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Gleanings

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Capability Without Character Doesn't Work

Ever been abused by your boss? Do you feel that your boss is insensitive and uncaring? Is his or her agenda self-glorification with no real loyalty to the company?

If you have a boss like this, you probably are working for what researchers call a psychopath. According to Dictionary.com, the definition of a psychopath is “a person with an antisocial personality disorder, manifested in aggressive, perverted, criminal, or amoral behavior without empathy or remorse.”

A recent article explored the current research on psychopaths in the workplace.* Professor Robert Hare is a leader in this field of study. He has developed a psychopathic checklist that can be used to qualitatively measure the degree to which someone is psychopathic. Following are some of the key symptoms.

- Glibness and superficial charm
- Grandiose sense of self-worth
- Pathological lying
- Conning and manipulation
- Lack of remorse or guilt
- Shallow effect (i.e., a coldness covered up by dramatic emotional displays that are actually playacting)
- Callousness and lack of empathy
- Failure to accept responsibility for one's own actions

Interestingly, research indicated that psychopathic managers and incarcerated criminals tend to display the same psychopathic characteristics. Researchers noted that the difference between the two groups appeared in the level of impulsiveness and physical aggression, which is displayed more often by incarcerated criminals. Researchers described managers with psychopathic tendencies as “successful psychopaths” and criminals as “unsuccessful psychopaths.” This distinction was not intended as an endorsement, but simply as a way of acknowledging that the managers were smart enough not to get thrown into jail.

Whether managers or criminals, psychopaths are self-centered people who view

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other people and organizations simply as tools to accomplish their personal agenda, which is self-glorification.

In reference to corporate psychopaths, the researchers noted the following additional characteristics:

- Psychopaths have to win, and enjoy hurting others in the process.
- Psychopaths have no allegiance to organizations or other people, only to themselves.
- Psychopaths play a short-term parasitic game. They join an organization not to improve it, but to use the organization to accomplish their personal agendas.
- Psychopaths tend to be corporate managers rather than entrepreneurs. Even though entrepreneurs may be narcissistic, they want their companies to win. Psychopaths view organizations as tools to help them win personally.

Know anyone with these characteristics? You are the exception if you don't, because according to researchers, psychopaths are ubiquitous in Corporate America.

How do psychopaths get hired and promoted? Clearly not based on character; they are hired based on perceived capability. If the article is correct, Corporate America, indeed organizations of all types, are filled with psychopaths, which implies that—as a maxim—hiring and performance accountability processes are woefully inadequate.

How can organizations protect themselves from psychopaths? The researchers suggested two key practices.

- Diligently screen new hires.
- Maintain a culture that promotes transparency and trust.

If you don't hire psychopaths, you don't have to deal with them. And if your organization's culture promotes trust and communication, then the organization will tend to self-cleanse as the psychopaths in the organization are identified and held accountable.

Corporate America is particularly susceptible to psychopaths because of the propensity toward individualism in America. A culture of rugged individualism may sound like a virtue, but in reality it encourages self-focus and works against building healthy teams and communities.

Because of this bias toward individualism, America is a breeding ground for psychopaths. Why is this? Researchers believe that only 50 percent of the mind-set of psychopaths is genetic, which means that psychopaths are shaped by culture as much as by family heritage.

By contrast, psychopaths are less prevalent in Asia because of the culture of community that exists. Asians are taught from childhood the value of subordinating personal agendas to the good of the whole. In this regard, Asians practice a more biblical worldview of community and teamwork than Americans.

Psychopaths have capability or they would not be hired, but they lack the requisite character to produce long-term positive results. It requires capability

and character to build great organizations that produce excellent results.

By *character* the researchers are referring to biblical virtues such as honesty, humility, service, and selflessness. Consequently whether they realize it or not, the scholars are confirming the reality that biblical values undergird excellent management practices and facilitate long-term success. Biblical values are rooted in a biblical worldview. In the end, lasting economic blessings are the direct by-products of embracing and walking in a biblical worldview as individuals and as organizations.

* Alan Deutschman, "Is Your Boss a Psychopath?" *FastCompany*, issue 96, page 44, July 2005.

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