

Power Has Its Weakness

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



If you were shipwrecked and stuck on an island with someone, what type of person would you want to be stuck with? Beyond the obvious answer of being with your mate, family member, or someone with survival skills, what type of personality would you prefer? If you were stuck with one of the following types of people, which would you pick:

- Egotistical
- Whining
- Aloof
- Negative
- Controlling

Not a lot of great choices, right? Better choices would obviously be people who are encouraging, personable, considerate, positive, genuine, and unselfish. But if these types of people weren't an option, what type of person would you choose to be stuck with? Who would be the least desirable? Perhaps the least desirable would be someone who is egotistical. Self-centered and arrogant people who want all the attention on themselves can be very difficult to spend time with.

Being with people who promote two-way conversation and show interest in others is much preferred to hearing someone brag incessantly about themselves. Yet, we all know people who think and talk mostly about themselves. Some people, especially those in positions of power, expect to be admired. They expect to be the center of attention. Their hubris exudes as they refer to their title, authority, control, possessions, or publicized image. Politicians, public officials, large-company corporate executives, professional athletes, famous actors, and other high-profile people are notorious for being self-absorbed.

You might be wondering, were they born that way? No, they weren't. They became that way. Yes, they probably had negative influences in their past, but they own their character. You might label these people narcissists, but be careful. Narcissism is not a binary trait. Narcissism is not all or nothing. It is a spectrum. Many people are narcissistic to a degree. But even though most people don't meet the requirements of Narcissistic Personality Disorder and aren't technically considered narcissists, egotistical people certainly exhibit narcissistic behaviors.

Spending time with powerful people and hearing their stories might be fascinating for a while, but can become boring if not annoying at some point. This is bad news for egotists who are in positions of leadership and expect people to follow them. When leaders show little interest in people, their followers don't feel very appreciated and therefore aren't very motivated.

Of course not all leaders or famous people are egomaniacs. Nor is having power and its associated accoutrements inherently bad. But without intentional self-control, power and prestige have a way of turning people's attention to themselves.

The more authority and control people have, the higher their likelihood of thinking they are better than others. People with power, whether based on title, authority, resources, wealth, or knowledge, tend to lose perspective. The more that power becomes their norm, the more likely they are to think more highly of themselves than they should. They forget how much of their success was not of their own doing. They lose

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touch with reality. Perhaps this is why employee surveys find that over two-thirds of company employees don't trust their organization's senior leaders.

In contrast to self-centered leaders, humble leaders give others credit when things go well. They use "we" rather than "I" as their pronoun of choice. They don't need titles, fame, executive perks, or other status symbols to feel secure. They are grateful for their followers and credit their followers for their success. They are genuinely interested in how others are doing. They build up others rather than themselves.

Humility is not to be confused with being weak, meek, or timid. Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. Humility is not self-deprecation or letting people mistreat you. Healthy humility gives attention to others because you are secure in yourself.

Some think strength and confidence come through audacity—if not arrogance. The reality is that the most confident and capable people are humble. They don't feel the need to show off or prove themselves because they know they are capable. Their abilities speak for themselves. They are self-assured. In contrast, the insecure lack confidence and try to make up for it by speaking boastfully. They take advantage of whatever external power they have to make up for their internal self-doubt.

Here are a few principles to keep in mind to avoid being perceived as arrogant, particularly for leaders and people in positions of power:

- Give credit where credit is due. Your abilities may have been a key contributor, but rarely are you the total reason for any achievement.
- Don't assume your success is due to your efforts. Bad behaviors as well as decisions are often offset by others' hard work.
- Be grateful. Don't forget that others were instrumental in your success and that continued success depends on others.
- Let your competence speak for itself. True knowledge, abilities, and success will become known without you highlighting it.
- Be patient with others. Give people a chance to learn from their mistakes. Remember, you probably made the same mistakes too.
- Make others feel heard, valued, and understood. Ask questions, get to know people, and show appreciation for what they do.
- Stay grounded. Don't lose touch with reality including how most people live and how real work is done.

Apply these principles and you will garner tremendous respect. Your constituents will feel valued and be more likely to give you their best. And if you are ever stuck on an island with others, you'll be a lot more enjoyable to be around.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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