

The Well-Defined Leader

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Who is this leader who is able to lead effectively? It is what we call the well-defined leader. We know from Jim Collins' work that she is a person with two qualities: humility + focus, a combination of character + action. But can we dig deeper than this? Can we peer inside of these Level 5 leaders to see what actually makes them tick?

This leader is internally aligned (what s/he says is what s/he does). She is subsequently is a non-anxious presence within the organization. As a result, she is able to lead effectively.

Did you notice the word alignment in there? It's there because alignment is critical to leadership success, and I'll tell you why. Those who lead who are internally aligned with their own values (actions match words), and thus are able to align the organization around its values, mission and vision, are the truly effective leaders. And yet, so few leaders across the organizational world seem to possess this essential quality.

Internally Aligned

Getting aligned, getting my words to match my actions, sounds easy? It's not. In fact, our interior lives tend to be so complex and scrambled that few people have a good grasp of what actually unfolds in their brains. As a result, our actions, words, and underlining values are usually out of alignment one with another. As a result, our unfolding lives are incongruent and misaligned. And thus we lose credibility with those around us.

How do we deal with this? Our minds have elaborate ways of disguising the truth, even from ourselves. In many ways it becomes our life work to understand ourselves and our inconsistencies, and seek to smooth out the rough edges and unscramble the mixed messages – to align who we authentically are with how we portray ourselves to the world.

So what does the aligned, well-defined leader look like?

Well-Defined Leader	Poorly-defined Leader
The thinking part of self rules over the emotional self, thus preventing or minimizing the creation of or reaction to anxiety and stress in the organization.	The emotional part of self rules over the thinking self, thus generating and reacting much more to the anxiety and stress in the organization.
Is able to absorb a large amount of stress. Can also be around other excited individuals without themselves	Susceptible to a great deal of emotional stimulation, themselves becoming excited and adding to the

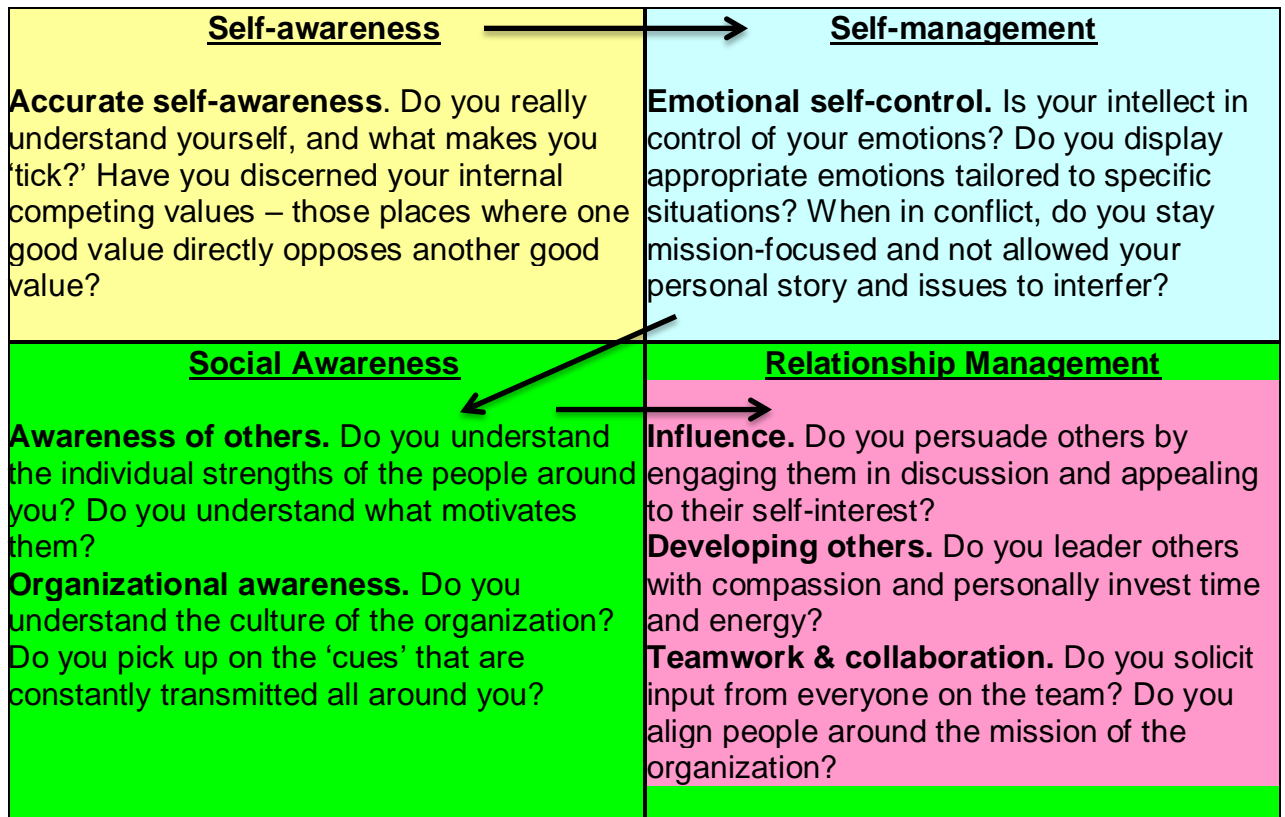
becoming emotionally excited, thus diffusing the situation.	stress they experience rather than diffusing it.
Demonstrates a great deal of self-knowledge. As they pay close attention to the self and their reactivity at every level possible, they are able to develop a degree of mastery over self and relationships.	Demonstrates much less self-knowledge. Hence have difficulty with decision-making. Because they have less choice between thinking and feeling, more of their choices are emotionally driven.
Has firm, appropriate personal boundaries	Boundaries are either too porous or too rigid
Has clarity about self and his/her own life goals.	Is unclear about who s/he is and unclear about his/her life goals.
Able to hold one's ground in conflict, keeping an eye on the mission.	Sacrifices own position to manage anxiety.
Focuses on strengths, both for herself and for her people.	Focuses on pathology in those around her.
Considers self when problems arise.	Diagnoses others when problems arise.
Is challenged by difficult situations.	Is quick to distance from difficult situations.
Responds effectively to resistance & sabotage, seeing it as necessary and instructive.	Responds poorly to resistance & sabotage, allowing it to distract.
Has a challenging attitude that encourages responsibility.	Focuses empathetically on helpless victims.
Able to disappoint those dependent on them.	Is more likely to create dependent relationships and has difficulty disappointing those dependent on them
Seeks enduring change.	Seeks symptom relief
Acknowledges and navigates competing values.	Fails to acknowledge competing values defaulting to the expedient.
Welcomes conflict that is focused on the mission and introduces conflicting viewpoints.	Insists on unanimity and agreement, and is threatened when conflict arises.

A wonderful idea, you might be saying to yourself, but one that is unachievable. I would argue that it is attainable, and learnable. In other words, these are not inborn traits, but behaviors and dispositions that anyone can learn.

The Self-Aware Leader

The most effective leaders, those who are most well-defined and internally aligned, are the leaders who are the most self-aware, simple as that. Oh, you say, I'm not into all of the soft psych stuff. Sufficient to say, if you aren't aware of yourself, then parts of yourself buried deep in your brain will misalign you,

controlling more of your thinking and responding than you will ever care to know. In other words, you may think that your actions are perfectly aligned with what you say and what you value, but research points otherwise. In fact, our brains are wired to protect ourselves from the truth of this. So we stumble through life, misaligned, all the while assuming that all is perfectly well, and everyone celebrates us the way we celebrate ourselves.



Smart people, people with all kinds of degrees from all the best places, make terrible leaders. Not all of them, but many of them. And the reason this is so, is that these folks, though knowing all kinds of facts about many areas of life, lack any kind of self-awareness that allows them to manage themselves, leading to social awareness and the ability to manage relationships appropriately.

Researchers had managers in one group give negative feedback on performance to their direct reports, but had them give it with positive non-verbals – nods and smiles. Then these researchers had managers give feedback to subordinates that was positive about their performance, but with negative non-verbals – frowns and narrow eyes. Guess what? Both groups ignored the verbal evaluations, and only reacted to the non-verbals, the positive performers end up feeling bad about what they'd done, and the bad performers feeling good."

What this means for a leader is this: you can give content all day to those you lead. You can tell them what they're doing well or poorly. But none of that counts. What really counts is the way you deliver it. And if you're not aware of how you're coming across, you could be giving all kinds of messages that you had no idea you were giving.

And that's one major reason there's so much bad leading and bad management out there in the world. Leaders often have no idea how they're coming across to people; Why people do not want to work with them; Why they can get so little good performance out of their people.

You're going to be leading these people. You have to be aware of yourself so that you can help them be aware of themselves. Let me give you a concrete example. Two leaders. Both are brilliant. Both have managed for years, even published articles on managing in prestigious management journals. Manager #1, Dave, is intense, task-focused, and impersonal. His tone is combative. He is a perfectionist and is rarely satisfied. Manager #2, Sue, is also demanding. But she is also approachable and is said to be playful in working with her people and customers.

So what was the results for these two managers? Dave constantly lost good talent. Guess where they tended to wind up? In Sue's department. And when asked why, these folks said, 'The environment in Sue's department is so much better. I'd much rather work here.' And when it came to leading, both Dave and Sue did that also. Dave rarely kept a direct report more than several months. Sue kept her direct reports for a long time, and those who moved on to bigger things kept in contact with her long after the leading relationship had ended.

The Three Aspects of Self-Awareness

There are three aspects of self-awareness that are critical in order for a person to be well-defined. The first aspect is understanding how we have been uniquely created – our particular bent if you will. Some people have called this the Element. Others term it our 'sweet spot.' Still others call it are unique talent pool or our Hedgehog Principle. Whatever you call it, it involves the hardwiring internal to each of us that makes us uniquely who we are.

The second aspect that is critical is our own personal story. Each of us has come from a particular background. We grew up in a family. In that family we were a particular gender and occupied a particular birth order. Our parents exhibited certain traits, habits and behaviors towards us and the world. We grew up in a community that had a special DNA, and that community molded us in certain ways. We had seminal events that occurred in our lives, with special people entering our lives at critical moments. The sum total of all of these life events I call our unique story or narrative out of which each of us now live. We use this unique story as a

'pair of glasses' to give us perspective on everyone and all that is going on around us. It is from this story that our Red Zone emerges.

The third aspect is the culture that surrounds us.

Let's now look at these three aspects, beginning with our unique bent.

The First Aspect: Knowing Our I.D. (Intentional Difference)

We've found it to be tremendously helpful to begin figuring ourselves out beginning focusing on the positive – our unique strengths makeup. So often people have told us that they have little or no idea what they are truly good at, and what they are passionate about. Obviously, if we aren't clear on our unique wiring, and where our strengths and talents lie, we will not have a clear understanding of ourselves, or feel comfortable in our skin as we move about our lives from day to day.

The most important tool we use in this self-discovery endeavor, based on Gallup's Strengthsfinder©, is the concept of Intentional Difference©. We will not delve into this extensively here, in that we have discussed this adequately elsewhere (see *Intentional Difference* by Ken Tucker).

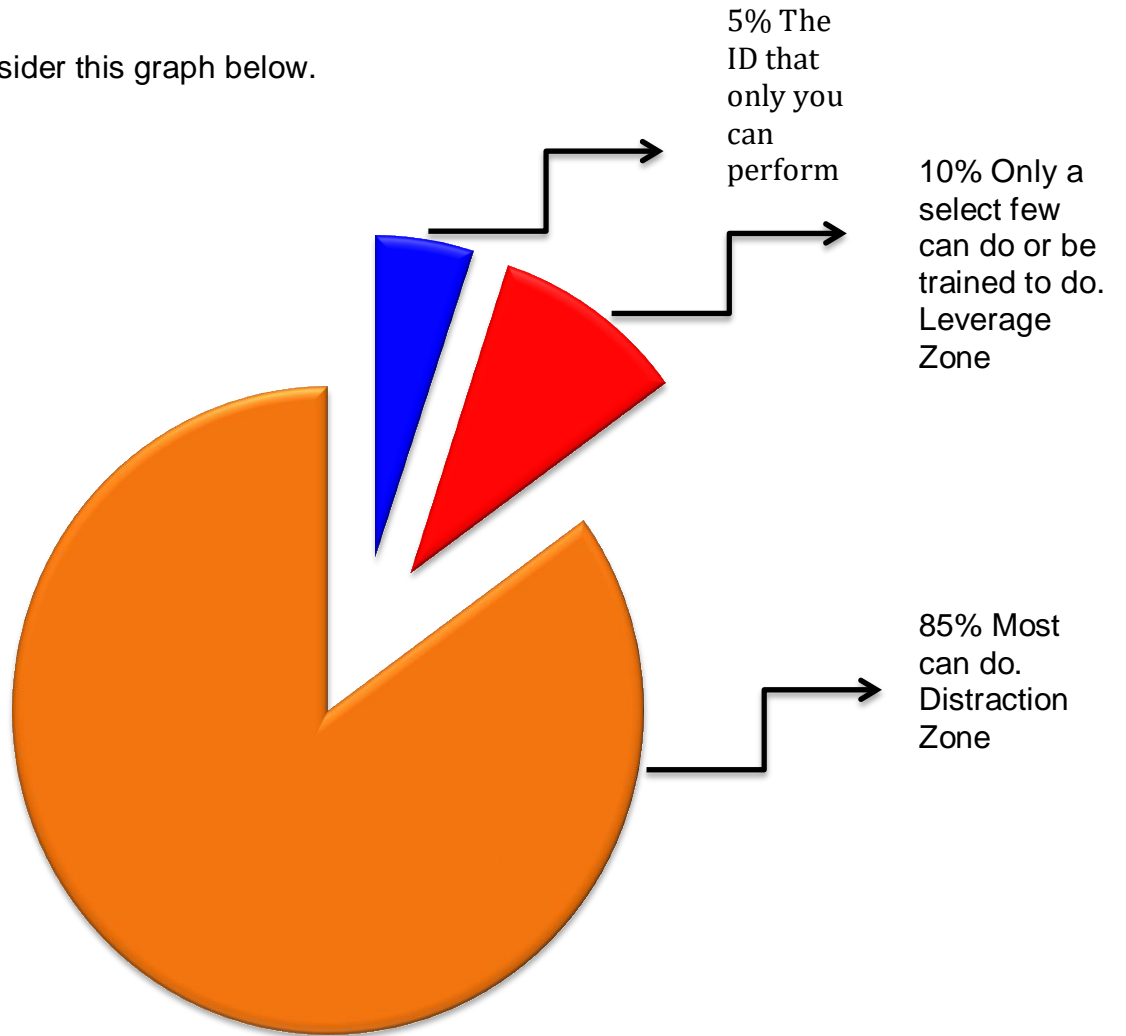
Sufficient to say, the well-defined leader is one who spends a preponderance of her time functioning in her Intentional Difference. This ID as we call it represents that convergence of our talents-turned-into-strengths where all of our faculties are combined in a harmonious order. When we are functioning in our ID, we are extremely focused, lost in the moment. We perform at our peak, getting lost in the process and losing a sense of the passage of time. We can work for hours, and are actually energized rather than depleted by the experience. At these times, we are authentically centered in the true sense of ourselves – we are well-defined. We pursue our ID for its own sake, not worrying about the residuals that might flow from its successful prosecution. When we are in our ID, we are re-creating (though most would assume that recreation is the antithesis of work. This is true if our work involves us doing little of our ID).

Obviously, those who can combine their career with their ID will be those who function in those careers at the highest levels, at the same time maintaining a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that unfortunately few of us realize. Those who are rarely if ever in their ID will usually find themselves depleted. These folks may also turn to artificial stimulants to produce the synthetic high that ID naturally produces (although these artificial means often lead to addictions and a host of problems associated with that).¹

¹ For a much fuller explanation of ID, see Ken Tucker's book, *Your Intentional Difference*.

The Math

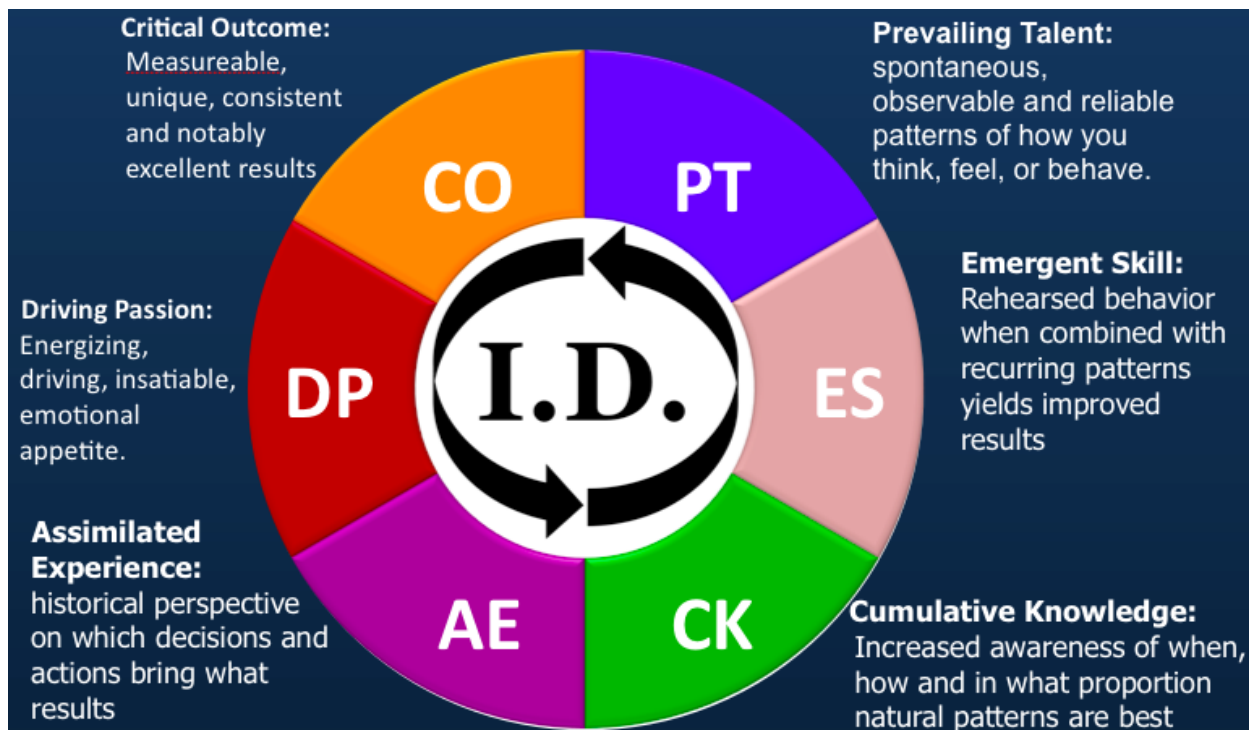
Consider this graph below.



The 6 Dimensions of Intentional Difference

We discover our ID by following the below path.

1. Critical Outcome
2. Driving Passion
3. Assimilated Experience
4. Cumulative Knowledge
5. Emergent Skill
6. Prevailing Talent



For those of you reading this who are parents, it is important to begin to consider your children's ID, even at a young age. Parents, followed by society, tend to impose rather than elicit a child's skill set (*You'd make a fine attorney, just like your dad*). We need to observe in our children what, when left to their own devices, do they tend to do voluntarily. What absorbs them? What questions do they ask? By noting the answers to these questions, we as parents can begin to point our children toward their ID, and in the process, begin to help them construct an authentic self-definition.

The Second Aspect: Knowing your Story

After discerning your unique strengths makeup, for the next step in your journey into self-awareness and clear self-definition, it is important to understand your personal story. Your story consists of all of the experiences that have

befallen you since (and possibly before) your birth. These are not isolated, disconnected events, but an unfolding narrative complete with interpretations and perspectives on life, how we should act in any given situation, and thus how we can successfully negotiate life. Your story contains a predominant theme – that of acceptance, competence, control, or survival – that has a tendency to emerge and color certain situations as anxiety arises.

The role that anxiety plays in our lives, simply because there is nothing more disruptive in our attempts at clear self-definition than anxiety. And it begins early, in our families of origin. And this early anxiety is first generated as parents begin to impose upon their children what the parent thinks the child needs to be, rather than eliciting from the child what her true talents and abilities are. Society then steps in with its demands and strictures. Let's take a look at how it operates in our lives.

The Third Aspect: Knowing your Culture

Culture surrounds us as the context in which our lives unfold. One can look at the national culture, the local culture, and the culture that resides within every organization. Each of these contexts exerts a strong influence on us and how we think and behave.

Someone from the South will have different influences brought to bear than someone from New England. Someone living in Los Angeles (where image reigns) will have different pressures than someone living in Washington, D.C. (where power reigns).

Each organization will exert powerful forces on those who reside within that organization. If an individual does not align with and conform to that culture, strong pressures are brought to bear to either change or leave.

Culture also encompasses generational, gender, economic, and racial differences. An African American single mother struggling to survive will experience the world quite differently from a white middle class male.

These three aspects of self-awareness are critical to leadership success.

The Anxiety (the Fuel) that Drives Us

We turn our attention now to anxiety because of its unseen yet powerful influence on how we live. Anxiety, among other things, can be seen as an internal unseen fuel that drives us. The response to the perception of threat is anxiety. This threat might be nothing more than, *I've got to get up this morning and go to work or I'll lose my job and have no money*. The more easily people are threatened, the more anxiety. Anxiety is automatic and most of it is out of awareness.

Anxiety emerges in those regions of our brain where reason is fuzzy at best. As a result, what creates the sense of threat that generates the anxiety more often than not is markedly unreasonable. We'll explain more about this later.

Though usually thought of as negative, anxiety has a positive side. We need moderate amounts of it to get up in the morning and get things done.. Anxiety, of course, is part and parcel of the human condition; There is no escaping it. It is doubtful that anyone would want to live a totally anxiety-free life, or could live such a life for that matter.

Anxiety comes in many forms: it can be acute (short-term), as in a crisis, or it can be chronic, lasting many years or even generations. It can be very intense, when one is anticipating a very negative event (e.g. an approaching hurricane), or it can be a semi-conscious unsettledness (e.g. when in-laws are coming for dinner). Anxiety resides in individuals, but it also exists in relationships and organizations.

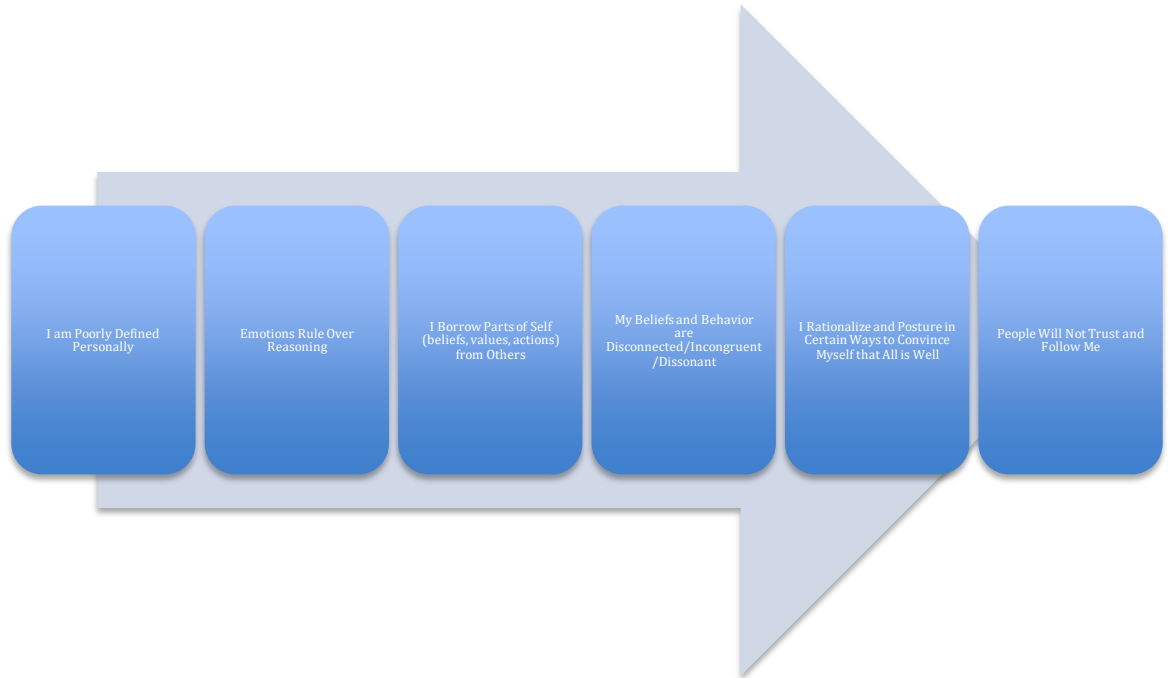
For our purposes, we're going to focus on anxiety as it appears in relationships. People, of course, form themselves into groups – families, companies, or nations. The more a person's focus and energy is bound in a relationship, the more a person's functioning will be influenced by and dependent on that relationship. The more a person is absorbed into relationship, the less energy she will have to develop her distinct individuality (beginning with ID) and become well-defined as an individual.

There are actually two strong pressures that confront humans, the pressure to be a distinct individual, and the pressure to join in and conform to the demands or relationships. Both of these pressures are valuable and need to be kept in tension with one another, because the pressures are pulling in the opposite direction. Too much individuality, and the person becomes a hermit. Too much relationship, and the individual is absorbed into the collective losing her distinct individuality.

If a person grows up under strong pressure to adjust to the demands of others (the relationship pressure), her life becomes strongly governed by emotional processes rather than reasoning (*I don't care what I really want and believe. I must go along with what the group wants and demands*). This process (emotion rules over reasoning) has the side affect of reducing the ability to be a well-defined individual, because clear self-definition demands clear thinking and reasoning, which leads to action that is aligned with my core beliefs, values, and ID. As personal definition decreases, togetherness needs are stronger and emotional reactivity becomes more intense. So the less well-defined person who is influenced more by emotion than reason can be much more easily swayed by the demands of the crowd and the tenor of the moment.

People differ in how easily they are influenced by what transpires in a relationship, and how they manage the pressure to conform in relationship (the more involved emotionally they are in the relationship, the more threat they experience in subtle shifts that inevitably occur in the relationship). The rule of thumb is the more emotionally dependent a person is in a relationship, the more easily that person is threatened by group pressure, the more anxiety she experiences, the more energy is invested in actions aimed at reducing the anxiety, all of which leads to group conformity. The more actions people feel compelled to take to reduce anxiety and avoid triggering anxiety, the less flexibility they have in that relationship (because conformity is contrary to flexibility).

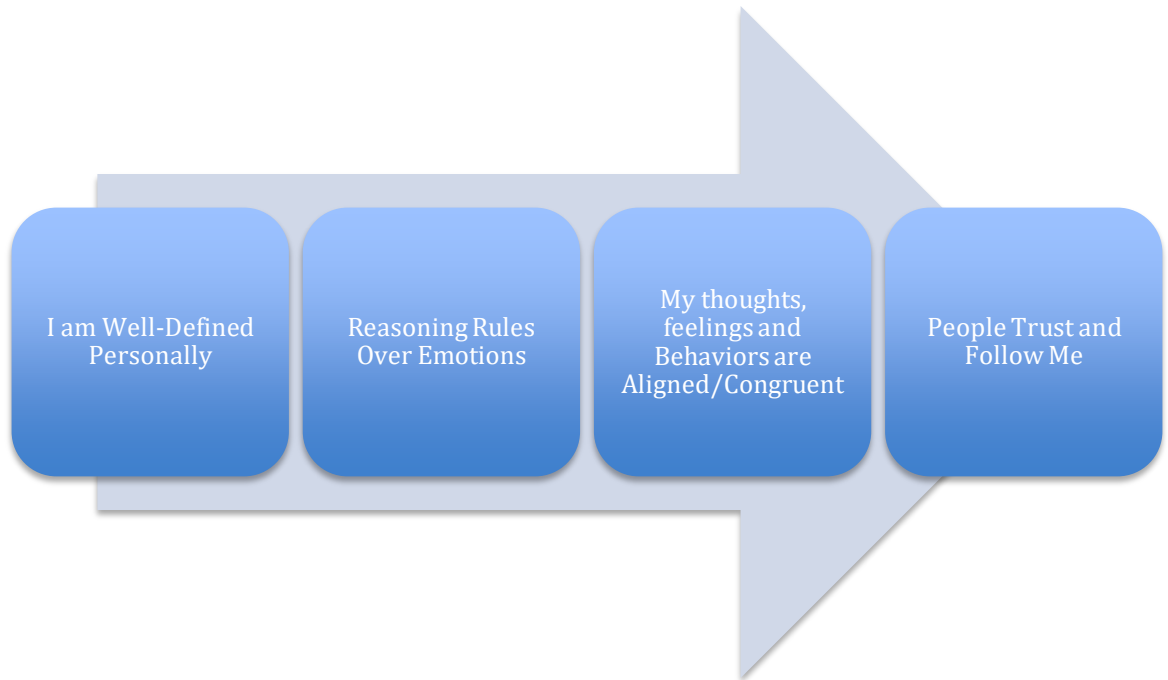
Less mature (or less well-defined) individuals, handle themselves emotionally quite differently than those who are more mature and well-defined. Their relationships are susceptible to a great deal of mutual emotional stimulation, partly because there is a great deal of trading of selves involved (*I have very little core authentic self, therefore I must borrow from what I see in you to complete my self, as you are doing the same with me*). In time, however, borrowing and lending of selves becomes a source of stress (*I don't have a clear sense of myself, so I see what you're like – how you think, what you value, how you act. I borrow those parts that appeal, whether or not these are congruent with who I truly am*). Since trying to make a self out of a relationship cannot work (I end up with a number of misconnected, incongruent parts I've borrowed from others), the attempt itself creates a certain amount of anxiety (I'm not authentic as a person. The self I display is merely a false self of borrowed parts). In order to manage that anxiety, people begin to rationalize the discrepancies and to posture themselves in recognizable ways, and certain relationship patterns form (discussed later).



Emotionally mature (well-defined) individuals seem able to absorb a large amount of stress or be around other excited individuals without themselves becoming emotionally excited, thus passing the anxiety on. Because I am well-defined, I have clear thinking which allows me to reason through what is unfolding in front of me, and therefore make clear decisions about my actions that are aligned with my core beliefs and values.

All of this said is not to rule out the centrality of relationship in favor of the individual (the error of the Western mind). Well-defined people enter easily into relationships, but those relationships don't define who they are. They already have a strong sense of their ID, their beliefs, and their values. And the groups to which they tend to attach are invariably made up of equally well-defined people who reinforce their individuality.

An individual can stay connected to others without losing his or her identity (i.e. stay well-defined as a person), and without taking on the emotional anxiety of the group. Well-defined people, who lean more toward the pressure to be an individual and are thus more well-defined, are those who are not easily threatened by others and the pressure to conform in relationships. Well-defined people have enough confidence in their ability to deal with relationships so they neither avoid them nor become highly anxious in encountering them. In other words, their self definition is not compromised every time they enter a group. They remain well-defined, even when the group pressure to conform is intense.



Take a moment to think of people in the two categories:

- Those who are well-defined as individuals, who understand themselves, who are uncompromising on their values, who enter into relationships but are not easily influenced to change core values in the face of group pressure.
- Those who are poorly defined as individuals. Who have a poor understanding of themselves, who compromise core values in the face of group pressure.

Fill in the graph below with people you know who are well and poorly defined. Note the characteristics or distinct behaviors that come to mind that would put each in the category you've chosen.

Well-defined people		Poorly Defined People	
Name	Characteristics	Name	Characteristics
John	Not easily swayed by group pressure	Bill	Changes his position whenever the group demands.

Levels of anxiety vary with people over time, but the rule of thumb is the less well-defined a person is, the higher the average level of chronic anxiety. Poorly defined people are more relationship-dependent, a dependence that in the moment reduces anxiety, but in the long term actually spawns chronic anxiety.

Anxiety needs to be constrained (the higher the levels of anxiety, the less the person is able to function normally). There are numerous ways to confine it (the higher the levels of anxiety, the more pronounced these confining traits). Relationships are by far the most effective anxiety constrainer. When people become more anxious, the togetherness and conformity pressure increases – they must think and act alike. The more people respond based on anxiety, the less tolerant they are in the differences of one another (*Your differences create more anxiety in me. Cut it out!*). But people can also use drugs and alcohol to manage their anxiety. Over/under eating, sexual fantasies, or excessive moralizing also work. Indeed, an excessive concentration on nearly anything (golf, work, hobbies, etc.) can act as a constrainer of anxiety.

In organizations, as anxiety builds, actions are often taken to relieve the anxiety in the moment – giving in to the anxiety of others -- rather than determining a long-term view. And, in the absence of a well-defined leader, this default to the expedient in the face of organizational anxiety compromises any chance of a clear, well-reasoned path forward,

Reduction of chronic anxiety is a by-product of increasing one's basic self-definition. A successful effort to improve one's level of definition and reduce anxiety strongly depends on a person's developing more awareness of and control over her emotional reactivity. This is because a person's automatic

reactiveness to relationship systems is the major factor that undermines her emotional autonomy.

The Road to Clear Self-Definition

As stated, the path to clear self-definition involves the two aspects that are critical to self-awareness and clear self-definition: your 'bent' in life which is captured in the Intentional Difference process, and the more negative, anxiety-charged aspects of your story that lie hidden from awareness exerting great influence on our unfolding behavior.

It is important to discover those anxiety-charged aspects of your story. We have called these hidden aspects as we enter into conflict the Red Zone. We want you to take some time to think through and fill out the questionnaire below. This should help you identify where you might be having difficulty in anxiety-laden aspects of your self-definition.

I. Identify Your Codes, Automatic Interpretations, Patterns and Beliefs.

What is your typical code or pattern?

- What relational patterns occur again and again in your intimate relationships? (e.g. being abandoned, being criticized, being smothered, never being able to find a partner, having affairs, having your partner have affairs, arguments about money, etc.).
- How do others typically misunderstand you?
- What problem(s) recur again and again?

What are you listening for? (e.g. the possibility of continued success? Failure? Acceptance? Rejection? Loss? etc.)

- What is your typical interpretation when things go wrong?
- What do you expect life to bring you?
- What, in your view, stops you from realizing your dreams or getting to your goals?

- What are you afraid of?
- What do you believe must happen before you can realize your dreams and visions?
- What are the actions you haven't taken to make your dreams come true?
- What are the real world barriers to deal with to realize your dreams?
- What are you doing, not doing, feeling or thinking that they would, wouldn't do in this situation?

Telling the truth about your life.

- Areas in which I have been avoiding something in my relationships, my career, my health, or my spiritual/inner life.
- Areas in which I haven't been fully alive or showing up fully.
- Things I have been avoiding telling the truth about or facing.
- Areas in which I have been clinging to security that have stifled my aliveness and passion.
- Things I have not started and want to start.
- Things I want to change and have not changed.

- Things I want to stop and have not stopped.
- Things I have started and want to finish.
- Things I want to have and do not have.
- Things I want to do and have not done.

Shame as a block to change

Shameful secret events

- What has happened to you that you are ashamed of that you have never told anyone?
- What have you done that you are ashamed of that you have never told anyone?
- Who, if anyone, would it be right to tell these things to?
- When, or in what circumstances, would it be right to “go public” with this shameful secret?

Shameful secret desires of sensibilities

- What do you fantasize about or want to do that you are ashamed about or wouldn't want others to know?

- What do you do regularly or occasionally that you are ashamed about or afraid others would find out about?

Ongoing shameful sense of self or qualities

- List any qualities or aspects of yourself that you think are bad or shameful.

Components of Upsets

Undelivered communication

- What haven't you said and to whom haven't you said it?
- What do you need to say?
- When or by when do you need to say it?

Unfulfilled expectations

- What have you expected to be a certain way in your life that is not that way?
- Who have you expected to be a certain way that isn't that way?

Thwarted intentions

- What have or did you attempt to accomplish or do that has been blocked or stopped in some way?

- Where have your intentions been misinterpreted?

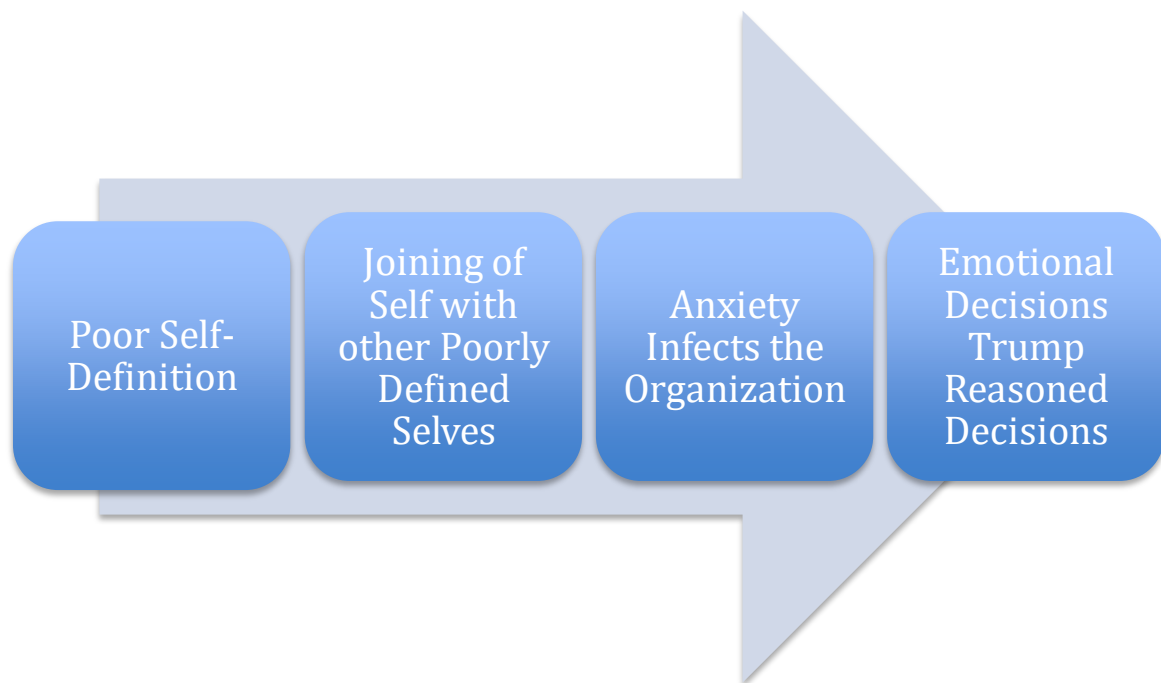
Rumblings from your soul

- What is disturbing for you right now in your job, your career, your life, your relationships, etc.? What doesn't fit in those circumstances or in what areas do you think you are out of sync with yourself?

Hopefully, after you have taken the I.D. exercise and worked through the questionnaire above, you will have a grasp of the contours of the way you were originally created, and the actual way that your story has developed that has distorted that original design that was uniquely you.

Anxiety affects and infects the organization

All this talk about anxiety might sound to you like so much psycho-babble. But keep in mind, these forces reside to a greater or lesser degree in all individuals and organizations, and will determine the long term direction of all organizations whether or not they are acknowledged.



Whatever affects one affects each one in the system. That is, anxiety moves easily from person to person in the group. It's infectious. It is almost as if, in relationship systems, electrical connections link the individuals of the system, transporting emotions and feelings from one individual to another continuously. You may have seen a herd of cows grazing in a field together. One cow accidentally touches an electric fence and startles. The anxiety quickly ripples through the herd as other cows begin to experience the anxiety.

Certain members in organizations are more prone to picking up the anxiety as it reverberates through an organization. These are the members who are the least well-defined in their own individuality. Often, organizations set up mechanisms whereby these more fragile members can be protected from increasing levels of anxiety. Unfortunately, these more fragile members, rather than being protected, are actually more caught up in the organization's emotional problems. The protection paradoxically becomes an accelerator of anxiety, because the protective mechanisms often put in place create other problems within the organization.

Let's say an organization is facing steep declines in income, and must come to grips with the possibility of lay-offs. This, of course, creates a great deal of anxiety for any organization. But it is the fragile, less well-defined members of that organization who are the first to experience the rising anxiety. And it is these same individuals who begin to act out on this anxiety (with absenteeism, work mistakes, showing up at the boss's door for reassurance, etc.). Bosses quickly step in to "reassure" the more troubled employees that all is well. And yet, these assurances merely act to increase anxiety ("Why did the boss think he had to say that to us at this time? It's probably worse than I first thought!!").

Emotional reactivity passes like a hot potato between individuals. When one anxious individual succeeds in exciting a second, the first is often relieved. In humans, this phenomenon results in nothing ever getting resolved. The problem that triggered the emotions is never addressed; emotions are merely generated and then circuited and re-circuited through the system.

Note that emotionally mature (well-defined) individuals seem able to absorb a large amount of anxiety and stress or be around other excited individuals without themselves becoming emotionally excited or passing it on. This is part of what is meant by having more choice about being in emotions or in thinking.

Note: The more emotionally unhealthy an organization, the more threatened these organizations by someone who is well-defined, because this upsets the way things have always been done. The organization invariably turns on the well-defined leader. But sabotage is a sign that the leader is doing the right thing. And it's the non-anxious response to the sabotage that defines the non-anxious leader. This is the absolute standard of the leader – the one

who can respond as the non-anxious presence. And this can happen in leadership at any level. This non-anxious, well-defined presence is not a static goal, but an unfolding journey, and the only way we can achieve it is to take care of ourselves. Ideally, each of us would contain a discrete self, made up of our thoughts, emotions and actions.

Less mature (or less differentiated, less well-defined) individuals, however, handle themselves emotionally quite differently. Their relationships are susceptible to a great deal of mutual emotional stimulation, partly because there is a great deal of trading of selves involved. The reason selves can be traded back and forth is because these individuals possess much more porous personal boundaries than the well-defined person.

In time, however, borrowing and lending of selves becomes a source of stress. Since trying to make a self out of a relationship cannot work, the attempt itself creates a certain amount of anxiety. In order to manage that anxiety, partners begin to posture themselves in recognizable ways, and certain well-known relationship patterns form.

Patterns Relationships Take

Anxiety and stress begins to spread through an organization. And as it spreads, certain things start to happen within that organization. As people within the organization sense the anxiety, the tendency (especially for those who are the least well-defined individuals) is to begin to 'herd,' drawing closer together emotionally. This drawing together spells the further loss of each person's individuality and assumption of the group definition. This herding together is an attempt to reduce anxiety, but it in fact creates its own anxiety, thus adding to the mounting difficulty in the organization.

People in the stressed organization herd together. They also assume certain postures in an attempt to reduce the anxiety. Note a particular pattern: solutions to certain problems themselves turn into problems. In other words, as you solve the wrong problem, or solve the right problem with the wrong solution, the solution becomes the problem. You can see this throughout organizational life, and throughout history.

Let's look at these four postures that people assume when anxiety confronts an organization.

Triangling

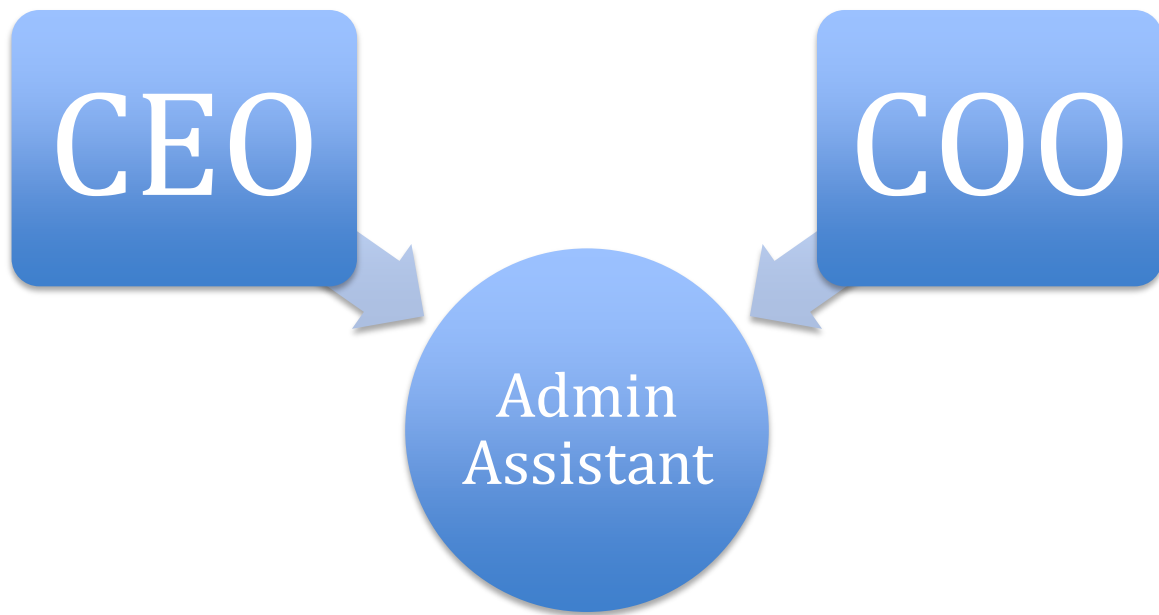
When anxiety builds in an organization, one of the automatic postures people assume together is that of the triangle. Let's say the CEO of an organization comes to the office early after a board meeting the evening before.

He is anxious because the board was very angry about the last quarter performance of the organization. How long does it take the COO to figure it out that the CEO is upset? Like the cows, she knows immediately. And, like them, she quite possibly takes it on herself (remember how quickly it spread in the cows). The CEO transmits, and COO takes on the anxiety instantly. Interestingly, as soon as she takes on the anxiety, the CEO often calms down.

Now, if one of the administrative assistants (or whoever else is part of that office staff) comes around the COO, he or she, if poorly defined with poor boundaries, will take on the anxiety and end up carrying the anxiety that the CEO originally brought in that morning. The CEO and the COO feel better. So now we have two calm company principles, but an upset admin assistant. If this particular cycle happens often enough, with the anxiety ending up in the admin assistant, we have a triangle pattern.

Further, if the organizational anxiety tends to settle in one person (in this case, the admin assistant) long and often enough, that person is likely to develop a symptom (either physical, mental/emotional, or social). This is also true of groupings, as we will discuss below.

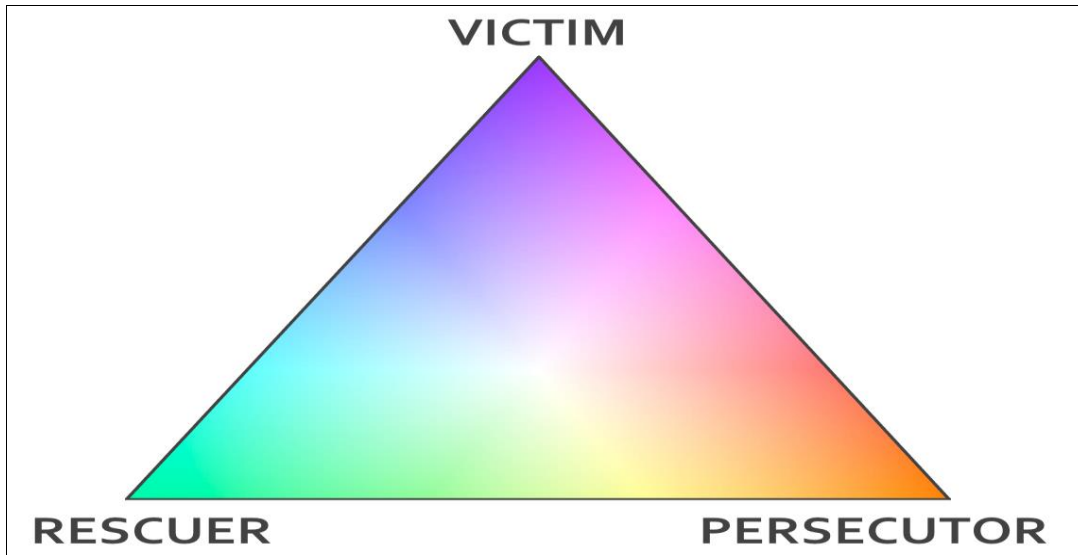
The onset of the symptom may add to the CEO and COO's anxiety. They will begin to worry about the admin assistant (at least if this person is important to their functioning). The more they worry, the more anxious that person becomes, intensifying the symptom, and so a vicious cycle ensues. But let's say the CEO and COO have had a long-standing, under-the surface conflict between them. Focusing on the admin assistant takes the pressure off their conflict, and thus the triangle serves the purpose of reducing the conflict between the two principles.



This triangling doesn't have to just exist between three individuals. It can encompass whole departments. As an example, senior leadership is having tension with marketing. HR jumps in to rescue marketing. Whole departments can become symptomatic, usually by being consumed with dysfunction and under-performing. Often the solution to this is to fire the department head. But in lieu of system analysis and change, pulling one manager out and installing another will not solve the problem.

The Karpman Drama Triangle is an example of the ongoing triangling that exists between individuals and between groups of individuals, seen with regards to the stylized roles people often take toward one another .

The Drama Triangle



In conflicted situations, people will often adopt three habitual roles:

- The person who is treated as, or accepts the role of, a *victim* (the victim is not really as helpless as s/he feels)
- The person who pressures, coerces or *persecutes* the victim (the persecutor doesn't really have a valid complaint), and
- The *rescuer*, who intervenes out of an ostensible wish to help the situation or the underdog.

The drama plays out when the protagonist begins in one of the three main roles: Rescuer, Persecutor, or Victim, with the other principal player (the antagonist) in one of the other roles. Thereafter the players move around the triangle, thus switching roles – the persecutor becoming the victim (when the rescuer starts to persecute her for persecuting the victim), the victim becoming the rescuer, or the rescuer switching to persecuting.

The covert purpose for each 'player' is to get their unspoken (and frequently unconscious) psychological wishes/needs met in a manner they feel justified, without having to acknowledge the broader dysfunction or harm done in the system as a whole. As such, each player is acting upon his own selfish 'needs', rather than acting in a genuinely responsible or altruistic manner.

The relationship between the victim and the rescuer can be one of codependency. The Rescuer keeps the Victim dependent on them by playing into their Victimhood. The Victim gets her needs met by having the rescuer take care of her.

The chief cause of burn-out is not working too much, but getting sucked into other people's problems. Well-defined, non-anxious people resist being triangled,. Thus influencing others to take responsibility for themselves. Non-anxious leaders are able to tolerate other people's anxiety, thus requiring them to

take personal responsibility. Anxiety is thus diffused in the organization, allowing it to function in a healthy way.

As an example, a direct report comes into the manager's office to complain about another direct report. "Fred never gets his work done on time, and that directly effects my ability to meet deadlines," Sally complains. Rather than storming out of his office to confront Fred (thus getting triangled between the two), the manager says to the complainer, "So have you spoken to Fred about this? If not, I suggest you start there, then if it goes no where, come back and speak to me about it."

Conflict

Triangling assumes conflict. In other words, two people enter into conflict and, if this continues over time (which more than likely denotes Red Zone conflict), that conflicted relationship by definition is unstable. As a result, the warring factions (individuals or groups of individuals) will triangle in a third party to focus on, thus defusing the original conflict.

This brings up two issues. The first, why would a conflict go on and on? The reason lies in the fact that there are two types of conflict -- a mission-focused conflict (Blue Zone) that does not tap into personal elements. This conflict resolves because it stays focused on issues and the personal element never enters. It is also carried on by two people who are well-defined, and able to stay focused on the mission. The second type of conflict is a person-centered conflict (Red Zone) that draws up a person's personal story. Folks who chronically caught in this type of conflict are the less well-defined people.

The highest performing, most effective teams are also the most highly conflicted teams, as are the poorest performing, least effective teams. How could this be? The issue is not the presence or absence of conflict. The issue has to do with how each of us handles conflict – does it stay Blue Zone and mission focused? Or does it turn Red Zone drawing the personal elements?

Conflict is neither a personal failure nor a distraction from your calling as a leader. Conflict *is* your calling! Conflict cannot be avoided. It's inherent in life itself! If we used just a small portion of the time we waste in avoiding conflict, to learn the skills we need to resolve conflict in our self and with others, the world would be a different place!

What most of us fail to understand is the quality of our relationships is directly related to the quality of the *relationship that we have evolved with our self*. Conflict is the opportunity to examine our life! Despite what most of us believe, conflict is never about the other person. Conflict is about your *self*. Conflict will teach you about your self if you if you are willing to learn. Thus

conflict is the prime arena for becoming self-aware. What distinguishes our understanding of conflict from most others is the fact that we begin internally. Understanding conflict begins with understanding myself. From this vantage point we move externally to the effects my self has on others.

The Red Zone and the Blue Zone. Let’s make some distinctions that will help us understand conflict, and the way it can be helpful or destructive.

Red Zone	Blue Zone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This conflict is personal. • It’s about me! • Emotions rule without being acknowledged. • I must protect myself , because I’m feeling weak. • Emotions are denied in self, therefore “projected” on others. • The situation escalates. • Behaviors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I disengage ✓ I become easily annoyed ✓ I’m resentful ✓ I procrastinate ✓ I attack the other personally ✓ I use Alcohol as medication ✓ I avoid people , situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This conflict is professional. • It’s about the business. • The mission of the organization rules. • I must protect the team and the business. • Emotions are understood and acknowledged in myself. • The situation is reframed into a more useful construct. • Behaviors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Thoughtful ✓ Reflective ✓ Listen deeply for what the underlying issue might be ✓ Do not see negative intent in other person.

The Red Zone. Notice on the chart the characteristics of Red Zone conflict. This is conflict that is personal. In other words, the conflict is no longer about whatever issue we were disagreeing about. The issue is now *me*.

So the Red Zone is about my own personal issues, and also about behavior -- behaviors often learned in childhood, originally designed to reduce the anxiety of a threatening situation. In adulthood these coping strategy behaviors can be extremely effective in avoiding situations that create anxiety for us. While effective at reducing anxiety they prevent us from making progress in our most important relationships.

Core Red Zone Issues. Take a look at the Red Zone issues that people tend to have. We’ve talked a great deal about anxiety generally. Hopefully this chart will help you begin to identify the particular profile that your anxiety might take. Hopefully, when you were filling the questionnaire above on the negative aspects of your personal story, you were able to discern the contours of the below themes beginning to emerge.

Core Issue	Self-Description	Positive Side	Negative Side
Survival	"I must take care of myself. The world is full of peril, so I must enjoy the moment."	These people have traits of competence, self-reliance, and responsibility. They are usually very 'street smart.'	These people lack the ability to trust others and tend to be wary and troubled in relationships. They have little interest in anything but what is of practical benefit. They become angry and panicky (Red Zone) whenever they feel their survival has been threatened.
Acceptance	"I will do anything to be loved and accepted by others. I am a people-pleaser."	These people have a heart for serving others and are very attentive to the needs and feelings of other people.	These people are overly compliant and self-effacing. They tend to be rescuers. They become angry and carry personal grudges (Red Zone) whenever they feel they have been rejected.
Control	"The world is a threatening place, and the only way I can feel safe is if I can control every situation and the people around me."	These people tend to have strong leadership qualities. They are vigilant, highly organized, and have high expectations of themselves.	These people often wall themselves off emotionally. They do not let others get too close to them. They can be overly controlling toward others—bossy, directive, demanding, rigid, and nit-picking. They impose perfectionist demands on others. They become anxious and angry (Red Zone) whenever anyone or anything threatens their control.
Competence	"I am loved only on the basis of my performance. My performance is never good enough, so I never feel worthy of being loved."	These people tend to be high achievers. If you are a leader, you want these people on your team, because they will work hard to achieve a great performance.	They are never satisfied with their achievements. They have a hard time receiving from other people. They impose perfectionist demands on themselves. They are defensive and easily angered (Red Zone) whenever they perceive that their competence has been questioned.

Basically everyone can have all of these, but one is always going to be the favorite or signature or default Red Zone issue. A person can be a competence guy, but at the same time want to be accepted, and can be controlling at times. But competence would be considered the signature issue that raises the most anxiety and drives that person as conflict arises. And the danger for this person,

in a disagreement with someone, is that she will begin to read competence into the conflict – ‘Oh, you think I’m not competent!’”

As conflict about a particular matter unfolds, people think they’re still arguing about whatever the original issue was. But there’s a subtle internal shift, as that person’s personal issue from long ago gets activated.

There are two good ways to see when the conflict is Red Zone: First, the intensity in the conflict is disproportionate to the issue at hand. Someone’s shouting and screaming about an issue that seems inconsequential. Second, the conflict goes on far too long without resolution. The reason it can’t get resolved is the original issue is no longer what the conflict is about. Red Zone conflict, because it is about my personal issue, can *never* be resolved. Certainly not by wrapping a totally unrelated issue in it.

Red Zone issues go back to childhood issues, and those you need to resolve on your own. What’s important for you to realize is how these issues get pulled into everyday conflicts and totally muck up the process of resolution. You see this everywhere – in political discourse, between husbands and wives, in board rooms, in shops.

Sufficient to say, if I’m in conflict, and the conflict does not resolve, and my Red Zone issue has been triggered as well as with the person with whom I’m conflicted

The Blue Zone. The Blue Zone begins with my own self-awareness. As I become aware of myself, I can manage myself. After that I can become more socially aware, and able to manage relationships – especially conflicted relationships. The well-defined leader is synonymous with the leader who is Blue Zone. Well-defined people tend not to stray into Red Zone very often. They are aware of themselves, their Red Zone issues, and are thus able to stay focused on the mission-driven issues at hand.

Blue Zone is the continual refusal to shift responsibility for our actions to anyone or to any institution or to any system. Accepting responsibility for our behavior allows us to *change* the behavior that is in-consistent with our most personal values. And the inverse is also true! Accepting responsibility for our own behavior protects us from accepting responsibility for other’s behavior. You can read more about conflict in our book, *Naked Conflict*.

Distance

While triangling is a tried and true way of dealing with conflict and the anxiety it stirs up, it is not the only way. Another favorite solution is that of distancing. A person is extremely anxious and conflicted in a particular relationship. The solution? Leave the relationship. Now, they believe, they have

solved the problem. At least the conflict is over for awhile. But in reality they have solved nothing.

All the above-mentioned postures distance people from a one-to-one relationship but sometimes the distance is so striking it actually becomes the major pattern. In all organizations, beginning with the family, the tactic of distancing is on display. In a healthy, well-defined person and organization, there is the tendency to tease out conflict, make sure it focuses on the mission of that organization, and then to work toward resolution.

But as we have said, when people are less well-defined, conflict goes Red Zone more readily, and people will either triangle drawing others into the fray, or they will distance (*I'm never speaking to anyone in HR ever again. Or, I'm leaving this organization, if this is the way they treat me.*)

Over/Under-functioning

Over-functioning/under-functioning reciprocity describes two people trying to make one self out of two. One person in a relationship (let's say one salesman) becomes the more dominant decision-maker for the common self, while the other (the first salesman's colleague and friend) adapts to the situation. This is one of the best examples of borrowing and trading of self in a close relationship. One may assume the dominant role and force the other to be adaptive...The dominant one gains self at the expense of the more adaptive one, who loses self.

The one who functions for long periods of time in the adaptive position gradually loses the ability to function and make decisions for herself. At that point, it requires no more than a moderate increase in anxiety and stress to trigger the adaptive one into dysfunction, which can be physical illness, emotional illness or social illness, such as drinking, acting out and irresponsible behavior.

The over-functioner:

- ✓ Knows the answers
- ✓ Does well in life
- ✓ Tells the other what to do, how to think, how to feel
- ✓ Tries to help too much
- ✓ Assumes increasing responsibility for the other
- ✓ Does things for the other he or she could do for self
- ✓ Sees the other as "the problem"
- ✓ Demands agreement, bringing on "groupthink"

The under-functioner:

- ✓ Relies on the other to know what to do

- ✓ Asks for advice unnecessarily
- ✓ Takes all offered help, needed or not, becoming passive Asks the other to do what he or she can do for self
- ✓ Sees self as “the problem” Is susceptible to “groupthink”
- ✓ Eventually becomes symptomatic
- ✓ Gives in on everything

By knowing about the patterns we are able, at times, to watch for and see anxiety traveling in a system. When the anxiety is intense, the patterns are more visible. When the anxiety is low, there may be few or no apparent patterns at all. After anxiety reaches a certain level (different for each person and organization), it overpowers thoughtful response. Logic is unavailable. It is as if the cerebral cortex (the thinking part of the brain) is “flooded” with anxiety. When that happens the cerebrum is unable to function properly. Without the ability to be logical or give a thoughtful response, a relationship snag cannot be resolved. So, the anxiety continues to escalate. And as we have previously said, if any of the people caught in the relationship patterns were to manage their own part of the relationship differently, the pattern would disappear.

Sufficient to say, a regressed organization or society focuses on the toxic environment they inhabit, not realizing that their own poor self-definition is a major contributor to the surrounding problems. Leaders are expected to come up with the quick fix solution, rather than helping people through suffering to take more personal responsibility. The progressive organization focuses on how people can be more well-defined, Blue Zone, and thus more mature. It’s easier to focus on the external environment, because the only other option requires one to focus primarily on oneself *first*.

Boundaries

And issue we have not as yet discussed, which is foundational to understanding of the well-defined leader, is that of boundaries. Healthy boundaries identify and separate the self from others and consequently are the foundation of the well-defined person. Boundaries are the fences, both physical and emotional, that mark off our world, creating zones of safety, authority, privacy, and territoriality. Boundaries are essential components because they:

- Define who we are – what we believe, think, feel, and do – where my story ends and yours begins;
- Restrict access and intrusions;
- Protect priorities; and
- Differentiate between personal (Red Zone) and professional (Blue Zone) issues.

Boundary difficulties go hand-in-hand with poor self-definition. As I sink deeper into the morass of my own narrative, my personal boundaries invariably are involved, and I engage others in my emotional drama in unhealthy ways.

For some people, boundaries become too rigid. Vital information -- the lifeblood of any healthy person -- is greatly restricted. Stylized ways of behaving become fixed. Prejudices are constructed and maintained.

For other people, boundaries become too porous or ambiguous. In such cases, the integrity and cohesion of the person is threatened by a lack of definition -- "Who am I, other than an extension of you?"

We are used to the visible boundary markers of our world: fences, hedges, traffic signs. Less obvious, but equally effective, are the internal boundaries that mark off emotional territory: "These are my thoughts, my feelings, my story" or "This is my responsibility, not yours." These internal boundaries are emotional barriers that protect and enhance the integrity of individuals.

A person can be so close-minded that no new thoughts and information reaches her. She can also be so loose with boundaries that she's swayed by every idea that comes along, never able to establish her own position on anything.

Here's a quick test to help you determine the strength and health of your own personal boundaries (based on ideas suggested by C.L. Whitfield in *Boundaries and Relationships*). See if you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Too Porous

- **I have difficulty making up my mind.**
- **I have difficulty saying no to people.**
- **I feel my happiness depends on other people.**
- **I would rather attend to others than to myself.**
- **Others' opinions are more important than mine.**
- **People take and use my things without asking me.**
- **I have difficulty asking for what I want or need.**
- **I would rather go along with other people than express what I would really like to do.**
- **It's hard for me to know what I think and believe.**
- **I have a hard time determining what I really feel.**
- **I don't get to spend much time alone.**
- **I have a hard time keeping a confidence.**
- **I am very sensitive to criticism.**
- **I tend to stay in relationships that are harmful to me.**

- **I tend to take on or feel what others are feeling.**
- **I feel responsible for other people's feelings.**
- **Now let's see if your boundaries might be too rigid.**

Now let's see if your boundaries might be too rigid.

Too Rigid

- **My mind is always made up.**
- **It is much easier for me to say no than to say yes to people.**
- **My happiness never depends on other people.**
- **I would rather attend to myself than to others.**
- **My opinion is more important than others'.**
- **I rarely if ever lend my things to other people.**
- **Most issues appear very black and white to me.**
- **I know exactly what I think and believe on almost every issue.**
- **I have a hard time determining what I really feel.**
- **I spend much time alone.**
- **I keep most of my thoughts to myself.**
- **I am immune to criticism.**
- **I find it difficult to make and maintain close relationships.**
- **I never feel responsible for other people's feelings.**

Creating Healthy Boundaries

Steps to Creating Healthy Internal Boundaries are:

- Learn to recognize your own emotional responses.
- Become aware of when you are reacting to an authority figure, a peer, or a situation.
- Become aware of when the other is reacting to something in you.
- Recognize situations in which you repeat the same behavior and produce the same result.
- Recognize situations that create anxiety for you and acknowledge that fear to self.
- When a conflict arises, talk about your behavior and feelings with someone. Avoid focusing on the other person's behavior.
- Become aware of the people who provoke emotional responses in you.
- Identify the characteristics in that person that provoke the emotional response in you: e.g. he is so arrogant or so needy or so angry.
- Recognizing that, if you are unable to resolve an issue with someone after talking about it then there is another deeper level conflict present.

- If you realize that another issue is present, acknowledge that and get support from a third party.

Steps to Creating Healthy External Boundaries

- Understand your target audience and anticipate what the resistance will be.
- When you experience resistance from others, avoid personalizing the situation.
- Ask questions in a non threatening manner and genuinely seek to understand the issues.
- Do not respond in the moment if you are feeling threatened.
- Organizational blind spots are just that-blind spots. There is no intent to do wrong because people are not aware of the consequences of their actions.
- Determine when you need help, what kind, how much
- Create a safe environment
- Be aware of team values when attacked from outside
- Don't assume same things work for all
- Use dry runs for briefings
- Give feedback
- Share information
- Ask for help
- Have agreed-upon values and expectations / empowerment
- Share information within the directorate
- Create more clarity around task and purpose
- Create more clarity around roles and responsibility
- Re-organize ATO-P R&TD structure around existing programs
- Have clear understanding of the mission, vision and values of ATO-P R&TD
- Have an understanding and tolerance for various work styles
- Be better at giving and receiving feedback
- Show support for each other
- Be able to talk about the experience
- Include more peer review
- Look for people who have insight into your audience
- Value and reinforce the work we do as an organization for the organization
- Raise awareness when feeling micromanaged

Becoming the Well Defined Leader Assessment

Criteria	Yes	No
The capacity to get outside the emotional climate of the organization.		
A willingness to be exposed and vulnerable.		

Persistence in the face of resistance and downright rejection.		
Stamina in the face of sabotage.		
Being “headstrong” and “determined” at least in the eyes of others. Mission is the basis for my decisions.		

Skill	Yes	No
Identify underlying competing values		
Identify internal conflicts in self		
Manage your expectations of self and others		
Ask penetrating questions Frame questions based on the mission and avoid asking for personal cooperation		
Clarify your own position		
Focus on behavior You are responsible for what they do , not how they feel		

Further Reading

- Ken Tucker, *Your Intentional Difference*
- Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*
- Roberta Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*
- Roberta Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*
- M.E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation*
- Karla McLaren, *The Language of Emotion*