

The Dark Side of Leadership



Carl Jung, writing about what he called the “Shadow” wrote, *“To become conscious of it involves recognising the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge.”*

The dark side has been around since the depths of time; Abel & Cain, Arthur & Mordred, Richard the Lionheart & King John, Van Helsing & Dracula, Gandalf & Saruman, Yoda & Darth Sidious and most recently Voldemort and Harry Potter.

Anakin Skywalker succumbed to the dark side of the force and both Bilbo and Frodo Baggins had to fight hard not to be corrupted by the “one ring” – submission begins where temptation starts.

Even great leaders have a dark side; stories abound with regards to people like Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela & others; maybe there is some truth in them; we all have a dark side – even us! We are all tempted by power, possession, pleasure, etc.

If you have ever completed a questionnaire such as MBTI or Insights, you will undoubtedly have received a very flattering report.

My Jungian preferences are INTP and I am an Insights “Blue”. My reports invariably read something like, “People like me are known for our brilliant theories and unrelenting logic. We are

considered to be the most logically precise of all the personality types priding ourselves on our inventiveness and creativity; we have a unique perspective and a vigorous intellect. We are rigorous and disciplined with an uncanny knack of summarising; and we leave no stone unturned before coming to an invariably pertinent conclusion.

The reports do usually say that we can be procedural, critical, somewhat cold and a bit distant, but it's usually written in a way that makes it "almost acceptable".

I've yet to receive a report telling me that I can be dogmatic, critical, irritable, opinionated and downright stubborn with regards to my analysis of a situation – all of which I am aware of and, I like to think, manage to control.

I remember someone, many years ago, when reading his Insights report saying that he was "impressed with the description and accuracy of his strengths" but they (Insights) had got it completely wrong in their description of potential "bad day" behaviours.

We ALL have a dark side, it's not necessarily as "black & white" as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde; i.e., either "one or the other" but we all have "shades" of the dark side.

So, how can we detect that we are on the slippery slide to our dark side of leadership? If we accept that leadership is globally about "influencing others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of the organisations of which they are members" and not about "showing or proving that I know best" then there are some signs:

From consensus to controlling

Rather than looking for common agreements and a collective decision we find ourselves controlling the situation and blocking out those who don't agree with us, we start directing the discussion in a certain direction – the direction we want

it to go.

From assertive to aggressive

We move from using “I statements” and respecting different points of view to using “you can’t do that”, or “one can’t do that”, we become pushy and directive – and we push where we want to go.

From proposing to imposing

We move from giving ideas & suggestions and building on the ideas & suggestions of others to enforcing and imposing ideas and suggestion – generally our ideas and suggestions.

From dialoguing to debating

We move from trying to find a shared connection, not concerned with winning or losing, listening and trying to understand to combat and looking for victory – our victory.

From arguing to attacking

We move from giving arguments to explain our ideas and reasoning to attacking others and their ideas and reasoning – we attack them and defend ourselves.

None of the above are a problem in small doses; leadership is about having influence, tenacity, self-confidence, leading edge thinking, etc. but when we find ourselves controlling the situation by aggressively attacking someone in order to ensure implementation of our ideas, then maybe temptation has been replaced by submission!

As Yoda probably never said *“In every leader, the dark side there is”*