

Ego, Work and Relationships

There's an interesting phenomenon I've been following for years — a phenomenon that takes place largely at work whether "work" takes place in the corporation, in the sports arena, in the arts, in politics, etc.

The phenomenon is this: there seems to be an ever-increasing number of folks who possess the social skills to create workplace relationships in order to climb the "rank-related workplace ladder" — interactions replete with all the aplomb and niceties that go along with creating and maintaining workplace relationships.

This is to say these folks are great at relating to their peers, their bosses, their clients, their mentors, their coaches, their followers, their "groupies", their stakeholders, for example, but when it comes to their relationships outside the workplace — spouses, partners, friends, etc. — there is no "there" there.

There is the phenomenon of folks who fail deeply when it comes to creating and maintaining truly healthy, conscious, and intimate relationships.

Many of these folks, a number of whom I have observed or coached over the years, have all the "right stuff". They came from "good stock", and growing up they went to the "right" schools, played all the requisite sports and engaged in the "acceptable" and revered extracurricular activities, pledged the "right" sororities and fraternities, and received the degree-du-jour and the post-graduate accolades that now line their walls.

On the way, they learned how to be egotistical and arrogant and wear their successes and coats of arms on their sleeves. Then, on into their professional field of choice, they paid their dues, moved up the ranks, and climbed the ladder of success — creating and cultivating the necessary relationships that would help them achieve whatever it is their ego-driven desires needed to achieve rank, status, recognition. And, to be honest, they knew their stuff, they knew their craft.

Being adept at relationships, they used all the tools, their tools: false modesty, false intimacy, false trust, cloudy transparency, fake vulnerability, fake charisma and insincere charm, forced gracefulness and the like.

The downside is their narcissism — their consistent need to be "on", their need always to be in the limelight, to wield their power, to be in control and to be the center of their universe, and, for that matter, *The Universe*.

Then, it hits. Sometimes in a subtle way and, more often, in a not-so-subtle way, one day they wake up and they feel alone. They sense the loneliness and feeling of deficiency that accompanies the stark realization that "the game is up" — their mask wears thin and disintegrates, their costume covers but a skeleton — no meat — and, alas, they begin to experience sadness, depression, self-hate, self-loathing and self-pity.

They discover they don't know who they are.

At home with their partners, at play with their friends, in their life (outside of work) in relationship, they stumble, they feel disoriented, disconnected and ungrounded; they feel like a stranger — emotionally distant and incapable of forging deeper, heart-felt and loving intimacy. They experience estrangement from their spouses and partners, distance from their loved ones, and often end up engaging in superficial affairs, one-night stands,

uncomfortable and clunky liaisons — all in an effort to find and feel a deeper self that has alluded them.

They're searching for, longing for, their soul — long lost, covered over and forgotten. Along the way, they jettisoned their need for true and real friendship, for true and real relationships, for true and real connection — jettisoned for the sake of ego-driven needs for control, recognition and security. They created and lived their fictional stories that shored up their egos, but not their relationships. They created and lived their fictional stories that focused on the superficial "me" and the immortal "me", but never on true and real friendships and relationships.

So now, lost, lonely and unhappy, they don't know where to turn.

Turn inside. That's where you can find your True and Real Self — the Self of honest, conscious, sincere and healthy relationships. That's where *you* are. And, the good news — it's never too late.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Do you have meaningful and fulfilling relationships at work? How do you know?
- Have you ever "used" people at work to get ahead? Do you now? If so, how does that make you feel? How do you justify your behavior?
- Is your relationship with your partner, spouse, best friend(s) where you want it to be? If not, why not?
- Is there a gap between the level of closeness, contactfulness, intimacy or connection between you and your spouse/partner? If so, why? Is that OK? What story do you tell yourself (and others, perhaps) to rationalize the gap?
- How is your relationship with your children, your parents, your siblings?
- Do you sometimes view people as expendable? If so, why?
- Do you ever feel sad, lonely, unhappy, hopeless about your love relationships? How are you contributing to that sadness, loneliness, unhappiness and hopelessness?
- Are friends important to you? How engaged are you, really engaged, with them? Is your friendship more about you than them?
- If you have few or no friends, or no deep, loving relationship, why is that?
- Have your loving relationships grown over the last year or two. If not, why not?
- Have your friendships deepened over the last year or two? If not, why not?
- How would you feel if your spouse/partner or close friend(s) walked away next week?
- Do you invest in your relationships, in your friendships? Do you take them for granted?

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