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EGO-WHAT MAKES EGO OUR GREATEST ASSET**COL. (RETD.) DR. R.M. NAIDU****PROFESSOR****SIVA SIVANI INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT****SECUNDERABAD****ABSTRACT**

Ego is neither an entity nor a process. It is only a notion of I-ness which exists in the mind. The process of reducing the ego is for the mind and not for the ego itself, although we talk about the ego as separate. It never exists without the mind. If a person is senseless, the person doesn't know about his or her state. I-ness is dormant. It's not our choice to have the ego or not. We are born with it. It is the nature of the mind to experience its individuality. All our desires, attachment, experiences in the world are due to the ego based in the mind. When all worldly experiences appear as pain, then the ego-based mind seeks for liberation. When we say liberation, we mean the experience within us, the ego of individuality, starts seeking for its own liberation from all the memories of past experiences.

KEYWORDS

Ego, senses.

INTRODUCTION

Ego is the invisible line item on every company's profit and loss statement. It is the unseen-but not unfelt force that ultimately decides whether a team is held back by performance that's 'good enough' or breaks through that barrier to reach great. But despite the negative reputation of ego, it is not purely a loss. On the profit side, ego sparks the drive to invent and achieve the nerve to try something new and the tenacity to conquer adversities that inevitably come. Surprising as it may sound, many people do not have enough ego and that leads to insecurity and apathy that paralyze teams and leaders. If we manage ego wisely, we get the upside it delivers followed by strong returns. But when that intense, persistent force inside manages us, we suffer real losses. At a macro level, business performance suffers when ego negatively impacts the way we produce. Over one third of all failed business decisions are driven by ego. Research has revealed that nearly two third of executives never explore alternatives once they make up their mind and eighty one percent of managers push their decisions through by persuasion or edict and not by the value of their idea.

The word ego comes from Latin, where it means 'I, Myself'. What people usually mean when they talk about 'ego' is that someone else is so me-myself and I absorbed, that the person can't see anything else. To get a clear understanding of the way ego works, picture the way our bodies work. To keep our body health, our immune system creates molecules called free radicals that fight viruses and bacteria. However, when environmental factors such pollution and pesticides cause free radical production to become excessive, the molecules attack not only viruses and bacteria but good cells and vital tissue as well, causing illness, premature ageing, cancer and other diseases. Similarly, ego is a free radical. Ego's power is pervasive and relentless but never neutral in how it affects our performance. When the intense power of ego is not managed effectively, it damages our strengths and turns them into weakness. Through ego's overconfidence, over ambition, insecurity or I-centered agenda, our talents take on a slightly different appearance but have a significantly different impact. For example assertive becomes pushy, flexible-pushover, decisive-hasty, dedicated-stubborn, loyal-blind, independent-detached etc. Most of us don't lose our lives when we momentarily lose control of ego-but we lose a lot of trust, respect, relationships, influence, talent, careers, clients and market share. Each of us has occasionally perhaps unknowingly let ego weaken our talents despite our qualifications, expertise, charisma, track record and remarkable ability. When ego works against us there are early warning sign that indicate we are losing value.

EARLY WARNING SIGN I-BEING COMPARITIVE

Being too competitive makes us less competitive. By fixating on someone else, we lose unrecoverable time that could be devoted to becoming uniquely great; we give up our potential in the name of becoming 'better than' or at least 'as good as' someone else. Better than is a strategy for the ordinary. "The competitor to be feared is one who never bothers about you at all," said Henry Ford "but goes on making his own business better all the time" Excessive comparison also turns colleagues into competitors and competitors aren't effective collaborators. When we are too comparative, the goal we reach for is for someone else's standard of success. While under the influence of comparison we don't discern whether we are barely tapping our potential or are so unrealistic that we fail and become discouraged trying to achieve something we can't, isn't the best use of talents. In any case, we accomplish less. Unfair or inaccurate comparison not only steals credit from the person we're comparing against when they deserve credit, it interferes with the opportunity to make the most of our situation-independent of anyone or anything. Comparison often clouds the clarity of our vision. When comparison blurs our focus then comparison gets personal-'you versus me' or 'us versus them'. Constantly looking over our shoulders at what others are doing takes our eyes off what's ahead of us. Then our goals are set not by what's possible or relevant but by what someone else is doing. In that case, we are not even setting our goals: someone else is. Competition whose motive is merely to compete, to drive some other fellow out, never carries very far. The competitor to be feared is one who never bothers about you at all, but goes on making his own business better all the time. Businesses that grow by development and improvement do not die. But when a business ceases to be creative and it believes it has reached perfection and needs to do nothing but produce-no improvement, no development, it is done. Not only can comparisons hurt the creativity that leads to uniqueness they may spur us to prematurely abandon the truly unique creation. The search for uniqueness compels us to innovate not impersonate.

EARLY WARNING SIGN II-BEING DEFENSIVE

When the power of ego surges, our intent switches from honestly defending our point to proving our case exclusively; we refuse to be influenced, regardless of gaps in logic or inaccuracies. In the relentless effort to 'right', we make excuses, find fault with others, even if our faultfinding is unrelated to the discussion at hand. To justify our switch from defending to defensiveness, we may feel righteously indignant or that we are the innocent victim. And when a simple acknowledgement of being wrong would move everyone toward openness, oddly we use apology as another weapon of defensiveness. The point is, our defensiveness, often seen as evasiveness, only serves to indict us, regardless of the truth of the accusation, the sincerity of the question or the nature of the feedback. Holding an overly flattering view of one's personality, abilities and other attributes is often a recipe for disaster. Success in life comes largely from matching one's abilities, interests and inclinations to appropriate situations, jobs and relationship. To the extent they misperceive who or what they are really like, people are more likely to make bad decisions. How many people are in jobs, relationships and lives for which they are unsuited simply because they perceived themselves inaccurately? When self-serving illusions blind people to their shortcomings and weakness they are unlikely to try to improve. If hearing feedback from someone is painful, the alternative-ignoring it-appears even worse. Being defensive does not erase the truth; instead, it only protects our illusions that block progress. One of the flaws we should examine that may help us to stay open to feedback is the logic underlying our defensive. We resist feedback because we want and need to hold a positive image of ourselves. Anything counter to that positive image can be seen as a threat. The wheel of defensive spin has four major spokes that lead to bias and error-1. Exaggerate: inflate information beyond its actual significance, 2. Understate: filter, minimize or block out certain information, 3. Manipulate: twist and re-form information and 4. Fabricate: create information that has no basis in reality.

EARLY WARNING SIGN III-SHOWCASING BRILLIANCE

Showcasing/showing off brilliance is an early warning sign that ego is eroding the bottom line. The more we expect people to recognize, appreciate or be dazzled by our brilliance the less they listen, even if we do have better ideas. When others stop listening, we isolate ourselves not only from their interest in our ideas but from their brilliance in making ideas better. Then we are left less informed and have less influence-opposite of what we thought we were getting by showcasing. That is why showcasing is the ultimate irony; whether we dominate a conversation, name drop to dazzle, choose words or phrases to impress, pontificate to promote ourselves or pay only superficial attention to what others say, the more we showcase the less brilliance surfaces-and less brilliant we are likely to be. There is nothing wrong with being brilliant or capitalizing on our talents. After all, what is the value of having brilliance if we don't use it. But we cross the line from sharing to showcasing when we use it to feed our ego. When ego is out of balance, there is an inverse relationship between amassing knowledge and learning; the more we know the more confident we become. When our confidence in what we know increases to the point where we think there is little left to learn, we are less open. That's the point of danger; the lid to our box of knowledge begins to close. As it closes, new ideas have a harder time getting in, flawed ideas have a tough time escaping and we slide down the other side of the curve. The faster the lid closes, the faster our descent.

EARLY SIGN IV-SEEKING ACCEPTANCE

There is a vast difference between wanting respect and recognition and being desperate for it, even momentarily. When too little ego deprives us of a healthy sense of self, getting approval from others is our primary motive and a consuming distraction to making a contribution. Ironically, the less we are worried about maintaining an ideal self image and being endorsed by others, the more genuine acceptance and real confidence come our way. When our ego is not managed well, we do not grow out of the school level mentality of high need for acceptance, we grow into it as 'grown ups'. Whether we are on the receiving or giving end of acceptance, comments or artificial information. We are prone to say whatever we think will get is the acceptance we need, which ironically increases the chances we will get rejected. What value is someone adding if a leader is personally craving acceptance? If a person wants to be told only what makes him or her feel good, how close to reality could that person possibly be in making decisions. Most people think that when people have a problem with ego, they have too much. Seeking acceptance can be an early warning sign we have too little ego, which is equally ineffective.

REMEDY

Humility-for each of us, there is a continuum of ego. At one end of the continuum, we have too little ego; at the other, too much. Humility is equilibrium and keeps ego balanced between the two extremes. Humility is intelligent self-respect that keeps us from thinking too highly or too meanly of ourselves. It makes us modest by reminding how far we have come and how far short we are of what we can be. For most people, tradition holds that the opposite of excessive ego is humility when in fact having too little ego is as just as dangerous and unproductive as having too much. The properties of humility exist only at the equilibrium. When we are on the centre, our talents stay true to form and we make our greatest contributions. But since there is a natural tendency to deviate from the equilibrium, when we move just right or left of the centre, we begin to lose the power of humility. As a result, our strengths morph into weakness that parade as strengths. The closer we move to the extremes of humility's equilibrium the harder it is to make our way back to the centre. The longer we stay off centre the more comfortable we become off centre. If we don't quickly recover, we are more likely to develop an egotistical reflex in the way we work. When humility does not manage the power of ego, comparison, defensiveness, showcasing and seeking acceptance paint us into a corner of contentment-the feeling that we are finished, that we are complete. While pure ego fights tell us we are finished, humility reminds us we never are. The realization we are unfinished from humility's three unique properties-1. We, then me (devotion to progress), 2. I am brilliant and I am not (duality) and 3. one more thing (constructive discontent). The intersection of the three properties is humility.

Curiosity-there are two types of curiosity, 'state' and 'trait'. State curiosity the kind most people have-waits on something to spark it. State curiosity is temporary. Quickly after we are removed from the state that sparked our curiosity, it is finished. Trait curiosity, on the other hand, does not wait it be sparked: it does the sparking. People with trait curiosity have a rare blend of order and openness. When order overrides openness, curiosity loses freedom to explore. If left to openness alone, curiosity loses structure and purpose. Trait curiosity requires equal parts of both. People do not lack the ability to build or courage to try. Research suggests we don't lack imagination, ambition or ideas. We do not lack pre-build, pre-launch, pre-execution curiosity. It's not the only factor but it is a major one. When we use discipline and patience to resist our impulse to run with an idea at first glance, we give curiosity time to breathe. Four ways to raise the level of curiosity is by combining openness and order include-What do we mean? What are we seeing? What are we assuming? and What does that lead to?

Veracity-its Latin root, VERITAS means 'truth'. Truth refers to facts or reality. Truth is a destination. Veracity does not differ from truth in its destination but it differs in action. Veracity implies the habitual pursuit and adherence to truth. Both pursuit and adherence matter immensely, pursuit in arriving at truth and adherence in making a change once truth is discovered. Veracity is the pursuit of reality-the difference between what we think is happening and what is actually happening. The barrier to veracity is not that people are incapable of seeing the truth or even expressing it. The reaction to hard to hear truth when revealed is not usually favorable. As a result of the typical reaction to candor most people believe truth telling is risky. There are three steps to veracity-establish permission, make your intentions clear and be candid. The second half of veracity's meaning is adherence to truth. That usually means change. While it is true that knowledge is power, there is a clear difference in the power of knowing versus the discipline of becoming.

CONCLUSION

Most of us are influenced by more than one of the early warning signs of ego. We may have tendencies toward on sigh, like being defensive but everyone has experienced more than one sign at differed t times. The signs show up in the moment and turn our strengths into counterfeits. Since we make decisions based on beliefs, breaking the habit of any early warning sign-even momentarily-requires thorough thinking. We need to examine beliefs that drive our tendencies. Our beliefs are based on an equation-a series of 'this plus this equals this' or 'if-then logic'. But the math we do in our heads does not always add up: the beliefs we have may be anything but true.

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