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# Leadership: It's all about me ... No, really

Have you ever visited a business where each worker has a personal toolbox?

I once studied a printing company where I learned that



**Constance Campbell**

each employee's toolbox was jealously guarded, highly valued and highly personalized. These employees had devoted time and care to finding just the

right tools that enabled them to perform their job at a high level.

The toolbox of a leader may not have the same appearance as the toolboxes described above, but leaders also need tools that enable them to perform effectively.

What are these tools? Herein lays one of the paradoxes of leadership. In our last visit, I proposed that light-side leaders focus primarily on others, their mission and their context while dark-side

leaders focus primarily on self.

In this visit, I propose that, when it comes to tools, the focus of light- and dark-side leaders is exactly the opposite from that described above. Light-side leaders understand their most important tool is self, whereas dark-side leaders view others, their mission and the context as their tools.

In this sense, light-side leadership really is "all about me." In this case, though, the "all about me" serves a purpose larger than self.

Light-side leaders focus on self for the purpose of enhancing their ability to lead others toward accomplishment of a mission in a particular context while dark-side leaders focus on self for the purpose of aggrandizing themselves.

As an example, consider a particular leadership skill, emotional intelligence (EI).

Those who are familiar with the concept know that EI bears a strong resemblance to good old-fashioned "people

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skills." It has two components: 1) a high level of self-awareness and an ability to manage oneself effectively, and 2) an ability to see beyond the surface in others and interact with them based on that deep-level understanding.

Both light- and dark-side leaders may demonstrate strength in at least one component of EI.

Light-side leaders are likely to demonstrate strength in the first EI component of self-awareness. Self-awareness involves an inward journey in which one attends to issues such as values, emotions, strengths and limitations.

Ironically, though dark-side leaders focus inordinately on self, they are unlikely to have a high level of self-awareness

because their primary focus is on obtaining their desires rather than enhancing their leadership abilities.

Regarding the second component of EI, light-side leaders may need to develop their abilities in reading and responding to others, but dark-side leaders are often highly skilled at this.

Let's revisit our exemplar of the dark side, Hitler, who was so skilled at reading and responding to others that he convinced many British leaders prior to World War II that he was a noble leader whose main desire for Europe was peace.

Once again, this illustrates the difference between light-side leaders, whose focus on self enhances the lives of

their followers as well as the accomplishment of their mission, and dark-side leaders, whose focus on self enhances the accomplishment of their own desires.

Yes, leadership is paradoxical. Light-side leadership is not "all about me" when it comes to the goals of the leadership endeavor, but it is "all about me" when it comes to viewing oneself as the primary tool for accomplishing those goals.

Dark-side leadership is "all about me" when it comes to accomplishing the goals of the leadership endeavor, but it is not "all about me" when it comes to the tools needed to accomplish those goals.

So what do you think? Do you know a light-side or dark-side leader? Does this description fit?

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