

THE ROOT OF LEADERSHIP AFFLICTION SERIES: DESTRUCTIVE VS. CONSTRUCTIVE NARCISSISM

If you are just joining us in our “Root of Leadership Affliction” series, we are now deep into our discussion on destruction narcissism and power.

RECOGNIZING THE DIFFERENCE: CONSTRUCTIVE VS. DESTRUCTIVE NARCISSISM.

It is critical that we draw a clear distinction between constructive narcissism and destructive narcissism. The constructive narcissist infuses the organization with urgency and energy, creativity and insight. But—and this is the difference maker—their leadership is shaped and seasoned by a deep and abiding emotional maturity. The constructive narcissist functions out of a strong, secure and accurate sense of self. They maintain an objective perspective on their strengths and limitations. They remain open to critique. They do not operate out of emotional neediness or an irrational need to be admired. They may even have a sense of humor that keeps them loose, and helps them maintain perspective and cultivate the humility to keep on learning.

While they are aspirational and forward-looking, they are also aware of the needs and concerns of others. They move the organization forward with drive and determination, but they do so without diminishing or manipulating others. With this distinction in mind, I define **constructive narcissism as a cluster of emotionally mature personality traits and behaviors that signify a strong and secure self devoted to using one’s personal and organizational power to serve others.**

The destructive narcissist indeed brings urgency and energy, creativity and insight to the organization, but lacking emotional maturity, their leadership is fueled by self-serving attitudes and behaviors.

THE DESTRUCTIVE NARCISSIST FUNCTIONS OUT OF A WEAK, INSECURE AND INACCURATE SENSE OF SELF.

They lack self-awareness and so are unable to control their emotional landscape. They are apt to be emotionally reactive. They lack emotional realism. They distort reality to confirm their dark suspicions and affirm their grandiose assumptions: the world is against them, and it is up to them and them alone to defeat their enemies and march the organization to glory. They fail to take emotional responsibility for their attitudes and actions, choosing rather to blame others when things go wrong.

HEY SEEK TO CONTROL OTHERS EVEN AS THEY FAIL TO CONTROL THEMSELVES.

They are incapable of resonating with and responding to the needs of others—remember Lyndon Johnson.

The leadership of a destructive narcissist is all and only about them—their talent, their goals and their concerns—again, remember Lyndon Johnson destructive narcissism as a cluster of emotionally immature personality traits and behaviors that signify preoccupation with a weak and insecure self devoted to using personal and organizational power to serve self-interest—if need be at the expense of others.

SUMMARY.

It is one thing to translate positive self-regard and noble purpose into constructive action that serves others. It is quite another to lead out of an inflated sense of self-importance, and pursue a self-aggrandizing agenda that diminishes others.

Ultimately the question of whether narcissism is constructive or destructive comes down to two ethical questions.

(1) Is the leader operating out of “substantial personal integrity”—is he or she living out of an emotionally sound personal identity?

(2) Does the leader seek the welfare and progress of others—do his or her attitudes and behaviors secure benefit for others? Does the leader utilize his or her personal assets—strengths, gifting, knowledge, skills, abilities—and organizational assets—resources, power and authority—to build up others and the organization, or are these assets used to promote a self-serving agenda at the expense of others?

Today, as you enter your sphere of influence in your personal leadership circles, look around you for constructive leadership.

Work with us
www.Lead2Transform/Education
info@lead2transform.com