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Ego vs. EQ: How Top Leaders Beat 8 Ego Traps With Emotional Intelligence

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associated—leaders who understanding following and followers who know how to exercise leadership.

This book embraces and shares many good ideas and reflections regarding leadership and its future. The author suggests that maybe one of the solutions is to be found in an understanding and application of the servant leadership model (p. 179). Leaders must look to the collective interest. Another of her recommendations relates to our investment in leadership training. Instead of learning and teaching how to lead, maybe leadership education should have “the purpose of learning about leadership” (p. 179).

I recommend *The End of Leadership* for every person who wants to contextualize the meaning of leadership today. The book will open readers’ minds to an understanding that the leadership process has in a sense reversed in our time, which means that followers are playing a more significant role in leadership. Reading this book will help readers understand how to proceed in this new context of leadership.

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EGO VS. EQ: HOW TOP LEADERS BEAT 8 EGO TRAPS WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

By Jen Shirkani
Brookline, MA: Bibliomotion (2013)
Hard Cover, 185 pages

Reviewed by ROBERT L. OVERSTREET

Much has been written on the topic of emotional quotient (EQ) and how crucial the development of EQ is for

leaders. Other researchers have explored how the ego affects the leader and can serve as either a benefit or detriment. Shirkani expands both avenues of thinking by exploring how EQ and ego balance each other and by explaining how emotional intelligence can be used as a tool to avoid career derailment that can result from an uncontrolled ego. According to Shirkani, the leadership disappointment and failure rate is high, with two out of five CEOs failing to succeed in their first year and a half on the job. Shirkani explains the most common reasons for ineffectiveness in leadership by examining ego and providing tools and strategies that can help leaders raise their EQ, prevent leadership breaches, and thus avoid a downward spiral of consequences.

Shirkani fulfills her stated purpose of exploring the relationship between ego and EQ by providing many relevant examples that illuminate this relationship. Shirkani’s well-written book offers many reader-friendly strategies that include bullet-point lists or key points, tables such as “You Know You’ve Fallen Into Ego Trap 7 If:” (p. 118), and short summaries at the end of each chapter, which she calls “In a Nutshell.” Also at the end of each chapter, Shirkani provides an implementation plan for “Applying the Three Rs” (Recognize, Read, and Respond), facilitating readers’ self-evaluation and application.

Drawing on real-life narratives from Shirkani’s two decades of coaching, *Ego vs. EQ* includes stories and case studies of leadership successes and failures through the lens of ego and emotional quotient. Shirkani defines ego as that part of a person that is concerned with the self to the exclusion of others. While EQ (Emotional Quotient) is not specifically defined by Shirkani, she does quote

contributing authors' definitions, such as Daniel Goleman (2006) and Peter Salovey and John Mayer (2004), thus assuming their definitions for the purpose of this book. Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. EQ is often used interchangeably with EI, as the two terms are defined in the same way. While her title may lead some to believe that she is presenting an argument for how either ego or EQ is more important for a leader to have, Shirvani instead identifies eight ego traps that leaders can fall into on their leadership journey, and explains how a focus on EQ can help them avoid those ego traps.

The first ego trap a leader can succumb to is to ignore feedback he or she does not like, which robs the leader of a precious opportunity to improve personal performance and that of one's team. Ego Trap Two is the belief that one's technical skills trump leadership skills. In place of this, letting go of the need to be the expert and investing energy in developing the team's expertise is imperative. Ego Trap Three, surrounding yourself with more of you, is a mistake that is common among leaders. The key here is to avoid surrounding oneself with individuals who see matters similarly and instead to seek out those who see from a different perspective. Not letting go of control is the fourth ego trap. Leaders must establish good processes and allow team members freedom to do excellent work, facilitating this work with honest and open two-way communication.

The final four ego traps are equally compelling. Ego Trap Five involves being blind to one's downstream

impact, which can be exacerbated by advisors who refuse to give accurate feedback and silently defer to the leader rather than making waves. Ego Trap Six is underestimating how much others are observing leadership. The fact of the matter is that everyone watches what the leader does. The behavior of the leader within the organization, either good or bad, is the primary example by which everyone else acts. Most likely, people will follow the leader's behaviors, demeanor, and even character. The seventh ego trap involves losing track of the experience of those on the front lines, which can lead to poor leadership decisions. Understanding how front-line individuals think and feel is thus essential. Finally, the eighth ego trap is ego relapse, or returning to known and comfortable patterns of behavior which may be negative; this can result in a leader shifting back from high EQ to high ego behavior.

Shirvani points out that the greatest application of her book is for leaders who are willing to free themselves of their personal egos and stop hiding behind the titles they hold. According to Shirvani, over one third of all CEOs fail within their first 18 months on the job because highly confident leaders create barriers to valuable information that is completely seen and viewed by other stakeholders. She emphasizes that all leaders, from young rookie leaders to confident veterans, must eliminate these barriers. Shirvani reminds her readers that when leaders fall into traps such as these, they risk not only the demise of their own careers but also the destruction of their organizations. Leaders or managers with supervisory responsibilities as well as those who have recently embarked upon a career in business or who are now preparing for one would benefit greatly from a thoughtful reading of this book.

Caveats to this book include the fact that those who would benefit the most from what Shirvani writes are also the least likely to be aware of or acknowledge their need to manage their egos. Additionally, in my opinion, the title of the book is somewhat deceptive because it suggests a confrontational relationship between ego and EQ when, in fact, those with healthy egos are most likely to have a well-developed EQ. Another potential drawback of this book is one that is true for many: the value of the guidance that Shirvani provides will be determined almost entirely by how effectively each reader applies what he or she learns.

In conclusion, Shirvani points out that there will be many instances in the process of leadership where the leader simply cannot control the outcome or the end product. What a leader can control are interactions with one's team. A leader can choose to lead from an unconscious place driven by ego or to lead intentionally with EQ at the forefront. Being aware of the areas where ego may tend to result in poor leadership can allow a leader to be authentic and to practice emotionally intelligent leadership. Shirvani urges readers to remember that "it's not about changing who you are, but instead opening your eyes to some of your blind spots and being courageous enough to make a few small but incredibly powerful changes" (p. 158). Since Shirvani's work opens the door for leaders to identify their own ego traps and provides simple actions to remedy those traps, I would recommend this book to leaders who want to avoid the traps that ego can cause and to lead in a way that capitalizes on EQ. Many of the principles embraced in this book mirror those that a Christian leader would want to use as he or she seeks to live by the Golden Rule.

References

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LEADERSHIP AND THE ART OF STRUGGLE: HOW GREAT LEADERS GROW THROUGH CHALLENGE AND ADVERSITY

by Steven Snyder
San Francisco, CA: Barrett-Koehler
(2013)
Paperback, 244 pages

Reviewed by IOSIF SALAJAN

In *Leadership and the Art of Struggle*, Steven Snyder combines personal experience and academic research with 151 real-life stories of struggling leaders, well-known or less famous, in the desire to illustrate that struggle is crucial to effective leadership. In Snyder's view, struggle often "unlocks the potential for the greatest growth" (p. 3), a lesson that he has learned from 30 years of leadership experience. This abundance of examples of leaders who were able to overcome their own difficulties will have a beneficial impact on the reader. In recounting these stories, Snyder insightfully addresses the psychological background of the issues and shows the practical way out of the deadlocks.

Snyder points out "three fundamental conditions that determine the nature of the struggle and serve as its defining elements: change, tensions, and being out of balance" (p. 22). Behind every struggle, there is a change that inevitably creates ten-