

Work Daze: The clown in your cube

by *Bob_Goldman*

If you've been wondering who to blame for your puny paycheck, the paucity of your promotions, and the total meltdown of your career, here's good news. It's not you who is to blame; it's your family.

No, I'm not talking about that maladjusted bunch of malcontents who sponge off you in your overleveraged bungalow in Foreclosure Farms. I'm talking about the folks who raised you up from a pup: Mom, Dad, Brother, Sister, and don't forget Uncle Wally who lived in the basement.

It's true! Your toxic reaction to your nuclear family as a kid is informing and influencing your relations with bosses and co-workers today. Or so suggests Sylvia Lafair, an "expert in leadership, workplace behavior and relationships," in her new book, "Don't Bring It To Work, Breaking the Family Patterns that Limit Success."

Lafair's gift is in helping executives "discover the correlation between their own family history and their present-day responses to behaviors at work." This version of workplace therapy, honed in leadership retreats in New Mexico, can result in "Ah-ha moments" and "career changing breakthroughs," starting, no doubt, when the executive steps out from the sweat lodge, strips naked, picks up a tribal drum, and acknowledges in ancient Sumerian, a language they previously didn't know they could speak, "their engagement in one or more of these unconscious behaviors and their destructive affect on their career and family."

(In full disclosure, I may be slightly embroidering a very sober and serious process that is probably conducted in a Holiday Inn meeting room with no drums, no sweat, and the participants wearing J. Crew, but a fellow can dream.)

After serving a life sentence in corporate America, you will have to excuse my innate skepticism of any workplace self-improvement program — a reflex due, Lafair might suggest, to my own childhood experience of learning that it was Uncle Wally and not the tooth fairy who celebrated every new tooth by emptying my piggy bank. But I must admit that I do find at least a smidgen of truth in this theory of family influence.

Who among us has not been the victim of a steely CEO-type erupt in a stinging string of invectives and epithets simply because we have made a tiny, inconsequential mistake, like forgetting to fill the company jet with canapes, or fuel. And who among us, while assaulted with threats and recriminations, has not said to ourselves, "Gee, here's a guy who didn't get a G.I. Joe for Christmas."

No doubt our family history influences our behavior in the workplace family! My quarrel with Dr. Lafair is not that such dynamics exist; I object to her suggestion that it is to your benefit to recognize and resolve these character flaws. In my experience, it is exactly these destructive psychological imbalances that are

essential for success in business today.

For example, consider three of the 13 "common behavior patterns" that Lafair describes as personality types that can impact workplaces negatively:

The Pleaser "cannot handle truth," says Lafair, choosing instead to "say 'yes' to everything, and rarely offering an opinion." The genesis of the "chameleon-like stance" of the pleaser can easily be seen in the efforts of a needy child to please his parents. Sad, perhaps, even tragic, but hardly a drawback for workplace success. No one rises higher, or faster, up the org chart than the mindless sycophants who do nothing but agree with their bosses. Look around you. Truth is a very nice commodity, but wouldn't you rather have a corner office and a leased Jaguar?

The Persecutor is "a bully who loves to control; sees others as weak and sentimental; needs to feel important; gives and withholds information as a means of exercising power." In other words "a highly effective and well-compensated manager. Sure, you could cure this individual, turning a persecutor into a pussycat, but then the entire organization could crumble. Persecutors can "cause depression, sleep disorders, ulcers, high-blood pressure, lowered self-confidence and a sense of inadequacy and isolation." LaFair thinks this is a negative. To most of our managers, it's a job well done.

Finally, there is The Clown, time-wasting "bozos, jokers, smart-asses and motor mouths" who "know every detail about trivial issues and give their own 2 cents just to get a rise out of their colleagues." You might reject Lafair's description of these "pubescent employees who are not high-potential candidates."

Personally, I'm impressed she knows you so well.

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