

COACHING THE ALPHA MALE LEADERS

Alpha males represent about 70% of all senior executives (Harvard University).

As the label implies they are the people who aren't happy unless they are the top dogs. Although there are plenty of successful female leaders with equally strong personalities, do women rarely if ever match the complete alpha profile.

Alphas reach the top ranks in large organisations, because they are natural leaders – comfortable with responsibility in a way nonalphas can never be. Most people feel stress when they have to make important decisions; alphas get stressed when tough decisions don't rest in their capable hands. For them being in charge delivers such a thrill, they willingly take on levels of responsibility most rational people would find overwhelming. In fact, it's hard to imagine the modern corporation without alpha leaders.

Then why do so many of them need Executive Counseling/Coaching?

As it turns out "alphas" quintessential strengths are also what make them so challenging and often frustrating to work with. Independent and action oriented, alphas take extraordinarily high levels of performance for granted, both in themselves and in others. The "Alphas" think very fast and this rapid processing can prevent them from listening to others – especially those who don't communicate in alpha language. Their impatience can cause them to miss subtle but important details. Alphas, moreover, have opinions about everything, and they rarely admit that those opinions might be wrong or incomplete. Early in life, alphas realize that they are smarter than most people, smarter perhaps than even their parents and teachers. As adults they believe that their insights are unique and therefore put complete faith in their instincts. Because their intuitions are so often proven right, alphas feel justified in focusing on the flaws in other people's ideas or arguments. As a result, coworkers and colleagues get intimidated, which makes learning from alphas difficult. The more pressure an alpha feels to perform, the more he tends to shift his leadership style from constructive and challenging to intimidating or even abusive. Organisations become dysfunctional when people avoid dealing with a difficult alpha instead they work around him or simply pay him lip service. Unemotional and analytical in their cognitive thinking style, alphas are eager to learn about business, technology, and "things" but have little or no natural curiosity about people or feelings. Because they believe that paying attention to feelings, even their own, detracts from getting the job done. They are surprisingly oblivious to the effect they have on others. They are judgemental of colleagues who can't control emotions yet often fail to notice how they vent their own anger and frustration. Or they dismiss their own outbursts, arguing that the same rules should not apply to top dogs.

Alphas make perfect midlevel managers, where their primary role is to oversee processes. But as they approach CEO level, they are expected to become inspirational people managers. Most organisations are not good at helping alphas make the required transition. Alphas require skilled coaches because it's very difficult for them to ask for help or even to acknowledge that they need it. They are normally stubborn and resistant to feedback. After all, they haven't gotten where they are by being self-reflective.

As much as they love talking about accountability, they often fail to see that their own communication style, rather than someone else's shortcomings, is what is creating the roadblock.

A 360-degree assessment is a wake-up call for most alphas. They say: "Wow, these are people I deeply respect – strong performers – and they think that about me? I can't believe they are afraid to push back or that they think I am stubborn and closed to their opinions." Alphas need a coach who helps



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them realize why they need to change their behaviour, since alphas think in charts, graphs and metrics, for maximum impact it is best to present the coaching data in alpha language. It is important to teach them how to read and analyse people as they often don't feel what makes the other one tick. Alphas are uncomfortable showing vulnerability or taking a break from constant action. The coaching process makes them feel unproductive and out of control. The Coach's challenge is to preserve an alpha's strengths while correcting his weaknesses. Alphas hate touchy-feely coaches. They need coaches who have achieved a lot by themselves.

When strengths turns into weakness coaching is needed

Alpha Attribute	Value to Organisation	Risk to Organisation
self-confident and 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
action oriented	produces results	is impatient, resists process changes that might improve results
high performance expectations for himself and others	sets and achieve high goals	is constantly dissatisfied, fails to appreciate and motivate others
direct communication style	moves people to action	generates fear and gossip-filled, CYA cultures of compliance
highly disciplined	is extraordinarily productive, finds time and energy for a high level of work and fitness	has unreasonable expectations of self and others, misses signs of burnout
unemotional	is laser focused and objective	is difficult to connect with, doesn't inspire teams

(source: Harvard University)