

The Price of Getting Everything You Want

Kane was a man who got everything he wanted-and then lost it.

Slide 1 - The ambition test

Charles Foster Kane built an empire.

He also lost love, friendship, family, public trust, and finally the ability to hear anyone who disagreed with him.

The question is not whether ambition is dangerous.

It is whether your ambition still serves a life you can belong to.

Slide 2 - Start with the scoreboard you cannot see

Kane's visible scoreboard was impressive:

- Dozens of newspapers, magazines, radio, and industrial enterprises
- A circulation that grew from 26,000 to more than 200,000
- Enough possessions for ten museums
- Influence over public issues and political figures

But the private scoreboard was different:

- Isolation inside Xanadu
- Relationships shaped by fear and control
- A shrinking empire
- A nation that had ceased to listen to him

Growth can be real while the life supporting it is quietly collapsing.

Slide 3 - The first warning sign: people become assets

Kane's power allowed him to recruit talent, shape institutions, and make others useful to his vision.

But loyalty became difficult to read. Leland questioned whether Kane's journalists shared his values-or simply followed the available employment.

That is a dangerous leadership question:

> Are people with you because they believe, because they benefit, or because they are afraid to leave?

If you cannot tell the difference, your organization may be aligned only on the surface.

Slide 4 - The second warning sign: provision becomes control

Kane often expressed care through money, buildings, access, and protection.

With Susan, he built an opera house and used his newspapers and influence to support her career.

But Susan did not want the career. "It was his idea-everything was his idea."

The lesson for any builder:

- A gift is not generous if it overrides the recipient's wishes.
- Support is not support when refusal is unacceptable.
- Resources can remove someone's agency while appearing to help them.

Slide 5 - You cannot purchase love, admiration, or loyalty

Susan identifies Kane's central pattern:

> "You want to be loved-that's all you want!"

Kane wants love on his terms. He treats disagreement and abandonment as injuries done to him.

His money can produce applause. His power can produce compliance. Neither can produce mutual connection.

If people must perform gratitude, affection, or loyalty to keep access to you, you have purchased a role-not earned a relationship.

Slide 6 - Winning can become self-destruction

When a scandal threatens Kane's campaign, he refuses to withdraw:

> "There's only one person in the world to decide what I'm going to do-and that's me."

The statement sounds like independence. Its cost is borne by others: family security, public trust, and his political future.

He loses the election, while his newspaper claims the election was fraudulent.

Autonomy becomes destructive when "I decide" means "no one else gets to count."

Slide 7 - Influence has limits

Kane can shape headlines, public attention, and political narratives.

He believes that if the headline is large enough, the news becomes large enough.

But:

- Entertainment is not truth.
- Attention is not credibility.
- A public platform cannot guarantee public trust.
- Institutional power cannot force people to believe you forever.

Kane's newspapers entertained readers, but Leland says they did not necessarily tell them the truth.

Slide 8 - The origin of control does not excuse its consequences

As a child, Kane is taken from his parents after his mother transfers control of his education, residence, and fortune to Thatcher and the bank.

He resists violently, then cries for his mother on the train.

That loss helps explain his later need to possess, command, and build a world of his own.

But explanation is not absolution.

Your history may explain why control feels like safety. It does not make controlling others safe for them.

Slide 9 - Define success before success defines you

Kane's public greatness and private unhappiness coexist.

He builds Xanadu after becoming disappointed in the world-an absolute monarchy he can control.

Yet the more he accumulates, the less he can retain:

- Love
- Friendship
- Family
- Belonging

The strongest warning is simple:

> He was a man who got everything he wanted, and then lost it.

Slide 10 - A builder's early-warning checklist

Ask yourself before the next promotion, acquisition, campaign, or expansion:

1. Am I treating people as partners-or as assets?
2. Can someone reject my plan without losing my respect or support?
3. Am I using money to solve a relational problem?
4. Is my public mission consistent with my private conduct?
5. Who around me can tell me the truth without fearing the consequences?
6. What would remain if influence, possessions, and applause disappeared?

These questions do not require smaller ambition.

They require ambition that does not destroy the people and values that give achievement meaning.

Slide 11 - The final counsel

No single word explains a human life-not even "Rosebud."

Kane is honest and crooked, liberal and reactionary, tolerant and intolerant, loving and destructive.

That complexity is the point.

Do not wait until the empire is built, the relationships are broken, and the palace is empty to discover what your success was meant to protect.

Build something substantial. But do not become so good at getting what you want that you lose the ability to receive what you need.