



Struggling With Behaviour & Performance?

Your Leadership Persona May Be to Blame!

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In our work with entrepreneurs, executives and leaders, we find most are experiencing frustration with the performance and behavior of their direct reports. And, while they are complaining about it, they are also feeling completely powerless to do anything about it. These leaders, despite trying to do the 'right thing', often feel like they are just surviving the experience of being a leader. Of course, no one became a leader to feel powerless!

If this is your experience, then your Leadership Persona may be to blame! As humans, we develop our survival strategies and persona first and then, once we feel safe, we allow our authentic self to emerge. So it is with leaders. Without skills and development, we try our best to lead, but end up developing a Leadership Persona to help us cope with the challenges of leading others.

What is a Leadership Persona?

A Leadership Persona is an adaptive identity; the personality that a leader projects to others and desires to be seen as. It is an image-driven construct that performs a role and believes it contains all of the qualities, behaviors and characteristics the person needs to be successful. **It is an ego structure, created to help us survive, not thrive.** It needs and wants others to recognize and approve of it and is there for the purpose of making sure others see you as competent, strong, wise, knowledgeable, etc. The lack of a foundation of leadership development based in self-awareness causes leaders to develop a Leadership Persona rather than developing as a leader.



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Our Leadership Persona enables us to adapt to an organization's demands, however, if we over identify with it, we don't develop ourselves as a leader. Instead, because it's a survival strategy, our energies go into defending the image of ourselves as a "great leader". Think *Donald Trump* and how often he tells people how great he is. He created that image of himself and constantly puts energy into promoting it, however, few would think of him as an inspirational, conscious, authentic leader.

Striving to be "Great"

As the Leadership Persona is adaptive, its agenda is to be seen as a "good" or "great" leader. This means when leading from their Persona, a leader will fashion themselves in the image of a leader they admire, trying to be what others expect them to be. Or, they may even read books on leadership voraciously, trying to "figure out" how to be a "good" leader, to be all things to all people, but never quite feeling they are good enough. They compare themselves to others and come up short. When leading from their Persona, leaders are locked into the idea that they are successful when they get things done, but never feel as though they are doing enough.

Too many leaders are performing their roles in an unhealthy fashion. They lack boundaries and don't take the time away from work they need to have a personal life. With our technological advances, leaders never stop working. Many are unable to disengage and are in the habit of sending emails at all hours of the night and on weekends. Their relationships suffer and they feel guilty when they stay late at work because they are neglecting their partner and children. They do, do, do, thinking they are doing what is best for everyone.

Unhealthy Leaders

Ultimately, accumulated stress and neglect of self-care catches up with leaders. They end up being discouraged, drained and defeated by the challenges of their role. It has a negative impact on their physical and emotional health in the long run. Two thirds of business leaders have suffered from mental health conditions according to research by Bupa Global, the international health insurer, including anxiety, stress and depression, with work often cited as a contributor.

No leader starts their career thinking it will cause them to become unhealthy. They don't think they will be that leader who puts the company before themselves, their family and their friends. Yet statistically that doesn't last long. Even those leaders who consider themselves to have a balanced life will start work at 5 and finish at 7, feeling proud they don't look at their phone until morning (unless there is an emergency).

Leaders suffer from anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, alcohol abuse, to name a few. 58% of the leaders surveyed said that they felt it was harder for leaders to talk about mental health and a quarter of people feel less supported around the issue of mental health since becoming more senior. This means leading for many is a dehumanizing activity.

If they are leading from their persona, they fear that talking about their health issues will have a negative impact on their reputation, seen as career limiting and fearing they will be judged by others. They burn out, because they have detached from the person they were when they started leading. When they slow down, they don't know how to be when not consumed with their work. Rather than getting the help they need, they fall deeper into patterns of adaptive behavior, putting on their best Adaptive Persona at work and shutting down at home.

Dominate or Submit

There are two main Personas we use when we adapt, both as humans and as leaders. The Persona is either wired to dominate or submit. These are survival strategies, based on the flight or fight mechanism in the brain. When we are living from our Persona, we aren't conscious of using these adaptive behavioral systems of the brain. A lack of training causes leaders to adapt — assuming one style of behaving or the other. While most of us are familiar with the dominant side of the adaptive continuum (Autocratic Leadership), Permissive Leadership, associated with the submissive side is less known, but has

recently become more pervasive in organizations because of changes in our society.

Dominance, while necessary to survive, isn't necessary when we are working with and cooperating with others. The dominant approach of the autocratic leader was necessary for the survival stage of our evolution. However, it has outlived its usefulness and is actually a detriment in organizations that still expect employees to be grateful they have a job. These leaders have lost the intrinsic power and leverage they used to have with employees when they were dependent on working for the same organization for life.

Effective leadership behavior ranges on a continuum with two opposing polarities: directive behavior and supportive behavior. Both types of behavior are necessary and need to be used by leaders to achieve their desired outcomes. However, when leaders aren't trained and are unaware of skills they need to use with employees, they overuse their natural style or become self-protective to make things happen. Those who tend to be more Directive naturally, become Autocratic and overuse power to drive performance. Those who are more Supportive, become Permissive, abdicating their power and allowing employees to do what they want regardless of what is required. Both can resort to the opposite of their natural behavior when they are unable to influence employee behavior and they become increasingly self-protective.

Many leaders are opting to lead from the Permissive side of the Adaptive Leadership Continuum, even when it is not natural for them to do so because they don't have the skills to

navigate the gray areas of leadership behavior using the appropriate skills for the person and situation. It's as though our leaders are all burying their heads in the sand, just trying to survive the experience of being a leader.

Autocratic vs. Permissive Leadership

Autocratic leadership is a style where a person at the top of an organizational hierarchy makes all the decisions and takes little input from other leaders and direct reports. Autocratic leaders make choices or decisions for others and tell them what to do. They behave as though adults are like children and aren't capable of or can't be trusted to make their own decisions. They enjoy their position power and ability to control the performance of their people. Autocratic leaders expect direct reports to do what they are told without question.

Conversely, **Permissive leadership** is a style that allows others to be self-directed and do things as they see fit. It is a hands-off style that believes everyone knows their own best way of doing things and inherently want to be left alone to do their own thing. Permissive leaders prefer not to have to correct, direct or otherwise manage their employee's performance. They believe adults are capable and shouldn't need to be told how to behave. They don't use their position power, and try to "coach" rather than direct the performance of their people.

These are the two adaptive styles of leading that people adopt when they have had little or no leadership development training. Using the natural abilities of their personality, they will lead others from one approach or the other. Sometimes leaders

go from Permissive to Autocratic when they are fed up with poor performance and vice versa when they are angry at an employee and don't want to lose control.

Cost of the Adaptive Leadership Persona

The cost of leading from the Leadership Persona to organizations is significant as goals go unmet, tasks incomplete, or budgets and timelines are ignored. Both of the Adaptive Personas lead to organizational dysfunction as they foster dependence on the leader to carry everyone else.

Because they don't invest in developing, coaching or mentoring their employees, Adaptive Leaders can end up with a team of disengaged or frightened employees that can't meet the needs of the business. The dysfunctional behavior of the Adaptive Leader becomes the norm for the culture with employees avoiding conflict, failing to communicate or engage with others, and high performance ultimately blocked by silos and power struggles.



Are you feeling frustrated and powerless as a leader?

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Leading With Authority

While many people strive for leadership roles, few participate in the development required to be an effective leader which leaves them feeling powerless, frustrated, dissatisfied and too often, unhealthy as well.

The shift from “trying” to be a leader, and simply surviving the experience to actually leading with authority involves **consciousness, self-awareness and mastery of specific skills and competencies**. Leaders need to be appropriately schooled, coached and developed for the complexities of leadership. They need the tools, insights and confidence to stop adapting and start leading authentically. Developing leadership authority and potency is a commitment to fully realizing your potential as a leader.

Sign up for our upcoming webinar or watch for our next newsletter in which we lay out a clear step by step framework to develop your leadership authority and potential.

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Do your leaders feel powerless?

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