



The Seven Deadly Sins – Greed and Leadership

On current trends, by 2010, an estimated 12 million adults and one million children will be obese. The average eight-year-old now eats 1,200 calories a day more than a child of that age did in the 1950s.

Well, if that is the case shouldn't there be many more obese leaders in our workplaces. But look around you now and what do you see? What size is your CEO? Is your finance director fat? Ask five people near to you to name a famous leader and I bet you get a list of thin people. Okay, Churchill was a little on the weighty side but Thatcher, Branson, Hitler, Jack Welch, and Lord Browne struggle to get a body mass index of 23 between them.

So what's going on? Do those infamous fat cats really exist at all? Has private equity really recruited all the big leaders? Academic research is particularly light on this topic and whilst it is easy to find papers on charismatic leaders, contextual leadership and transformational leadership, even the trait theories of leadership are silent on the issue of size.

Why should this be? Do the overweight not aspire to leadership positions? Are followers only willing to accept the lean and mean? Are we so superficial that we cannot accept a leader is a little on the hefty side? Or alternatively, is it that skinny people are so deprived by their diet and calorific abstinence that they satisfy their longing through megalomania?

After all, it is human to put butter on mashed potatoes and to lust a chocolate gateau instead of a salad, and to savour the port and stilton. Perhaps, the person who denies themselves these luxuries, satisfies their hungers elsewhere. So, does obesity create a sense of well-being which mitigates the desire to lead?

If so, is there a contradictory psychological weakness in the skinny and anxious that leads them to satisfy themselves and their desires through the leadership and control of others? If so, is this safe? Is there a danger that your managing director who appears rational and focused one-day, is in truth potentially unstable as a result of his or her fixation on the need to succeed (e.g. exceed objectives, increase market share, beat the competition, get bigger, earn a bonus etc). And can this obsession lead to rule breaking, overzealous pushing of envelopes or even criminal activity?

If this is the case, would the shareholders, staff, customers and pensioners of Enron and WorldCom have been better off today if one or two of their senior executives had carried a bit more weight?

Richard Wyatt-Haines speaks and facilitates internationally to bring alive, and make very applicable his thinking and approaches so that you can identify:

- Where you are going
- How you can get there quicker
- Why people will follow you

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