

# **Paradox**

**Office Lighthouse Discussion Materials**

## **Paradox**

### **Chapter 1 - Success**

A paradox, by its nature, is a contradiction, often absurd, that expresses a possible truth.

“Leaders in all fields suffer from the paradoxes of success: with heart breaking frequency they feel that the costs of their victories outweigh the rewards. Their power often leads to arrogance, isolation and stagnation.” (The Paradox of Success by John R. O’Neil)

O’Neil states that, “the more I studied, the more apparent it became to me that the greatest problems of any leader lie deep inside the psyche – in territory often called the shadow.” Physiologists Jung calls it the “dark side” of man.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Can you think of any other examples of contradictions / paradoxes as defined above?
- 2) Depression, arrogance, isolation, and stagnation are not considered positives in our culture. Why are most leaders reluctant to deal with these “shadow” problems?
- 3) American leaders are trained to prize unequivocal statements and firm measures in business. Why? Do these relate to secret-keeping and closed systems of inquiry in organizations and companies?
- 4) “Leaders feel an obligation to be happy because of their privileged status. They shrug off hurts and disappointment, thus avoiding pain.”  
(*The Paradox of Success*) In your opinion, what might be the consequences of this behavior?
- 5) The Bible states that God “opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.” How might this relate to the paradox of success?
- 6) Can an organization/company change to help its leaders deal with the “dark side” or is this best handled by the leaders in their own private life? Why?

## Paradox

### Chapter 2 - Paradox

“Success demands confidence. A positive self-image is an immeasurable asset, but even a normally healthy ego can easily become inflated on a diet of mythic success. If all we hear are messages of praise and flattery, the swollen ego comes to crave ever more applause, more good news, and shuts out any hint of things that may be done wrong. If we become convinced that we have nothing more to learn, ignoring errors that could provide valuable lessons are disregarded or covered up instead. So confidence gradually turns into a dangerous sense of infallibility. (Think of the leaders of American’s auto industry dismissing those “funny little cars” from Germany and Japan.)” *The Paradox of Success*, by John R.O’Neil

The paradox (shadow/dark side) of *confidence is infallibility*.

Comment.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Do you have any personal experience with a lack of confidence? Explain.
- 2) What’s been your experience with overconfidence?
- 3) How should one deal with the (paradox infallibility) shadow/dark side of confidence?
- 4) Healing depression with drugs and therapy is a major business in this country. How might this be related to confidence and its paradox?
- 5) “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” (The Bible). How might this relate to confidence and its paradox infallibility?
- 6) What character flaws in leaders are an indications they are falling victims to the paradox of confidence?

## **Paradox**

### Chapter 3 - Dedication

“Success calls for dedicated sacrifices of leisure time, recreation, and energy for family and friends. Such sacrifices are understood to be temporary; one day there will be enough success to pay loved ones back, get back into shape, and devote time to a cherished activity. But an appropriate level of dedication can easily be subverted into workaholic behavior, leaving you hopelessly stuck in a quagmire of obligations, compulsions, and prideful stubbornness.” (The Paradox of Success, John O’Neill)

The paradox (dark side) of *dedication* is workaholic behavior -- workaholism.  
Comment on the above.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1) What experience do you have with workaholic behavior?
- 2) How much work is too much? Can we count on dedication to produce success?
- 3) Instead of being driven by success, should our dedication be driven by self-perceived responsibility to: company, boss, clients, wife, or family? If not, what should be the root source of dedication?
- 4) How can you know when to ease up on workload and start to enjoy the benefits? What do you think retirement should look like?
- 5) “Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all things will be given to you as well.” (The Bible) How might this relate to dedication and its paradox, workaholism?
- 6) Is workaholism a form of co-dependent behavior? If so what treatment might be prescribed?

## **Paradox**

### Chapter 4 - Control

Typically, successful people value control – over both externals and themselves. Hands-on management, decisiveness, attention to detail, and a comprehensive understanding of one’s business are all useful disciplines for gaining success. Yet the drive to maintain success can turn control into inflexibility, a compulsive grip that chokes off initiative and adaptation. In large organizations, sound principles of uniformity and risk management can turn into mindless regulations filling massive policy manuals. (The Paradox of Success John R. O’Neil)

The paradox (dark side) of control is inflexibility.

Comment on the above.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1) How do you feel about control in relationships?
- 2) What has been your experience with control in business?
- 3) What behavior traits define control? Inflexibility?
- 4) Data processing in business produces instant information that can be used to control business. What has been your experience with this kind of control?
- 5) “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law (regulations) so that we serve in the new way of the spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” (The Bible) How might this relate to inflexibility, the dark side of control?
- 6) How do you deal with inflexible people?

## **Paradox**

### Chapter 5 - Courage

Success often requires courage for risk-taking-the willingness to buck conventional wisdom and trust your instincts. But when the shadow takes over- when we feel invulnerable or compelled to act out some hidden impulse, or are no longer truly challenged- it can drive courage over the brink into foolhardiness. For example, an all-out last run down an icy ski slope is where recklessness can be a calculated risk that imperils only the daredevil. But elsewhere, heedless risk-taking can be catastrophic. (The Paradox of Success)

The dark side paradox of courage is foolhardiness.

Comment on the above.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Do you consider yourself a high risk person or a low risk person? Why?
- 2) Why are you attracted to people with courage or why do you avoid them?
- 3) Where do you see the line between courage and its paradox, foolhardiness?
- 4) Any particular example of foolhardiness affecting your life in a defining way?
- 5) “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.” (The Bible) How might this help in seeing the difference between courage and foolhardiness?
- 6) If you are involved in a foolhardy relationship with a person, how would you manage your involvement?

## **Paradox**

### Chapter 6 - Alertness

Success requires alertness – the capacity to scan widely, to spot both opportunity and trouble from a distance. But full-spectrum alertness can gradually degenerate into a narrow focus on what looks good at the moment. This is fed by opportunities that promise quick profit, and by the filtering of information as it ascends the corporate pyramid. To truly serve success, alertness must operate over a broad band, picking up danger signals as well as attractive ones. (The Paradox of Success)

The dark side paradox of alertness is narrow focus.

Comment on the above.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Do you believe alertness is a gift or a quality one can develop? Why?
- 2) Are you attracted to people who are focused or those who are less intense? Why?
- 3) Where do you see the line between alertness and its paradox, narrow focus?
- 4) Any particular example of narrow focus affecting your life in a defining way?
- 5) “The Lord our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of Him about how to do it in the prescribed way.” (The Bible) How might this idea be related to the paradox of alertness (global thinking) and narrow focus (linear thinking)?
- 6) If you are involved in a relationship with a narrow focused person, how would you manage your involvement?