

On Archetypes of Leadership, Complexes and Growing up as a Leader

Introduction

I have come to view personal development as essential for satisfaction and success in a professional context.

For about ten years I have worked with executive development from a Jungian perspective, as a psychoanalyst. The work has been individual, and taken place in long-term one-to-one sessions, as well as in group sessions. The group work has taken place in the form of 3-4 days long retreats hosted in different locations world wide, once or twice per year, over a period of four to six years. Today I will talk about the work in one-to-one sessions.

My clients are experienced business leaders, mostly 38 years and older. They know their strengths and weaknesses, have completed a number of personality assessments and been profiled along the usual metrics, such as MBTI. Most often they have also followed some leadership training and are familiar with receiving feedback.

It is at this time that the next step in transformation means encountering the more ingrained patterns in the psyche. Yet, clients who have already invested considerably in work and professional development may feel fatigued by the outlook of yet more, heavy demands for personal development.

To meet the needs of those clients I've come to consider the perspective of a journey most helpful, because it helps in creating understanding and tolerance for the benefit of going the extra mile.

Journey

Dante Alighieri wrote the *Divine Comedy* in 1308-1321. It is considered one of the greatest works of world literature. It has many qualities, literary, poetic, and what concerns us here today, is its allegorical description of the soul's journey towards freedom from attachments of the ego, and from the dualities of good – bad; right- wrong and so on.

How can detachment from the ego be helpful for us in an increasingly competitive business environment? I will exemplify how loosening the complexes of the ego – because these are the aspects of the ego that keeps you attached - can liberate you from the hold of certain leadership archetypes and introduce you to another, with its specific view on power and effectiveness.

Purgatory

The journey through Purgatory serves as a metaphor for important milestones for this process. It is an autobiographical journey. Dante was himself a leader of his time and was in midlife when he entered upon his journey. He was accompanied by a guide, Virgil, who coached him up the mountain. The mountain is made up of seven terraces, on which fundamental psychological patterns are encountered and gradually resolved. These are for

example, pride, envy and anger – feelings that when active we don't really have, but they have us – what we call complexes today.

Likewise, in my practice I encounter clients who, in midlife, seek a guide to take them to the next level, making use of the hurdles in their own biography to understand themselves and the people they work with better and to function effectively in their leadership.

Complexes

Complexes are "feeling-toned ideas" that over the years accumulate around certain archetypes, for instance "mother". When complexes are constellated, they are invariably accompanied by affect. They are always relatively autonomous. Complexes behave like independent beings and one reacts according to what the complex dictates.

Just as Dante states that the sins – I mentioned pride, envy and anger – are not negative as such, Jung stressed that complexes in themselves are not negative; only their effects often are. In *Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype* Jung says, "A complex can be really overcome only if it is lived out to the full. In other words, if we are to develop further we have to draw to us and drink down to the very dregs what, because of our complexes, we have held at a distance."(CW 9i, par. 184)

The mother is the model by which we interact, because it is the earliest experience of relationship with another. The pattern of this interaction stays with us. It determines where someone is in the interaction with some one else.

The mother archetype is both life giving and life taking. Mothers fail by ways of giving too much as well as too little attention. In both cases the baby cannot feel their uniqueness. This points to the ambivalence in relationships: There is good and bad in one person. The development we are required to do, is to find containment for good and bad. To endure that love, hate and rejection are all in the same object and that one has these feelings also towards oneself.

A person with too much pride, a narcissistically wounded person, cannot do this. Such a person has made a split between what they consider good and bad, and is trying to stay only in the positive self-image and use other people to verify this. It is a way of using the other to evacuate the negative within and project it into the other. It is very unproductive because it does not lead to the desired feeling of being only good, but haunts a person and creates a state of permanent competition.

Transference

I now turn to what this means for leadership development, and especially for the development that can occur in the transference and counter transference in the individual work.

However, with pride it is critical to distinguish between outer behavior and inner feelings, because they are not congruent. A woman with pride at her core seeks nourishment by rejecting close contact with people, which gives her a feeling of independence. This

poses a hurdle for effective counter transference. This is the paradox, though, that can lead to real compassion.

A client can come to the sessions and constantly look for confirmation that she does things well. She seems to need to puff herself up into the positive position, whilst constantly feeling inferior, but after some time the client may begin to question this dynamic, as was the case in the following.

She said, “I am always a little bit anxious and I have my anxiety to thank for a lot – it has driven me to great achievements – but now I feel it starts to empty me of energy, and I know I cannot go on in the same way as before. I want to be more relaxed in life, but then again that feels like a risk, and as soon as I feel that, it swings back again and I am on the ball again. It is like constantly balancing on a ball, while knowing that you actually don’t know how to balance. So you know you will fall, it is just a matter of time.”

Both she and I “knew” that the only true response to her state would be one in which I would be holding her, that is, creating space for her to feel safe, stable, grounded, and “together” in herself *with* me. But, given that her need for this was so sensitive and paired with such a feeling of disgust, neither of us could really move into such mental holding, let alone express the need for it verbally. Yet, we practiced it, and she drank down the dregs.

But for any further development to come out of this, I then have to hold the fact that there are also negative things, such as failure, in her life. I have to introduce the fact of life and relationships that there is rejection, that things are sometimes “less”, bad even, and that these qualities are in her too as a fact of reality. I need to hold the position, that there are moments when one is imperfect.

If all goes well, she will then start to see me as the enemy. And start competing with me. With this client, competition started to have a form and life of its own, almost like a third person in the room. It grew, and I felt uncomfortable, depressed, and hopeless, and I realized that this must be how she felt sometimes. In the meantime her glow intensified, and it was as if she grew physically in the chair across from me. It was as if the competition was about who was going to have to retain the depressed feeling. She was determined not to. But, being an unusually brave, intelligent, and curious woman, in this setting she permitted herself to explore the opposing poles created by the competition. It was fruitful because she used me to “discover” and experience that depressed, unloved side within herself. She acknowledged that it was time to take responsibility for it. Doing so, she grew more relaxed and less a prey to competition. This left a place for compassion in her leadership, which she experienced as more restful.

Result

Pride is not uncommon among leaders, in fact, we have become so used to it that to a certain extent we also identify leadership through these qualities: independence, aggression, attraction, the “lone rider” who appears socially appropriate yet unavailable.

Those leaders have been feared, followed, and admired for it, to the point that pride has in fact become an indication of how a real leader can be recognized.

The result of overcoming the grip of complexes, such as pride, is that of resilience against one-sided tunnel vision. Most of all, as we have seen, it empowers you to hold ambivalence – to stand the ‘not knowing’ or the not receiving immediate confirmation that one is doing the right thing and that we are valuable to others. This enables you to suspend reacting to immediate external demands, however catastrophic these may seem. This, I consider to be an essential leadership quality at this point on time, when financial markets are volatile and easily jeopardized by emotions and feeling based decision making.

The archetype for this kind of leadership entails qualities of humility, compassion and tolerance for ambiguity and complexity.

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