



Examining the alpha male at work

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They're ambitious, self-confident, competitive and opinionated.

Often brilliant, they can be difficult to work with and unpleasant to be around.

They're the alpha males.

And they represent three out of four senior executives and half of all middle managers in corporate America.

Kate Ludeman Ph.D., and Eddie Erlandson M.D., are experts on the alpha male phenomenon, having researched and written the book "Alpha Male Syndrome" and built an entire consulting practice around coaching -- and dealing with -- alpha males.

According to Ludeman and Erlandson, alpha males tend to fall into one of four types:

Commanders. Intense, charismatic leaders who set the tone, mobilize the troops and infuse an organization with energy without necessarily getting into details. (They cite George Bush, Carly Fiorina and Donald Trump as examples.)

Visionaries. Curious, expansive, intuitive, proactive and future-oriented, they see possibilities and opportunities that others either miss or dismiss as impractical. And they inspire others with their vision. (They cite Tony Blair and Bill Gates and Michael Dell as examples.)

Strategists. Methodical, systematic, often brilliant thinkers who are oriented toward data and facts, strategists have superior analytic judgment and a sharp eye for pat-

terns and problems. (They list Henry Kissinger and Boston Red Sox President Larry Lucchino as typical strategists.)

Executors. Tireless, goal-oriented doers who push plans forward with an eye for detail, relentless discipline and keen oversight, surmounting all obstacles and holding everyone accountable for their commitments. (Examples include Dell's CEO Kevin B. Rollins and Gordon Brown -- presumed successor to Tony Blair as UK Prime Minister.)

Along with its amazing strengths, each type also carries some potentially disastrous liabilities.

For instance, commanders tend to isolate themselves from useful critical feedback; Visionaries are prone to extreme ADD (attention deficit disorder) and to bending the facts to get their ideas accepted; Strategists handle data better than people and executors tend to engender mutinies due to their tendency to micromanage, find fault and be slow to praise, yet quick to blame.

While it is currently the alphas who dominate, Ludeman and Erlandson say the climate is changing.

They believe that many of those who came to power in the early 90s, would not make it today. Why? Because of the critical mass of women in middle management and a corresponding emphasis on collaboration, rather than confrontation and Emotional Intelligence as much or more than I.Q.

"Today's employees who are well educated -- increasingly female and concerned with job satisfaction and work-life balance would sooner quit than put up with an abusive manager," Ludeman says.

Examining the alpha male at work

"Sometimes, talented people want to work for someone precisely because he or she isn't an aggressive alpha. That's an important factor if you believe, as many people do, that the main function of corporate leaders is to attract, retain and develop talent in their companies."

While Ludeman and Erlandson believe that non-alphas have much to offer an organization, they concede that those who aspire to upper management won't get there without adopting at least a few alpha traits.

They say that perhaps the best combination of all in a leader is the alpha assertiveness and willpower combined with a softer, more consensus-building management style.

Adding that, "Those who have little need to dominate a room can be very useful in opening up the culture and giving stability to an organization."

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