

Narcissistic Leaders: The Incredibles and the Inevitables

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ABSTRACT

The narcissists often go for leadership and are chosen for top positions, so are the CEOs of today. Iconic CEOs such as Andy Grove, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Jack Welch, are seen more than Page 3 brigade and heard more than political bosses. They have a patina of audacity, pompousness and are gallant. They are suave, stylish, urbane, dashing, vain-glorious and glib talkers to fault. They have a surrealistic larger-than-life-persona. Contrast this with the CEOs of yore. The yesteryear managers stayed miles away from the glare of the pestering media. They were staid, sober and less pompous. They mouthed politically correct lines if at all they cared to open one. But today's leaders as a tribe are made of a radically different mold. These CEOs have their own battery of publicist and Public Relation Officers working overtime. They have the boldness and practicality to write a book, give interesting sound bites to the news-hungry media and aggressively push their personal wisdom. These new poster boys have become the toast of high profile magazines like Business Week, Time and the like. Admittedly, these high-profile corporate czars have come to redefine the broader contours of social and personal discourses. This article attempts to provide an insight into this narcissist form of leadership in the organization and the impact it has on the aura of the organization.

Keywords: Corporate, Narcissist, Leaders, CEOs, Organization etc.

INTRODUCTION

The word 'narcissism' has its roots in Greek mythology. A handsome youth by the name of Narcissus fell in love with his own replication when he gazed into a pool of water. He was so fascinated by his beauty that he kept admiring himself and eventually died in despair when he realized that he couldn't seduce his own reflection. So is the condition with narcissist leaders who are so self-obsessed that they work according to their own interests and put the interests of the others at stake.

Maccoby describes narcissists as people who make an effort to impress others with their personalities. He further writes that such narcissist people tend to provide support for others, don the mantle of leaders and may lend impetus to demolishing well-entrenched notions and developing new thinking and ways of existence. History is replete with instances of narcissists have assumed centre stage, led people from the front and deftly architecture the political and social consciousness. History stands testimony to the fact that societal discourses at some point or other were shaped, sculpted and redefined by stalwarts such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Mahatma Gandhi and Roosevelt. Business, by virtue of being a vehicle of greater social change, had its fair share of narcissistic leaders like Andrew Carnegie, Edison and Ford who capitalized on emerging technologies

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and affected a major turnaround in American industries. The situation that existed five decades ago holds true today also.

Demystifying Persona of a Narcissistic Leader

Welcome to the world of narcissist leaders. Recognizing the traits of a narcissistic leader is quite easy. Though psychologists differ on the issue of recognition of narcissist leaders, a few traits of a narcissist can be fleshed out. Narcissistic leaders are way too cold, foxy, understated, refined, selfish, cunning, vain and delirious. They have skills that can match any thespian. They are cruelly ruthless, too charged and singularly devoid of an iota of empathetic quality.

THE INEVITABLE CONS OF NARCISSIST LEADERS

Corporate Narcissism- A Fertile Ground of Toxic Environment

The workplace, led by narcissists, will always slide dangerously into a veritable toxic environment. Narcissistic leaders have a strong desire to exercise control and power over others. In exercising such a brute control, they may resort to surreptitious methods and machinations. If the narcissist boss feels piqued or offended in any conceivable way at the hands of their co-dependents or threatened by the competencies of the managers, they may display their infamous narcissistic rage and aggression. A narcissistic boss may resort to verbal abuses, deliberate smearing campaigns, sexual harassment, hoarding information, employment of silent treatment for settling scores with those who dare to cut him or her down to size.

Narcissist Leaders Thrive on a Sense of Grandeur

Narcissistic leaders have a strong penchant for setting goals that are far removed from reality. Such leaders have a flight of fancy and are deliriously obsessed with being unique and achieving spectacular things. The truth of the matter is that their projected false self is far removed from their actual self resulting in the grandiosity gap. Their success, genius, achievements, bulging financial clout, prestige in the society will be hopelessly not incommensurate with the false self they project to the world, to close yawning grandiosity gap, narcissist leaders may resort to dubious means such as committing fraud or financial impropriety.

Narcissist Leaders Brag Pompously and Incessantly

The narcissistic leaders have a strong penchant for bragging about their escapades, prowess, accomplishments, successes, genius, wealth and conquests. Their talks will be laced with "I", "Me", "and myself". They dub themselves as extraordinarily brilliant, creative genius, too brainy, obscenely rich, or even coy and humble but always in an overtly exaggerated manner.

Narcissist Leader Singularly Lacks Empathy

A narcissistic leader expects others to be empathetic without being one in return. Devoid of empathy, narcissistic leaders fare badly in interpersonal relations. Companies may conduct a 360-degree appraisal to test their leadership styles, but narcissistic leaders are simply not going to change. They lull themselves into a false belief that as long as they deliver and be successful, they don't need training. Narcissist leaders know how to wrap people around their sturdy fingers, exploit blatantly and dump them pathetically once their utility is over. No doubt, narcissist leaders have an aura of regality about them, but they are easily reviled at many quarters.

Disdain for Mentoring

Narcissist leaders balk at the idea of mentoring. Narcissist leaders scarcely mentor others and even if they mentor, they expect their protégées to be a watered-down version of their personality.

Narcissists have Supercilious Body Language

Narcissists love social interactions and indulge in badinage. They will zealously protect their personal space. They will mix around with people, fake munificence and beneficence. In the same breath, they want to be a mute spectator or the loner. Their physical posture, gait and swagger will betray an air of supremacy, "I know it all" attitude, certain mystery, imperviousness and arrogance. Narcissist leaders can maintain direct eye contact but avoid physical proximity.

Narcissists have Tough Time Holding on to Satisfying Relationships

Narcissist leaders will appear courteous and graceful only in the presence of narcissist supply. They will have a tough time holding on to this cursory politeness for long.

Narcissists Tom-Tom about their Intellectual Prowess

Narcissist leaders love to brag about their cerebral prowess or intellectual superiority. They would never admit to their personal or professional failures. They do not realize that it is possible for anyone to break through the veil and veneer of their self-professed superiority, prowess, accomplishments, power, genius and affluence.

Narcissists Feel Shame More than Guilt

Narcissist leader's behavior may seem to be primed on an amazing level of strength. But in reality, it is anything but true. The behavior that rests on a rather tenuous foundation is due to the fear of being caught, exposed, or failure staring in the face.

Narcissist Leaders Think Themselves as Genius Extraordinaire

Narcissist leaders believe in turning the mirror inwards and doing a bit of soul-searching as a more effective way of gaining knowledge through a systematic course work based on the conventional curriculum. Suffused with grandiose feeling, they truly believe that their actions are destined to work wonders for everybody and everyone. Narcissists haughtily look down upon advice or suggestions offered by peers or subordinates. They think people just don't have the brains to suggest or advice them.

Narcissist Leaders Lack Psychological Awareness

A narcissist leader reacts to punishment with a heady mixture of emotions. The narcissist is hurt, disappointed, resentful, bitter, and furious all in the same breath. They are pretty convinced that other people are envious of their success stories. The truth is that a narcissist cannot tolerate the success of others easily. They wreck havoc against peers, colleagues, or underlings who they perceive to be inconvenient for them.

THE INEVITABLE PROS OF NARCISSIST LEADERS

On the Flip Side, Narcissist Leaders Can be Extremely Useful to Organizations

Freud had studied a multitude of personality types, which he winnowed down to three for the purpose of understanding them better. The major three personalities include among other things erotic, obsessive and narcissistic.

An erotic personality cared for warmth, love and care and affection. Such personalities loved others and craved for love from others. Such people are hopelessly attached to people whom they fear will ditch or dump them conveniently. Teachers, nurses and social workers can be very well classified as erotic personalities. Erotic people as managers end up becoming very caring and understanding individuals. They steer of troubles and make others dependant on them

Obsessives, in sharp contrast, are inner-directed, self-dependant, diligent and great organizers. They can morph into excellent administrators. They are excellent listeners, have better problem-solving skills and constantly scout around for gainful opportunities. Obsessives are underpinned by strong conscience and they work towards continuous improvement at the workplace. Best of the obsessives are good communicators, good at cost-cutting measures and effectively work within the budget.

Narcissists have a fiercely strong independent streak and are implacable. They are out of the box innovators. Productive narcissists are top-cheese in their chosen endeavor or demolish established assumptions.

Erotic types don't have it in them to be good managers. They constantly seek approval from others. Obsessives have what it takes to be good administrators. But they are too cautious and hypercritical, which are the major impediments. Narcissists have it in them to metamorphose into great leaders. They have and can weave an exhilarating vision. They have the charisma to attract followers by hordes.

Narcissists Can Create a Stimulating and Breath-taking Vision

Productive narcissists create and re-write their own futures. For instance, Bob Allen, productive obsessive and Mike Armstrong, productive narcissist to understand the difference that sets productive obsessive's from productive narcissists. In the year 1997, Bob Allen made a concrete effort to revamp AT&T, so that end-to-end service of bell system could be firmly put back on tracks once again. He resold local services from Regional Bell operating companies. But the move did not exactly set the river Thames on fire. In marked contrast, Mike devised a strategy combined voice, telecommunications and Internet on the back of high-speed broadband connections. His strategy paid off. This object lesson helps to understand different approaches adopted by productive narcissists and obsessives.

Productive Narcissists Attract Followers by Drones

Narcissist leaders firmly believe that words and powerful speeches can inspire and influence people. Their strong, spell-binding speeches can transform them into charismatic personalities. Anyone who has seen or interacted with narcissist leaders from close quarters can vouchsafe for aura, mystique and their ability to cast a spell on others.

Avoid the Booby Traps: Dealing with Narcissist Leaders

Managing narcissists can be equally tricky and challenging. Maccoby, in his perspicacity as a career counselor spanning many decades, suggests three ways to deal with narcissists (more so, the productive one).

Narcissists Should Find An Acolyte

Narcissists tend to form close ties with persons who may be their trusted acolytes. He may act as an emotional anchor and a trusted confidante. But the confidante may still find it quite tough managing his narcissist boss. For his part, the narcissist boss should see the acolyte as a shadow of his own persona. The acolyte will have to be perceptible to the ways of narcissist leaders to keep the relationship on an even keel. The acolytes need to get that nodding wink from their leader before they can execute their mandates. For instance, Bill Gates was able to look at the future with confidence as his Chief Operating Officer, Steve Ballmer, a tough-to-crack obsessive, keeps the show on.

Managing Narcissist Bosses- An Art perse

It is difficult to deal with narcissistic bosses. Subordinates would do well to remember that the company is betting big time on the boss's vision and not theirs. So, survival should become the key.

Empathize with the Boss

Subordinates would do well to remember that empathizing with a narcissist boss can iron out the strains in the relationship. But one should not make the mistake of expecting the boss to return the compliment. A subordinate can praise the boss's accomplishments frequently in a bid to boost his self-esteem.

Give the Boss the Tips. Don't Hanker After Credit

Subordinates should ensure that they hear their bosses out completely before they present their own views. The subordinate should not be surprised if the boss makes unreasonable demands on their time.

CONCLUSION

In this age where innovation has become a leitmotif for organizations, having a narcissistic leader on board has become a compelling necessity. The company looks to leaders who can create a brilliant future. Narcissistic leaders fit the bill. But many a times, narcissistic leaders have brought only destruction and catastrophe in companies they work for. Companies that have such bosses can zoom into the big league if the leaders have a good idea of their limitations and work accordingly. For other organizations, they will be in for the worst. The employees will have to look skywards and look at orison.

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