

Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership

(McIntosh & Rima)

Summary

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Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership

Gary L. McIntosh & Samuel D. Rima

Every leader suffers from some degree of personal dysfunction. The goals of the book are to:

- 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 in your success before you get blindsided by it

Understanding Our Dark Side

We live in a culture obsessed with both **having** and **success**. Reducing the potential for leadership failures begins by challenging the current paradigm of measuring success in terms of having as opposed to being (**Mat 23:11-12** and **Php 3:7-10**).

Blinded by the Dark Side

The dark side is the inner urges, compulsions, and dysfunctions of our personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown to us until we experience an emotional explosion. A paradox that all leaders face is that the aspects of life that push us in a positive way toward success can also exert a negative pull, destroying our effectiveness. Leaders often suffer significant failures when they do not understand and control their dark side.

Danger on the Dark Side

- Leaders have the power to cast either shadow or light by exercising their leadership.
- Your dark side can cause you to make unwise, risky, or bizarre decisions that can harm you or those you lead or serve.

Shedding Divine Light on the Dark Side

Our fallen human tendencies are raw material for the dark side.

- **Pride:** Scripture associates pride with failure and stumbling.
 - ▶ **Pro 11:2**
 - ▶ **Pro 16:18-19**
 - ▶ **Pro 16:5**
 - ▶ **Pro 29:23**
 - ▶ **Eze 28:17**
- **Selfishness:** Scripture shows that selfishness ends in your own disaster.
 - ▶ **Rom 2:5-8**
 - ▶ **Jas 3:14-16**
 - ▶ **Php 2:3-4**

- **Self-Deception** and Wrong Motives: We have an inherent ability to deceive ourselves.

- ▶ **Pro 16:2**
- ▶ **Jer 17:9**
- ▶ **1Cor 4:3-4**
- ▶ **Mark 7:21-22**

How the Dark Side Develops

Inside every leader is the raw material necessary for the manufacture of the dark side. No one is immune. Symptoms that the dark side is under development include:

- A vague sense of ambition
- A profound need for approval
- An irrational fear that your work is inadequate
- A need to feel in absolute control of every circumstance and event
- A tendency toward perfectionism and compulsive behaviors

When we are unable to meet our essential needs (physiological, safety, love, esteem, self actualization), we begin a quest to meet those needs. If we aren't sure how to meet those needs or view our failed attempts to meet those needs as a sign of weakness or fault, our dark side begins to develop. The following table shows the general pattern.

Stage	Element	Explanation
1	Needs	Maslow's pyramid
2	Traumatic Experiences	Something causes a missing block in the need pyramid.
3	Existential Debt	Feeling that our unmet need is our fault.
4	Dark Side Development	We try to pay the existential debt with unhealthy behaviors.

The dark side may drive us to succeed in some area of our lives; however, it also drives us to make unwise, impulsive, or immoral choices.

Discovering Our Dark Side

Compulsive Leader

The compulsive leader pursues perfection to an extreme. Symptoms include:

- Highly regimented
- Conscious of status
- Meticulous about personal appearance
- Explodes in anger when irritated
- Obsessive about small errors

Narcissistic Leader

The narcissistic leader uses everyone and every thing to enhance their self image. Symptoms include:

- Exaggerated sense of self-importance
- Grandiose fantasies
- Jealous of success of others
- Reacts poorly to criticism (anger, anxiety, depression)
- Worries about how the organization's success reflects on them

Paranoid Leader

The paranoid leader is desperately afraid of anyone and anything. Symptoms include:

- Suspicious, guarded, and hostile in relationships
- Deeply insecure in own abilities
- Intensely jealous of others
- Unable to take even light-hearted kidding
- Uses people to spy on others

Codependent Leader

The codependent leader is a peacemaker who covers up problems rather than facing them. Symptoms include:

- Fails to confront inappropriate behaviors
- Unable to give full honest expression of frustration
- Worries about hurting people's feelings
- Unable to disappoint anyone by saying "no"
- Feels guilty or unworthy without knowing why

Passive-Aggressive Leader

The passive aggressive leader finds it difficult to set goals and implement plans. Symptoms include:

- Resents standards and systems for measuring performance
- Procrastinates or avoids tasks
- Pessimistic outlook, complains frequently
- Periodic outbursts of anger and sulking
- Resists others' ideas

Which of These is Most Like You?

Many leaders are a combination of two or more of these types. Generally one or two of the types is most prevalent for a leader.

Redeeming Our Dark Side

Overcoming the Dark Side

All human beings have their weaknesses, but not all of us realize them, come to grips with them, or offset their negative impact. As a group whose primary endeavor is interacting with other people, leaders must accomplish the paradoxical task of managing their darker sides.
-Abraham Lincoln

Those who want to serve God's purposes, rather than simply satisfy their own needs, must redeem their dark sides. We must give our unhealthy motivations and fears to God. We must realize that no amount of success or achievement can ever fill our unmet needs.

- Compulsive leaders must realize that God is in control.
- Narcissistic leaders must learn that only God can satisfy.
- Paranoid leaders must learn to trust God.
- Codependent leaders must accept that pleasing God is more important than trying to please everyone else.
- Passive-aggressive leaders must learn that only a God-inspired vision and plan will motivate people.

Walking out from under the dark side of our personality is a lifetime process which calls for discipline and continual vigilance. It is like spiritual composting, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform the less desirable aspects of our personality and reintegrate them into our lives [[2Cor 12:9-10](#)].

Step 1: Acknowledge Your Dark Side

Begin by admitting that you have a dark side and think about how it has taken shape over the years.

Step 2: Examine the Past

You can diminish the influence of unpleasant childhood circumstances by **reflecting** on them and how they have shaped your behavior. Anything that stands out in your memory is worth thinking through. Some examples are rejection by family members or peers, abuse or neglect, parent's

divorce, death of close family member or friend, cruel statements from others, poverty or humble family circumstances, and bad choices you made.

For each event, also recall the feelings that the event generated and how those feelings drive your behavior today.

It does not help to focus on blaming others. To free yourself, you will need to forgive others for the way they treated you and you'll need to forgive yourself for the mistakes you made.

Step 3: Resist the Poison of Expectations

Unrealistic or selfishly motivated expectations are highly destructive. The weight of expectations can cause anyone to snap under the heavy load. More than anything else, a proper understanding and application of the grace of God can liberate you from the poison of unrealistic expectations.

- [Mat 11:28-30](#)
- [John 8:36](#)
- [Gal 5:1](#)
- [Rom 8:2](#)

As long as we do not allow our freedom to violate clear biblical prohibitions or cause harm to an immature believer, we are free to enjoy what God has provided [[Rom 14:3-4](#)].

Step 4: Practice Progressive Self-Knowledge

Scripture Reading: The best way to gain accurate self-knowledge is to faithfully read God's Word. It will force you to face your dark side [[Jas 1:22-25](#)].

Personal Retreats: Just as Jesus took time to retreat to a quiet place, so should you. It is a time to speak to God about your spiritual condition and where He wants you to make changes in how you use your time and where you focus your thoughts.

Devotional Reading: Exploring the writings of Christian leaders who worked through struggles can help you address your own struggles.

Journaling; It may help to pour out your heart to God in writing. Consider telling Him what in your life is in need of spiritual composting.

Personal Accountability Group: Recruit a few trusted friends who have your best interests at heart. Make an agreement on their role. For instance, you could discuss your progress on personal goals at each meeting. Their role would be to ask questions to help you see whether you are staying true to your values and what you have agreed to do. You could ask them to confront you in the meeting if they have recently seen you do anything that is not consistent with your values or goals. You could ask them to pray for your faithfulness to God.

Step 5: Understand Your Identity in Christ

Candid personal reflection will reveal that, apart from Christ, we are each bottomless pits of need and depravity. Only with Christ is there hope for us.

- **2Cor 5:17**
- **1Cor 15:22**
- **Rom 8:16-17**

<i>Position (Standing)</i>	<i>Condition (State)</i>
In heaven	On earth
Spiritual	Physical
Life	Death
New birth	First birth
New man, nature	Old man, nature
Justified	Condemned
Forgiven	Guilty
In Christ	In Adam

Overcoming your dark side is not an event. It is a lifelong process.