OVERCOMING THE DARK SIDE OF LEADERSHIP

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What are the causes, results, potential prevention of the many failures of leaders?

What personal issues may plague people in their exercise of leadership?

A paradox of sorts existed in the lives of most of the leaders who had experienced significant failures: The personal insecurities, feelings of inferiority and need for parental approval compelled these people to become successful leaders; but at the same time it was very often these same issues that precipitated their failure.

The goals of this book:

- Guide you in understanding what the dark side is.
- Assist you in identifying your own dark side.
- Give you some specific steps for overcoming the dark side lurking on your success before you unexpectedly get blindsided by it.

Part 1: Understanding Our Dark Side

1. BLINDSIDED BY THE DARK SIDE

Our personalities have been slowly intermingled with examples, emotions, expectations, experiences that over a lifetime have created our dark side. If not tended, the mixture will ultimately explode with great ferocity...either periodically in solitary acts of frustration or some other form of emotional release – or in a sudden and massive moral failure, because it has been denied and ignored for too long.....because especially leaders feel the constant need to be in total control of their lives.

2. COMPANY ON THE DARK SIDE

Helpful work ethic: unload one bag at a time. Face any challenge 'one bag at a time'.
People who ignore or refuse to acknowledge their dark side frequently encounter major failures in their leadership responsibilities. Leaders who face their dark side and redeem it accomplish the most over the long run.

3. SHEDDING DIVINE LIGHT ON THE DARK SIDE

God intended humans to be more than just managers: '...to exercise dominion, to rule...' The role of leadership: to do the right things, not merely to do things right!

Raw material for the dark side:

- **Pride** – in scripture always linked with failure and stumbling. Proverbs 6 – pride, wrong motives prevent accountability
- **Selfishness** – always leaves chaos and disorder
- **Self-deception** – wrong motives; be careful in justifying your plans and goals as good and right; leave the final judgment to the Lord

4. HOW THE DARK SIDE DEVELOPS

Much of what determines how a leaders dark side will develop, stems from the family the person grew up in and his/her childhood years through adolescence. Many in positions of leadership have sensed at some time a vague, inexplicable drive to make a significant mark with their lives:

- A vague sense of ambition
- A profound need to be approved
- An irrational fear that their work is not adequate
- A need to feel in absolute control of every circumstance and event
- A tendency toward perfection
- Other behaviors: overeating, compulsive spending, alcoholism, compulsive exercise

Any behavior that seems to overpower us as well as any urge or motivation that seems to uncontrollably drive us is a possible sign indicating the presence of our dark side.

If pride, selfishness, self-deceit and wrong motives are crucial ingredients for our dark side, then our family and our developmental years provide the catalyst for this mixture to determine the final shape of our dark side. The experiences of our childhood determine the degree to which we are controlled by the dark side of our personality.

Every person operates on the basis of a pyramid of needs and wants (Abraham Maslow). People must have their needs met at one level of this pyramid before they will move on to satisfy their needs at a higher level.

Self – actualization
Alienation, boredom, limited activities, no meaning, in life, routine

Esteem
Feeling of incompetence, negativism, inferiority

Love
Self-consciousness, feeling unwanted, worthless, empty, lonely, isolation, incompleteness

Safety
Insecurity, yearning, sense of loss, fear, obsession, compulsion

Physiological needs
Hunger, thirst, sexual frustration, tension, fatigue, illness

(Below each need are the reactions listed, when those needs are not met.)

When certain events threaten us in one of our need areas or when we are deprived in any way, we should expect meeting that need to become a controlling element of our personality.

STAGE	BASIC ELEMENT	EXPLANATION
1	Needs	Existence of basic needs
2	Traumatic experiences	That threatens the satisfaction of certain needs; result: missing block in pyramid
3	Existential debt	Feeling that unmet need is a result of a personal failure – an emotional debt that we attempt to pay through unhealthy behaviours during adulthood
4	Dark side development	The combined effects of these needs and traumatic experiences and emotional debts result in ongoing development of dark side

Our dark side is inclined to be overcompensation for needs that have not been met in our lives and develops as we attempt to repay the existential debts of varying degrees that we have taken on.

5. SEAFOOD, PICTIONARY AND THE DARK SIDE

For many leaders the dark side has provided the fuel for achievement. It can serve as a silent internal mentor, tirelessly coaching to triumph. The dark side has a powerful influence on the current success. But when the lessons of the dark side are never learned, it drives even successful leaders to make unwise, impulsive, unethical, or immoral choices that may lead to failure. Overcoming the negative aspects of the dark side requires constant vigilance!

6. PARADOXES OF THE DARK SIDE

The negative aspect of the dark side rises to the surface when we use it selfishly to only fulfil our own needs and wants. We can use our dark side to serve God´s purposes in our life rather than only our unmet needs. Leaders need to be students of themselves and understand the areas of their dark side. Areas that make them vulnerable to temptation. Understanding the own weaknesses should lead to continually seek God´s protection and guidance. Put in place defences that will prevent the dark side from running rampant. As we grow in leadership, we will experience failures, tension, emotional struggles, interpersonal conflicts, ...that can expose our dark side. Let´s be attentive and search for the tools that will prevent the dark side from causing us to derail.

Part 2: Discovering Our Dark Side

7. THE COMPULSIVE LEADER (BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: MOSES)

Compulsive in a leadership context describes the need to maintain absolute order. Compulsive leadership results from the leaders own compulsive personality – everything, every area of life must be controlled.

The compulsive leader pursues perfection to an extreme – personal and in organizational life. He develops very rigid, highly systematized daily routines that must be followed meticulously. Compulsive leaders tend to be very status conscious: deferential, ingratiating, diligent, efficient, often going out of their way. They continually look for the reassurance and approval of authority figures and are anxious when unsure of their performance and standing.

They leave little room for spontaneity; recreation and pleasure are often planned in advance.

These leaders are often overly moralistic, conscientious, judgmental both of themselves and others. Inside there are often an emotional power keg – as a result of a rigid childhood where moralistic expectations were placed on them; or the product of some failure or trauma.

Compulsive leaders respond to their inner turmoil by so tightly binding their feelings that the opposite of turmoil results in highly controlled and ordered individuals.

Compulsivity in the church often shows up in the pursuit of excellence in ministry. This can become perfectionism. We need to recognize when our pursuit of excellence is crossing the line to obsessive perfectionism. Excessive criticism and critiquing can be other signs of compulsive leadership. Although it looks very spiritual it is all done in an attempt to meet and satisfy the leaders unhealthy needs.

KEYWORDS:

- Status conscious.
- Looking for reassurance and approval from authorities.
- Controls activities.
- Workaholics.
- Keep order, excessively moralistic, conscientious, judgmental.
- **At the heart: a rebellious attitude, angry, resentful.**

8. THE NARCISSISTIC LEADER (BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: SOLOMON)

For the narcissistic leader the world revolves on the axis of self.
Narcissistic leaders present various combinations of:

- Intense ambitiousness.
- Grandiose fantasies.
- Feelings of inferiority.
- Overdependence on external admiration and acclaim.

At the same time the self-absorbed leader is

- Chronically uncertain of himself.
- Experiences dissatisfaction with his accomplishments.
- Has an over-inflated sense of his importance to the organisation.
- Has an exhibitionistic need for constant attention and admiration from others.
- Restless ambition.
- Interpersonal exploitiveness in which others are taken advantage of.
- Tend to overestimate their own achievements and abilities while refusing to recognize the quality and value of the same in others; it would be a threat to their own self-importance.

Narcissistic leaders tend to use others to advance their own goals; therefore they are notorious for being able to empathize with those they lead. This enables them to pursue their own ends without restraint.

Christian leaders often use those they lead to enhance their own image and improve the way they feel about themselves.

Signs: to be immediately obsessed with whether his sermon was good is dealing with a prime symptom of narcissism.

Numerous churches have been destroyed by leaders who led the church into projects too energetic and costly for the congregation, because the leader needed to feel good about himself. When the leader is constantly beginning new ministries, even when existing, essential ministries are not adequately staffed or effective, it is a sign of narcissism. Rather than ensuring that existing ministries are efficiently functioning, once the 'high' of a new ministry launch is gone, the narcissistic leader provides little long term oversight or maintenance.

God´s kingdom work provides fertile soil for budding narcissists. Be aware!!

KEYWORDS:

- Driven to succeed by a need for admiration and acclaim.
- Over-inflated sense of importance.
- Great ambitions.
- Grandiose fantasies.
- Self-absorption.
- Uncertainty – deep feelings of inferiority.
- May not enjoy their success – may be dissatisfied with their lives.

9. THE PARANOID LEADER

Paranoid leaders are:

- Afraid of anything or anyone.
- Characteristically suspicious and hostile.
- Guarded in their relationships with others.
- Hypersensitive to the actions and reactions of those they lead, always fearful of potential rebellions.
- Deeply insecure in their own abilities.
- Pathologically jealous of other gifted people.

Their actions:

- Use clandestine scheming and spying to maintain a firm grip on leadership.
- Build secret alliances and networks with those who can be easily manipulated.
- Those who are thought to be a threat often find themselves unwittingly caught in a web of misinformation and rumour spun by the paranoid leader and his spies/supporters.
- Overreacts to even the mildest forms of criticism.
- Constantly attaching subversive meanings and motives to even the most innocent actions of others in the organisation.
- Creates rigid structures and systems of control – limits the autonomy of underlings and associates.
- Excessive staff meetings and reporting.
- Difficulty in developing and maintaining close relationships – maintains a safe distance from people.
- **At the heart: strong feelings of insecurity, lack of confidence.**

10. THE CODEPENDENT LEADER

Co-dependency does not fall into any one category of recognized personality disorder. It is more of a generic trait or behaviour that can be found in many different personality types.

Definition:

> An emotional, psychological and behavioural condition that develops as a result of prolonged exposure to, and practice of, a set of oppressive rules – rules that prevent open expression of feelings as well as discussion of personal problems.

Co-dependency is most often associated with people living with others who are compulsively dependent on something (i.e. alcohol, drugs, food, porno,.....).

Another aspect: the social system around these types of relationships – counterbalancing a socially unacceptable and embarrassing behaviour of the dependent person which often involves strict rules that dictate how the family must behave and communicate in public.

- Coping behaviours for covering up develop.
- Resulting in emotional repression that creates great stress for the codependent person.
- Sometimes very high, unrealistic standards that are impossible to consistently meet – resulting in a constant sense of failure and self-blame.

- Tendency to react rather than to initiate action; codependents react to the behaviour of the dependent person; they make an effort to balance, cover up, maintain peace in their relationships.
- Codependents take personal responsibility for the actions and emotions of others, often blaming themselves; they generally have a high tolerance for bizarre behaviours in others; they will go far to avoid hurting a persons feelings, even if it means they hurt themselves in the process.
- Avoiding confrontations, they often serve as peacemakers, appear extremely benevolent, always willing to take on another task – despite being often overextended; they can´t say no. Result: repressed anger and frustration.
- Codependents obsessively worry about the feelings of others – they become often emotionally and physically ill.
- **In essence: the problem of co-dependency involves the way that an individual copes with the behaviours and expectations of those around him/her.**

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP is the ultimate venue for taking care of others. The person with severe co-dependency will experience great frustrations in ministry.

A common manifestation:
- Failure to confront and deal with inappropriate behaviour within the church; always in fear of hurting somebody's feelings and risking the loss of approval. Natural result of such avoidance: enabling of unhealthy and unbiblical behaviours within the church.
- The codependent leader is often willing to take responsibility for the inappropriate attitudes and actions of others.
- S/he finds it nearly impossible to say no to requests of church members, so s/he can find his/her schedule out of control and the workload unbearable. Ministry provides the perfect environment for a leader to focus on others to the exclusion of self. This often results in the codependent leaders failure to care for himself, producing burnout and other debilitation maladies.

11. THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE LEADER (BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: JONAH)

Jonah – disobeyed; the following sorrow and repentance would not last long; he preached lethargically with success, but the success made him angry and a period of sulking followed. He had generally a negative outlook on his life.

We see:
- A resistance to God´s demand to perform an assigned task.
- Bursts of sadness and anger.
- Short-lived periods of contrition and sorrow for his actions.
- Impulsive behaviour.
- General negativity.

Passive-aggressive leaders have a tendency to resist demands to adequately perform tasks. This is most expressed through: procrastination – dawdling – stubbornness – forgetfulness – intentional inefficiency.

All this stems from the fear of failure; and from the fear that success may bread higher expectations....which could lead to later failure.

Passive-aggressive leaders
- Are prone to short outbursts expressing intense emotions (sadness, anger, frustration), often just within the bounds of what is legal and socially acceptable, yet it is still provocative, often followed short-lived periods of sorrow and repentance. This demonstrates certain impulsiveness.
- Perform the tasks, but with little or no enthusiasm.
- Harbour anger and bitterness for being forced.
- Their impulsiveness leave their colleagues often feeling edgy. They make people uncomfortable and leave them confused.
- They exhibit impatience, irritability, fidgeting when things are not going their way.

IN MINISTRY:

Passive-aggressive leaders
- Find it difficult to set goals and implement plans for the future.
- Have a pessimistic outlook.
- Quickly complain about not having support, not being allowed to lead the way they want.

- A majority of the time they appear to be happy, compliant and satisfied with their job and organization. However over a period of time a pattern of erratic emotional behaviour can be seen.

Part 3: Redeeming our dark side

12. OVERCOMING THE DARK SIDE

Implement a series of self-management strategies. The majority of conflicts in leadership are the result of the leaders own sensibilities being offended, his ideas being rejected, his being out-performed by a staff member, or not receiving the attention and respect he feels he deserves.....and various other petty issues.

These things touch a raw nerve within the dark side. They reinforce the leader´s feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, paranoia,...

Make it a practice to avoid conflict by refusing to respond to those issues that are not crucial. Be always aware that the dark side is a serious threat to how God wants to use us.

Dangers of the dark side:

Compulsive leader:
- Self-righteous, legalistic environment.
- Workaholism, burnout.
- Urge to control -> alienation and rebellion of coworkers.

Narcissistic leader:
- Exploitation of people, use people for own ends.
- Perhaps even unethical, illegal behaviour.

Paranoid leader:
- Constant state of denial.
- Acute distrust.
- 'Warfare' between parties.

Codependent leader:
- Meets every other need while ignoring the own family and own needs.
- Burnout, divorce, adulterous affairs, physical illness.

Passive-aggressive leader:
- Uncontrolled outbursts.
- Erratic, strange behaviour.

We must take responsibility to triumph over our dark side. We must soberly examine ourselves to learn about the things that are motivating us and the fears and anxieties that always accompany leadership. Be aware of unhealthy motivations and fears – give them to God!
- God is sovereign and in total control of my life and my circumstances.
- Complete satisfaction (a sense of personal adequacy and esteem) we find ONLY in Christ.
- God protects against all attacks, we don´t need to do it ourselves.
- I am <u>not</u> responsible for the attitudes and actions of others; pleasing God is more important than being liked by the people we serve; we cannot 'fix' everyone. We cannot always keep the peace. Sometimes we have to address the issues.
- <u>No</u> manipulation through emotional outbursts! <u>But</u> motivation produced by God-inspired vision.

13. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR DARK SIDE

We must acknowledge our sinfulness and seek the forgiveness and redemption that can be found only through Jesus Christ. Be aware of the danger of denial. King David´s denial lasted for more than a year. Be aware not to put moral failures and other problems too quickly to the realm of spiritual warfare and demonic attacks. Give sufficient attention to the realities of human dysfunction!!

The dark side of our personality is the result of normal human development – we all have one! Don´t blame others – which is another symptom of denial.

The dark side can be a blessing in disguise. God is most present at our greatest point of weakness. We must make a choice – to practice a life of transparency before God!

1. Step to overcoming your dark side: TO ADMIT THAT IT EXISTS AND UNDERSTAND THE SHAPE IT HAS TAKEN IN YOUR LIFE.

14. EXAMINE THE PAST

Once we admit that we do have a dark side, we can begin to explore it..with periods of serious and often painful reflection about our past. Our past unavoidably impacts our present. We are the sum of the experiences of our lives. If you want to understand yourself and others, look into the areas of pain, sorrow, and rage. Often embarrassing and humiliating childhood experiences have created the missing blocks in our needs pyramid and are still driving us to achieve success. Not only the events are important, but also the feelings they generated – it is very often those same feelings that are still driving our behaviour as leaders today. They have likely created some of the unmet needs in our life – that we may be attempting to meet as adults through the exercise of our leadership.

What are the events in my life that have created unmet needs never satisfactorily addressed?

When dealing with the past be constructive, without placing blame. It almost certainly will involve extending forgiveness in some form. Unforgiveness is the number one avenue satan uses to gain entrance to believers lives. We as leaders are to extend mercy and forgive.

2. Step toward overcoming your dark side: TO EXAMINE YOUR PAST.

15. RESIST THE POISON OF EXPECTATIONS

Issues that have their source in us require steps that we can take in an effort to deal with emotions and behaviours that to some degree are self-generated and self-imposed. But it also requires to confront expectations imposed upon us by others.

What does it mean to act like a Christian?

What are legitimate, biblical expectations that can be placed on leaders?

Many of these expectations are internally generated, others have been created and placed by those being lead.
Some expectations:

- Human traditions.
- Spiritual standards of measure not entirely supported by Scripture.
- Legalism.

Healthy expectations can motivate, communicate that we have confidence in people.

Expectations can either propel people to achieve or they can produce pain and failure. Too many young leaders are completely unprepared for the realities of life in the church-planting trenches. Danger: self-destructive behaviours as a way to escape the pressure of the expectations one has failed to meet. Unrealistic expectations are intensified because of their cumulative effect.

Pastors and other leaders have always faced unrealistic expectations. The difficulty today is that each individual has his/her own set of expectations; few are commonly agreed on. Thus the intensity of expectations is multiplied. Result: leaders often live life at a dangerously frenetic pace – that increases people´s expectations - > vicious circle!

Every engine needs oil – every soul needs the oil of grace! The grace of God!

Jesus insisted on living on grace, accountable to his heavenly father, faithful to the mission for which he had been sent.

We are encouraged to live lives of freedom, not legalism, fully enjoying the grace of God; following our own conscience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This is hard to do if you´re insecure. We need to identify the numerous sources of the expectations that bind us and then soundly reject them.

3. Step toward overcoming your dark side: TO RESIST THE POISON OF UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.

16. PRACTICE PROGRESSIVE SELF-KNOWLEDGE

To gain control over our dark side involves the ongoing process of gathering knowledge about ourselves – through practice of specific disciplines and the use of certain tools.

Spiritual disciplines:

a. **Scripture reading** – consistently devote time to personal spiritual disciplines. Through Scripture we gain accurate self-knowledge which is necessary for successful leadership. Scripture is a mirror!
b. **Personal retreats** – a vital step away from busyness and ministry to reflect on your own spiritual condition:
   - Where have I grown sloppy?
   - What am I neglecting?
   - How are my most important relationships?
   - What does God say? how does He want me to lead His people?
c. **Devotional reading** – written by spiritual leaders who have gone before us.
d. **Journaling** – this is a clarifying process: fears, motives, insecurities, other emotions can be expressed; it helps to be honest with ourselves. The simple act of placing negative feelings on paper (inner urges, compulsions that drive us) reduces their power over us to some degree.

These disciplines are not supplemental to what we do as spiritual leaders; they are the very core of who we are and what we do. If we neglect them the effectiveness of our spiritual leadership is greatly reduced. **If we are too busy for such things, we are clearly just too busy! Don´t allow yourself to be in bondage of the urgent!!!**

Other tools:

- Personality profiles and tests.
- Professional counselling and therapy.

One of the most insidious aspects of the dark side is that it can maintain its presence in our lives without completely disabling us. We need to be committed to three important Christ-like qualities:

a. Humility.
b. Transparency – depth and nature of our self-revelations.
c. Honesty – accuracy of what we reveal.

More tools:

- Personal accountability group – a willingness to submit to ongoing accountable relationships; there are 3 levels:
  ⇒ Not objecting to advice.
  ⇒ Wanting advice.
  ⇒ Seeking out advice!!
- Formal performance evaluation – others usually see the effects of our dark side long before we do. Opportunity to address potential problem areas. It is painful to acknowledge our failures and problems but it is absolutely essential in order to gain control over the dark side.

As long as we choose to live in ignorance of our unique weaknesses and dysfunctions, we will continue to be victimized by them. With increased knowledge will come the increased power to live a life of balance, free from the destructive effects of our dark side.

4. Step toward overcoming your dark side: PRACTICE THE DISCIPLINE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

17. UNDERSTAND YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Our value is not dependent on our performance, positions, titles, achievements or the power that we wield. Our greatest source of worth as leaders should come from the knowledge that we are known by God and declared righteous in Christ. There are two sources of life:

OUR CONDITION (STATE) HERE ON EARTH	OUR POSITION (STANDING) BEFORE GOD
Earthly	Heavenly
Physical	Spiritual
Leads to death	Leads to eternal life
Old birth, man, nature	New man, nature, creature
Condemned	Justified
Guilty	Forgiven
In Adam	In Christ

From which source do we derive our value as people? As leaders?

Spiritual growth takes place as we appropriate what we already are in Christ by faith! To concentrate on our condition means we are not living by faith.

- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- 1 Corinthians 15:22
- Ephesians 1:4-8,11,13
- Romans 8:16,17
- 1 Corinthians 1:30
- Romans 5:6-8

Any attempts to overcome the dark side apart from the application of spiritual truth about our true position and identity in Christ will end in failure. This is a lifelong process!

5. Step toward overcoming your dark side: TO UNDERSTAND YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST