

Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership

Authors Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima in their book *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures* make the following sad and inescapable assessment: *When we refuse to process in healthy ways feelings of insecurity, unhealthy codependence issues, feelings of personal shame, deeply sublimated anger or fear, or some combination of these or other issues, they will wreak havoc in our lives and leadership and eventually endanger ourselves and others.* From there, the authors call out five of the most common leadership dark side types: Compulsive, Narcissistic, Paranoid, Co-Dependent, and Passive-Aggressive.

In a day and age of never-ending leadership failure, every leader needs to read and understand where they are most prone to live out of their dark side, bringing into the light so that the Holy Spirit can do His work of transformation. Take a look at these **Book Notes** for guidance that just may save you from being one more crash-and-burn statistic.

Chuck Olson
Founder | Lead With Your Life

Title: *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*

Author: Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima

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Book Description:

The Christian world has been rocked by the number of prominent leaders, in both church and parachurch organizations, who have been compromised by moral, ethical, and theological failures. This pace-setting volume addresses this alarming problem and offers Christian leaders valuable guidance in dealing with the inherent risks of their work.

Using biblical and current examples, the authors describe the characteristics of five types of leaders and the problems that are most likely to develop if their particular dysfunctions develop unrestrained. McIntosh and Rima offer a series of steps for leaders to consider so they can take control of their dark side and learn to harness its creative powers.

Book Quotes:

1. Every leader suffers from some degree of personal dysfunction varying from extremely mild to extremely acute.
2. Personal dysfunction, in one form or another, can often serve as the driving force behind an individual's desire to achieve success as a leader.
3. Many leaders are not aware of the dark side of their personalities and the personal dysfunctions that drive them.
4. The personal characteristics that drive

individuals to succeed and lead often have a shadow side that can cripple them once they become leaders and very often causes significant failure. This dynamic is what has been labeled in this book the “paradox of personal dysfunction in leadership.” LOCATION: 157

Learning about their own dark side and the dysfunctions that have created it can enable leaders to address those areas and prevent, or at least mitigate, the potential negative effects to their exercise of leadership. Scripture has much to say about the dark side of human personality and the motivations that drive us to achieve, which can be helpful to leaders in their efforts to understand themselves and overcome those areas of their personalities that might threaten their effectiveness as leaders. LOCATION: 164

At the core of the problem is personal ambition and the insidious desire to have or possess something that is not able to be possessed—namely, success. We live in a culture obsessed with both having and success. And this desire has infiltrated the ranks of Christian leaders as it has every other strata of American culture. The problem arises from the fact that success is not something one can have or possess. True success is a state of being not having. LOCATION: 219

Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3–4 NRSV). On another occasion Jesus told his disciples, “The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matt. 23:11–12 NRSV). Jesus clearly saw kingdom success in terms of being, not in terms of having or even doing. Kingdom success is entirely counterintuitive and countercultural to those of us living in a consumer-oriented culture, which is hell-bent on possessing more and more stuff in an effort to be somebody. LOCATION: 257

The dark side, though sounding quite sinister, is actually a natural result of human development. It 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, as just described in Sam’s life, or some other significant problem that causes us to search for a reason why. LOCATION: 313

In almost every case the factors that eventually undermine us are shadows of the ones that contribute to our success. LOCATION: 318

A person who must always have the answer usually does not listen very well. I fell into the trap of always giving answers to my wife and children when all they wanted was for me to listen. The talents and abilities that made me successful in work had a corresponding dark side that made me less effective at home. LOCATION: 395

- The “dark side” refers to our inner urges, compulsions, motivations, and dysfunctions that drive us toward success or undermine our accomplishments.
- Our dark side develops slowly over a lifetime of experiences and is often revealed in moments of frustration or anger.
- The dark side is a normal development of life and can be an agent for both good and bad in our lives.

LOCATION: 405

In his powerful and insightful book *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer writes that we as leaders have the power to cast either shadow or light by the exercise of our leadership. Palmer further contends that we as leaders create the ethos in which others must live: one of light in which people flourish and grow, or one as shadowy as hell that will bring pain and death. LOCATION: 416

In fact, leaders that we perceive to be exceptionally confident and in command are often compensating for a deeply rooted sense of inferiority and insecurity. LOCATION: 481

When we refuse to process in healthy ways feelings of insecurity, unhealthy codependence issues, feelings of personal shame, deeply sublimated anger or fear, or some combination of these or other issues, they will wreak havoc in our lives and leadership and eventually endanger ourselves and others. LOCATION: 486

- Leaders have the power to cast either shadow or light by the exercise of their leadership, thus creating the ethos in which others must live.
- Leaders' dark sides can cause them to make unwise, risky, and even bizarre decisions that have the potential to harm themselves and those they lead or serve.
- When leaders refuse to take the inward journey to explore and resolve their dark side issues, the result will often be some form of leadership failure. LOCATION: 593

People who ignore or refuse to acknowledge their dark side frequently encounter major failures in their leadership responsibilities. Leaders who face their dark side and redeem it accomplish the most over the long run. LOCATION: 695

Clearly God intended humans to be more than just managers. There is an implied sense that they were responsible to do the right things with the earth and all that was on and in it, the divine resource they had been given. Adam and Eve were responsible to see that life on earth was conducted as God would want it conducted had he been physically in charge himself. That is the role of leadership: to do the right things, not merely to do things right. LOCATION: 717

Simply put, the first human leadership failure was the result of unrestrained pride and selfishness with a healthy dose of self-deception. With several variations and minor additions, these provide the raw material for our dark side. LOCATION: 730

There are many scriptural admonitions that warn us of our fallen human tendencies toward pride, selfishness, self-deception, and wrong motives. LOCATION: 733

Pride in Scripture is almost exclusively linked with failure and stumbling. LOCATION: 738

If there is a close second to pride when it comes to our dark side, it is our all-consuming selfishness. LOCATION: 752

Leaders who are aware of their dark side and are willing to deal openly and honestly with it before God are empowered for greater effectiveness. LOCATION: 841

Though we may be only subconsciously aware of our dark side, there are signals that point to it. Such signals are observable in a drive to succeed, desire to be accepted, irrational fear, need to be in control, perfectionism, or various compulsions. LOCATION: 1036

The negative aspect of the dark side rises to the surface when we use it selfishly to only fulfill our own needs and wants. LOCATION: 1256

1. THE COMPULSIVE LEADER

Compulsive in a leadership context describes the need to maintain absolute order. LOCATION: 1300

Compulsive leaders generally develop very rigid, highly systematized daily routines that they must follow meticulously. These can involve exercise, devotions, schedule, and family routines and extend into the leadership of organizations. LOCATION: 1303

Some signs of a compulsive leader include the following: Compulsive leaders are status conscious, looking for reassurance and approval from those in authority. They try to control activities and keep order and usually are

workaholics. At times they are excessively moralistic, conscientious, and judgmental. LOCATION: 1337

2. THE NARCISSISTIC LEADER

For the narcissistic leader, such as Solomon, the world revolves on the axis of self, and all other people and issues closely orbit them as they get caught in the strong gravitational pull of the narcissist's self-absorption. As seen in the life of Solomon, narcissistic leaders "present various combinations of intense ambitiousness, grandiose fantasies, feelings of inferiority and overdependence on external admiration and acclaim." At the same time the self-absorbed leader is chronically uncertain of himself and experiences dissatisfaction with his accomplishments, which he tries to overcome by exploiting others in ways that will help elevate his self-image. LOCATION: 1408

Some signs of a narcissistic leader include the following: Narcissistic leaders are driven to succeed by a need for admiration and acclaim. They may have an overinflated sense of importance as well as great ambitions and grandiose fantasies. At the heart of narcissistic leaders are self-absorption and uncertainty due to deep feelings of inferiority. In addition, they may not enjoy their success and may be dissatisfied with their lives. LOCATION: 1444

3. THE PARANOID LEADER

Another struggle for paranoid spiritual leaders is difficulty in developing and maintaining close relationships with members of their church or organization. Close relationships are difficult because they require a measure of self-disclosure and transparency that they worry could be used against them at some point to undermine their leadership. LOCATION: 1538

Some signs of a paranoid leader include the following: Paranoid leaders are suspicious, hostile, fearful, and jealous. Afraid that someone will undermine their leadership, they are hypersensitive to the actions of others, attach subjective meaning to motives, and create rigid structures for control. LOCATION: 1545

4. THE CO-DEPENDENT LEADER

In essence the problem of codependency involves the ways that an individual copes with the behavior and expectations of those around him or her. LOCATION: 1684

On one hand it is not difficult to see why codependents end up in positions of spiritual leadership. It is the ultimate venue for taking care of others. Unfortunately the person with severe codependency will experience great frustration in ministry. There are few professions where it is more difficult to maintain peace and please everyone than in ministry. Inevitably, the behavior of the spiritual leader that pleases some will alienate others. LOCATION: 1687

5. THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE LEADER

Because passive-aggressive people often are impulsive, their acquaintances and colleagues often feel edgy as they wait for the next outburst. These leaders make people uncomfortable and often leave them feeling confused. Those who work with a passive-aggressive person often ask, "What did he mean by that outburst?" or "Where did that come from?" when the passive-aggressive launches into a tirade. Another tendency of these people is to exhibit impatience, irritability, and fidgeting when things are not going their way or when they become bored with the proceedings. LOCATION: 1754

It is through this process of learning about ourselves and progressively dealing with our dark side that we avoid its destructive paradox and allow God to exercise more control over our leadership. LOCATION: 1927

Spiritual composting is about allowing the Holy Spirit to transform the less desirable aspects of our personality and then reintegrating them into our life, rather than denying them and trying to excise them from our life.

LOCATION: 2008

As Christians we believe that it is our fallen human nature that is the primary culprit when it comes to the creation of our dark side and our ability to deny its existence. Therefore, our dark side needs not only to be acknowledged, it ultimately must be redeemed and restored. We must acknowledge our sinfulness and seek the forgiveness and redemption that can be found only through Jesus Christ. As we deal with this primal cause of the human dark side, the Holy Spirit of God will empower and direct us to overcome our dark side. However, even after taking these steps, we must be aware that we will be tempted to deny the periodic reemergence of our dark side. This is a battle we must constantly be prepared to fight. LOCATION: 2042

Denial is a deadly disease from which every serious leader should be inoculated. LOCATION: 2071

The first step toward overcoming your dark side is to admit that it exists and understand the shape it has taken in your life. LOCATION: 2091

Once we can admit that we do have a dark side that to some extent affects our exercise of leadership, we can begin in earnest to explore it. It is essential that such exploration begin with periods of serious and often painful reflection about our past. It is also vital that we avail ourselves of the probing, revealing ministry of the Holy Spirit, who can lead us into all truth, truth we would just as soon keep covered. LOCATION: 2106

The point is that our past unavoidably impacts our present. LOCATION: 2111

The purpose for examining the past is not for the assignment of blame, but for self-understanding. Though our reflections may lead us at some point to speak with people who played crucial roles in our development, casting blame is an absolutely fruitless and ultimately self-destructive practice. LOCATION: 2115

So what past events do we look for? The events are many and often very innocent in nature. However, if they stand out in our memory, they are doubtless worthy of a closer examination. Events such as the divorce or death of our parents require thought. Rejections by peers or teenage love interests should be explored. The condition of our complexion during adolescence should not be ignored. Cruel statements by friends, the exact words of which we still painfully remember, must be probed. Academic failures, serious errors in judgment, humble family circumstances, and many other experiences all provide the fodder for our dark side and must be reflected on in an effort to understand how they may still be affecting us today as adults. LOCATION: 2126

Dealing with your past in an effort to gain freedom from the power of your dark side almost certainly will involve extending forgiveness in some form. LOCATION: 2172

One of the most troubling realities about spiritual leaders today is the increasing number of them who do not consistently devote time to personal spiritual disciplines. Too many leaders today do not regularly expose themselves to the scrutinizing probe of the Holy Spirit by looking into Scripture. LOCATION: 2474

If there is one thing leaders need as they pursue self-knowledge and understanding, it is the ability to clarify the fears, motives, insecurities, and other emotions that lurk deep beneath the surface of their public leadership persona. Keeping a journal forces us to be honest with ourselves. It is possibly the only place where we can truly be ourselves, warts and all. In our journal we can finally explore our inner rumblings and give definition and shape to them. The safe confines of our journal can help us admit to feelings of jealousy, selfishness, and pride. Within these therapeutic pages we can feel free to identify those inner urges and compulsions that drive us. The simple act of placing them on paper, in black and white, reduces their power over us to some degree. LOCATION: 2509

Ultimately all of the previous four steps will leave us feeling frustrated and empty if we do not understand and accept our true identity in Jesus Christ. We must come to the point where we recognize that our value is not dependent on our performance, position, titles, achievements, or the power that we wield. Rather, our worth exists independently of anything we have ever done or will do in the future. LOCATION: 2682

Overcoming our dark side is not an event, it is a lifelong process that every leader must be continually working through. As we gain a progressively deeper understanding of our dark side and consistently practice the steps necessary to redeem it, we can protect ourselves and those we love from the painful, humiliating, and often devastating failures produced by the dark side.

LOCATION: 2740

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle "location" is provided after each entry.