

Executive Coaching with Alpha Males

(Excerpts from *Harvard Business Review* May, 2004 article, "Coaching the Alpha Male," by Ludeman & Erlandson)

Don't forget: You can be Alpha and be a Woman, & you can be Male & not be Alpha

“Alphas think very fast – This can prevent them from listening to others, especially those who don’t communicate in “alpha-speak”. Their impatience can cause them to miss subtle but important details. Alphas have opinions about everything & rarely admit those opinions might be wrong or incomplete.

Early in life, alphas realize that they are smarter than most people. Because their instincts have often been proven right, they put their complete faith in their instincts, and feel justified in focusing on the flaws in other people’s ideas or arguments. As a result, coworkers (& direct reports) get intimidated, making learning from alphas difficult.

The more pressure an alpha feels to perform, the more he shifts his leadership style from constructive and challenging to intimidating or even abusive. Organizations become dysfunctional when people avoid dealing the difficult alphas and instead work around him or simply pay him lip service.

Unemotional and analytical in their cognitive style, alphas are eager to learn “things”, but have little natural curiosity about people or feelings. They rely on exhaustive data to reach business conclusions, but often make snap judgments about other people.

Because they believe that paying attention to feelings, even their own, detracts from getting the job done, they’re surprisingly oblivious to the effect they have on others. They’re judgmental of colleagues who can’t control emotions, yet often fail to notice how they may vent their own anger and frustration, or, they dismiss their own outbursts, (arguing that different rules must apply to them given their leadership pressures).

The more executive authority alphas achieve, the more pressure they feel & the more pronounced their faults become.”

ALPHA LEADERS: Strengths & Weaknesses

<u>Attribute</u>	<u>Value to the Organization</u>	<u>Risk to the Organization</u>
Self-confident, Opinionated	Acts decisively; has good intuition	Is closed minded, domineering, and intimidating
Highly intelligent	Sees beyond the obvious; takes creative leaps	Dismisses or demeans colleagues who disagree with him/her
Action oriented	Produces results	Is impatient; resists change that might improve results
High performance expectations for self and others	See and achieves high goals	Is constantly dissatisfied; fails to appreciate and motivate others
Direct communication style	Moves people to action	Generates fear and a gossip-filled “CYA” culture of compliance
Highly disciplined	Extraordinarily productive; finds time & energy for high level of work & fitness	Has unreasonable expectations of self & others; misses signs of burnout or pain
Rational – Unemotional	Is laser focused and objective	Is difficult to connect with; doesn’t inspire; has problem empathizing

Adapted from Harvard Business Review, May 2004 article, “Coaching the Alpha Male,” Ludeman & Erlandson

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Executive Coaching of the Alpha Leader

Two questions to consider and respond to are:

1. *“Do you want to change?”*
2. *“Are you willing to do whatever it takes to meet and exceed these professional, leadership change and improvement goals?”*

Coaching Steps

- A. Getting Her/His Attention (Assessments’ ID of Strengths and Weaknesses**
- B. Expecting and Getting Her/His Commitment (in word and deed, including growth & change through humility and discomfort),**
- C. Speaking Her/His Language (The real and hard impact on his/her and others' careers, and the real and hard, bottom-line impact on the organization’s values, legal liability, motivation, loyalty, collaboration, innovation, teamwork, high performance, and strategic business goals.)**
- D. Hitting Just Hard Enough to Hurt (Dealing with the actual comments & experiences of others who may have been damaged and/or who may have witnessed previously deniable but now hard-to-deny examples of incompetency, arrogance, volatility, intimidation, favoritism, miscommunication, interpersonal blunders, disrespect, discrimination, micro-management, egocentrism, inflexibility or retribution.)**
- E. Engaging His/Her Intellectual Curiosity, Competitiveness and Personal and Career Survival Instincts (As to how his/her own problems with Defensiveness-Arrogance vs. Openness-Humility, have or may be sabotaging others and him/herself).**