss of its capacity to be playful. – Ed Friedman
- p. 144 The success of these tools is dependent on your capacity for vulnerability and courage. All of them involve putting yourself out there, possibly failing, and moving forward in the face of fear and anxiety.
- p. 147 **Genograms: What Has Been Handed Down**
- p. 147 Our identities are formed through the sphere of those who matter to us most. – Erwin McManus
- p. 148 A genogram helps you see the cards you have been dealt, what you are holding onto, and what is holding onto you.
- p. 149 It's not your fault, but it might be your responsibility. That's a fork in the road on the way to becoming a professional. – Seth Godin
- p. 151 Blessing on his terms and conditions. But that is not how blessing works.
- p. 151 A genogram gives insight into what you value, where your resilience comes from, and why you see the world the way you do. It invites you to sift your assumptions through the truth of Scripture.
- p. 152 ...those who are not aware of what they are gripping and what has a grip on them are doomed to pass their guilt down through their family system.
- p. 152 ...the promise from Exodus is, "If you come to God, God stops you from staining your family tree. If you don't, your stain will carry down through the generations."
- p. 154 We grow in fits, starts and breakthroughs...
- p. 156 You don't have to wait for him to behave the right way, you can no longer use his behavior as justification.
- p. 163 **Verbatims: Knowing How You Show Up**
- p. 163 Lord Jesus, let me know myself and know you. – St. Augustine
- p. 164 ...we all step on land mines we did not know were there. We have chronic patterns that keep getting us into the same problems every time.
- p. 166 It really is true that we retain our experiences; we just sometimes need help unlocking them.
- p. 169 All of us carry experiences and anxieties that inform our world view and most certainly inform how we show up in leadership.
- p. 169 By examining these in a verbatim, we are able to grow in awareness of how the self can get in the way of being fully present to God and the people we are called to serve and lead.
- p. 170 ...he was bringing his past into his present, and his past was now dictating his present behavior.
- p. 173 Leadership is an onslaught of challenge and it can take a toll. If we are not aware of what is going on under the surface, we become bound by it.
- p. 178 We all naturally regret the way we do things, and when our mistakes are laid out in front of others, we naturally feel the need to hide.
- p. 181 **A Wider Scope and A Deeper Capacity**
- p. 182 ...you may be done with the book, but that doesn't mean your anxiety is controlled or quelled.
- p. 182 Transformation takes time and involves a lot of failure.
- p. 183 Transformation and dying to self takes time, and you need to be kind to yourself through the process.
- p. 184 Things may get worse in the short term as you disrupt status quo within yourself and your organization, but on the other side is immense fruit provided by the goodness of God.

- p. 184 ...I got the hang of the lack of safety net and learned to walk by faith – trusting that God would guide me and that my mistakes would do less damage than I feared.
- p. 184 ...real development comes when we dive in over our heads, try some things, and adjust as we go.
- p. 185 You're going to make mistakes and take some licks and beatings along the way.
- p. 185 ...there are times in our lives when we have to play hurt.
- p. 186 If you want to grow as a leader, or if you want to learn more about your internal anxieties and triggers, find something you know nothing about that is needed by an organization and offer to lead it.
- p. 189 Lifelong leadership requires constant shedding and adapting, growing and learning from all manner of people, including people half your age.
- p. 189 For a Christian leader, leadership is actually about fellowship.
- p. 190 ...we all have Christian leaders whose fellowship is dangerously disconnected from their leadership. In the quest for more and better, they left behind actually following Jesus long ago.
- p. 190 One of the strongest temptations a leader will face is to allow a growing gap between her leadership and fellowship.
- p. 191 Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve. – John Stott
- p. 193 Healthy leadership operates out of gifting, not platform, so it operates regardless of your status in the organization.
- p. 194 This is hard work but staying the same and not doing this work is hard too...You've become so accustomed to the anxiety you carry every day that you don't realize how hard it is.
- p. 195 Christian leadership is ultimately about God and other people...