

THE ALPHA AFFLICTION IN THE ORGANIZATION

Continuing our discussion about The Alpha Affliction, we recall that afflicted top leaders -those lacking emotional maturity and prone to destructive narcissism- use their personal and organizational assets to afflict, rather than serve the interests of the organization. For the alpha, leadership is all about them – their vision, talent and goals. They pursue their own ambition and gratification with relentless, often ruthless drive.

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"My power is hard won and easily lost," they reason.

Consequently, alphas are unusually wary of contenders to their authority, typically other strong leaders. Ever vigilant in protecting what they consider "rightfully mine," the alpha is suspicious and distrustful of other established leaders and emerging leaders who might one day usurp their throne. Once the contenders are identified, alphas make it their business to deter, discourage or drive them off. Banishing these upstarts may be overt or subtle. It may be highly nuanced or played out with all the sophistication of a brick to the forehead.

Either way, the alpha sees to it that the organization is not a friendly place for other strong leaders.

THIRD, ALPHAS CREATE AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE LONG ON USING PEOPLE AND SHORT ON DEVELOPING PEOPLE.

Many alphas have a world-class ability to attract competent but deferential and insecure people who are all too happy to do what they are told because they need the affirmation and fear the disapproval of the alpha leader—the literature calls them omegas—i.e., last to the alpha's first. Omegas play the role of the "worker bee," a submissive and loyal subordinate but never a true partner in leadership matters. Additionally, the alpha has built in radar to recognize potential sycophants—fawning and servile flatterers that pay homage to the power, and authority of the alpha, and gladly do their bidding.

While it makes sense to most of us that mature adults aren't drawn to play the omega to the alpha, this doesn't matter to the alpha. There are plenty of omegas to go around, so reasons the alpha, and sorting out the omegas from the potential alpha competitors is all part of the alpha's playbook. For the alpha, pathology, not partnership, emotional need, not vision and shared values, is the tie that binds.

FOURTH, ALPHAS PERPETUATE A “ZERO SUM GAME” CULTURE.

As the ancient Roman philosopher Seneca observed,

The desire for the same thing is the source of discord and hatred because they cannot be given to one without robbing the other.”

Driven by a scarcity mentality, and suspicious that usurpers plot to rob them of their rightful claim to power, it is no surprise that alphas play what is called a “zero sum game.” To the alpha, everything of value, especially power, exists in limited supply—if you have it, I don’t, and if I have it, you don’t. These competing claims, of necessity, provoke rivalry and fierce competition, polluting the organizational culture with “discord and hatred.”

FIFTH, ALPHAS DON’T, WON’T AND CAN’T COLLABORATE WITH OTHER STRONG LEADERS.

Not surprisingly, alphas don’t “play well in the adult sandbox” with other strong and talented leaders.

Given the alpha’s instincts around power and domination, and their suspicion that others are out to take away their power, they find it difficult if not impossible to work in collaborative arrangements. They insist on having their own way, have a tendency to exploit others, and exude an air of superiority. This virtually guarantees they will alienate other strong, mature leaders, and of course, that is perfectly fine with the alpha.

SUMMARY AND IMPACT

These five patterns combine to create a profoundly “leadership-unfriendly” organization. The alpha sees talent in others as a tool of subversion, a challenge to their authority and power, and thus dangerous to tolerate, let alone embrace and put to work for the common good.

The alpha, self-centered, self-protecting and obsessed with his own ascent, taken with her own star on the rise, preoccupied with his personal Mt. Rushmore project, and protective of her prerogatives, simply has little time, inclination or capacity to invest in the development of new leaders.

As in the animal world, some alphas get downright hostile, and aggressively seek to eliminate anyone who might challenge their status as “king of the hill.”

Consequently, the alpha-led organization is diminished as talented and capable adults—those who don’t aspire to omega subservience—are denied what they need to develop, or are singled out for banishment. A vast pool of untapped human potential is wasted. Those who remain in this culture of scarcity face a future of limited opportunity at best.

OVER TIME, THE ALPHA WILL DRAIN THE ORGANIZATION’S TALENT POOL AS EMERGING LEADERS FADE INTO THE BACKGROUND OR DEPART.

Learning the destructive possibilities that arise when an alpha leader rules an organization, helps us to see the possibilities of leadership that serves the best interests of an organization

When leaders are emotionally mature, their vision, talent and goals align with what is best for everyone, not just for one person. Learning to identify leadership issues, helps us move forward with unlimited possibilities.

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