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Good Behavior, Bad Behavior

By Paperitalo Staff

I have met only two people in my entire life that were magnetically attractive. And, of course, I am speaking metaphysically here--nothing to do with electrons. This attraction is distinguishable from sexual attraction, companionship attraction, romantic attraction and those who are just plain interesting for whatever reason.

The first time I ran into a person like this was, remarkably, in high school. This male was moderately handsome, but came from an undistinguishable family--his dad was a lineman for the local power company. He was smart, but not unusually smart. He drove a rusted out 1959 Ford Fairlane, with different colored front fenders from the rest of the car (the front fenders had rusted out so badly, he went to a junk yard and replaced them, hence the different color). He did not dress fashionably. He was the quarterback on our football team, but our football team set the all-time Ohio record for most games lost in a row up to that time. He was not known for wild partying or prankster activities of any kind. His life was dull and boring (he and I did like to take his .30-06 and shoot groundhogs while driving down country roads on Sunday afternoons--did that from inside the Ford one time and nearly went deaf!). Last I heard of him, his family and he were Methodist missionaries in Peru. He had more friends than anyone else in our class.

Such people, at least the two I have known, are attractive for one simple capacity they have: they are interested in you. They have the least amount of narcissism of anyone you will ever meet. They are interested in you first, and you have to prompt them to ask how things are going with them.

Since most of us have at least a small dose of narcissism, finding someone whose first genuine priority is to find out how we are doing is extremely satisfying. We love to talk about ourselves (because of our own narcissism). Finding someone who listens day in and day out while we talk about ourselves is the tiramisu of relationships.

This says nothing about their other qualities (leadership, high standards, grumpiness and so forth). Those seem unrelated to a certain extent. However, think what such an attitude can do for your working relationship with people.

First, others will come to you, not avoid you. If you are caught up in talking about yourself all the time, do you wonder why no one wants to visit with you? Get interested in others and, whether at work or in a social setting, others will seek you out.

As a manager, it is great to have this attitude. Although I said it seems to have nothing to do with leadership in particular, it will naturally evoke leadership, for if co-workers come to you and tell you their problems, you will have a chance to lead. Contrast this to the grumpy boss that bites your head off for every little infraction-you do not want to spend any more time with them than possible, and, most likely, you will avoid telling them the big problems.

The trouble with most big time narcissists is they do not know who they are. You can print out this column, lay it anonymously on their desk and circle this: THIS COLUMN DESCRIBES YOU and they still will not get it.

We all have a little bit of narcissism, but, again, the really bad cases do not recognize it in themselves. And, even when you do know you have a fair dose, it is still hard to break the old habits. Shrinks I have talked to over the years say narcissism is the character flaw that can almost never be cured. Yet, it is worth trying, for the rewards are great in management, relationships and general harmony in life. Purge your narcissism, be more like my two friends, and you will sleep better, for you will have better relations all around.

Safety is both an expression of narcissism (taking responsibility for your own safety behavior) and one of watching out for others. It takes both behaviors to be a zero incident mill.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##