

# WHAT DO YOU LOOK LIKE ON THE INSIDE?

by Glenn Williams



In his excellent book, *The Leadership Mystique*, Manfred Kets De Vries looks at the importance of a leader's 'interior' condition and how this influences all interactions with others (Kets de Vries, 2006). In considering this he asks questions such as:

- What are the problems that preoccupy this person?
- What has emotional resonance – or connects deeply with him or her?
- What is the personal script that influences decisions and behavior?
- What influence does the individual's social setting or context have?

While holding a relatively high view of leadership, Kets De Vries admits there is also a darker side of leadership. He encourages leaders to be more aware of the **contest between the conflicting force of impulses, and defences to be managed**; a contest between what is visible and what is hidden. He refers to this as the "Core Conflictual Relationship Theme, or CCRT" (Kets de Vries, 2006, pp. 38). CCRT is composed of past experiences and relationships that influence a person's style of leadership, his/her capacity to calibrate their 'inner' world, and how change is embraced and managed.

## The Role of the Fool...

Kets de Vries goes as far as saying that every leader needs a 'fool'. The fool isn't the leader. The fool is a *foil* for the leader.

*The fool is a very traditional role, the stabilizer of kings and queens (and other leaders) down through the ages. The fool, a guardian of reality, uses antics and humor to prevent the pursuit of foolish action, avoid group-think, show the leader his or her reflection, and remind the leader of the transience of power (Kets de Vries, 2006, pp. 261).*

## Leaders must be challenged to be healthy internally

Anne Mulcahy, arguably the greatest CEO of Xerox, after taking on the role at a time when it was at risk of bankruptcy, states that, "It is imperative that leaders surround themselves with at least a few good critics... If you're not careful, you can begin to delude yourself and lose touch" (Heenan, 2012, pp. 24). This is what I like about the *servant leadership* paradigm. It "starts with the internal orientation of the leader that exhibits a readiness to renounce the superior status often attached to leadership, and embraces greatness by way of servanthood" (Sendaya and Cooper, 2012, pp.2).

## What's the bottom line?

Leaders in particular need to be willing to have their assumptions and beliefs **challenged** so that they are better at empowering and working with others. This is unlikely to happen if a person's interior condition is unhealthy.

In contrast to this, allowing a 'fool' to challenge your conventional thinking and possible blindspots is both a safeguard against unhealthy decisions, and an indicator of your true internal leadership capacity.

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### References

- Heenan, David. (2012). *Leaving on Top: Graceful Exits for Leaders* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Kets de Vries, Manfred. (2006). *The Leadership Mystique: Leading Behavior in the Human Enterprise*. Harlow, England: Prentice Hall.
- Sendaya, Sen, and Brian Cooper. (2012). "Servant Leadership Behaviour Scale: A hierarchical model and test of construct validity," *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*.