

# **The Great Deception in Leadership**

**By Danna Beal**

What looks like power is often not authentic power. Leaders operating from artificial power eventually come tumbling down, as we saw in the corporate scandals and recent financial collapses. The ego-driven leaders who appeared powerful were exposed. The recent debacles demonstrate the intensity of the greed, competition and lack of integrity occurring in companies. It appalled and shocked our sensibilities. Yet similar dramas, in varying degrees, are occurring in companies everywhere.

The biggest tragedy is many organizations will deny this could happen to their own company and cite the mega-crashes as isolated incidents. This is not true. My audiences and clients from a wide variety of industries, from all parts of the country, openly describe their workplaces as having the following symptoms: dishonesty, power struggles, personal agendas, sabotage, gossip, grandiosity, paranoia, lack of communication, lack of trust and little or no teamwork.

Today, the workplace is a stage for a drama of intertwined egos battling and competing for power. Managers are dis-empowering employees; co-workers are hurting and sabotaging one another while fear and insecurity are lurking everywhere. Since most people work and spend three fourths of their waking hours in the workplace, this is a critical problem striking the very fabric of the American culture.

Unfortunately, what is dominating management today is what I call “ego-driven” leadership. But it is not clearly evident to most people that the ego-driven leaders are actually operating from insecurity and fear; even those who appear powerful.

Believing they will insure their financial success by using dishonorable tactics, these leaders unwittingly, give up their own authentic power and integrity. Their desire to create wealth and power for themselves, at the expense of others, stems from their own deep inadequacies. It is an attempt to convince themselves and others, by grasping for external “props,” that they are invincible. Their schemes, ultimately, will not work and the current crisis in corporate America are visual testimony.

Most leaders and middle managers are afraid someone else could outperform and replace them. So they take on roles to protect their image. Some of the ego-driven roles I see are the following: Empire Builder, Micro-manager, Fault Finding Leader, Intimidator, Self-Righteous Leader, and Martyr. These leaders douse the spark of creativity, rather than fan it. This kind of false leadership creates fear among those they lead.

Employees and managers alike participate as though they are performers on a stage. They are drawn into the drama and find it difficult, almost impossible to be out of step from the drama where everyone is

playing out their assigned parts. So great is the fear of losing financial and emotional security, even in the face of dishonesty, corruption, and inequities, not many people will speak up. A few people at the top of an organization cannot take down a whole company. It takes a whole cast of characters, playing out a drama, like puppets on a stage.

As leaders at the top make decisions that primarily benefit themselves, they create an environment where people cannot feel satisfaction and self-worth. Feeling powerless, employees resort to the symptoms described by my audiences in efforts to bolster their own egos and relieve their fear. This further intensifies the drama, the pain and the suffering. This chain reaction has been going on for decades but it is at an all time high.

### **What is the remedy for this pervasive problem?**

It is time to revolutionize the way we do business in America. If we don't heed the opportunity to bring about change, we will continue to see collapses of organizations and companies. Business and government leaders must look at their own organizations and more importantly, they must take a fixed look at their own ego and subsequent management style. It is time to stop pointing the finger of blame and operate from personal responsibility.

Many experts identify the trait that is possessed by truly great leaders, to be the ability to feel compassion and emotion for others. Enlightened leadership is when the spirit in the leader recognizes that same spiritual essence in those they lead. An authentic leader has the following qualities: vision, trust, honor, commitment, affinity, non-resistance, acceptance, integrity and compassion.

Enlightened leaders make decisions that benefit all people. Enlightened leaders do not attempt to be superior to others. They understand it is the participation of everyone that creates the synergy of teamwork and elevates the performance of the entire group.

The key to enlightened leadership is the ability of the leader to look within and discover the limitations and defenses of their own ego. An enlightened leader understands that aligning with ethical principles rather than the artificial power of the ego will lead to success and satisfaction for all. The cost of the wasted energy in drama and organizational dysfunction is immeasurable.

The only change that will be long lasting is when, we, one by one, begin unraveling the drama of reactions and counter-reactions occurring in the workplace today. It is our ego, our self-created identity who is threatened and hooked into reacting and blaming. But every time we blame someone else we give up our own power and we intensify the drama.

As we restore ourselves to our true identities, and give up casting others as the enemy, we free others to give up their ego defenses. As leaders go through this process, they create a safe environment where people can excel and express their true potential. It is time to bring integrity and personal responsibility to the workplace. It starts with each one of us. It must start now.