



ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH, INC

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DIFFERENTIAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES

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SHARK STRATEGY - Sharks view the world as a game of “win-lose” and are determined to do everything they can to come out on top, without concern for the cost. They believe that there is never enough of the pie to go around (scarcity model) and attempt to control people, events, etc., lest they be controlled by them. Since they are driven by self-preservation rather than underlying principles, sharks have no larger vision to guide them during times of crisis. Under pressure, they dig in and barrel ahead rather than shift gears. When they make a mistake, they are masters at deflecting responsibility and/or scapegoating others.

Although often charming and seemingly confident, beneath the surface sharks are usually riddled with self-doubt, distrust and anger. They mistakenly believe that outward power, prestige, etc. can fill the void within. While they once dominated most organizations, sharks do not have the savvy to motivate the highly skilled and diverse workers of today who resent simply being told how “high to jump.” As a result, they are not able to effectively lead modern, mission based organizations.

CARP STRATEGY - In contrast to the aggressiveness of sharks, carps have a passive approach to leadership and usually give in or get out under pressure. They put a premium on being nice, getting along and avoiding the potential risk of conflict inherent in saying what they really think or feel. As a result, they usually get outmaneuvered or eaten by sharks who view them easy prey to help fuel their drive to the top. Rather than lash back, carps often try to use their role as victim to their advantage (Lose-Win). They are too caught up in the security of the status quo to be a vital player in organizational change. Their role is to be on the sidelines, cheering others on, trying to meet their needs and carping (often behind closed doors) about organizational problems or how badly they are treated.

Despite their many attractive and valuable qualities, carps, like sharks, are insecure and long for the respect and recognition they never seem to get. After many years of overextending themselves to others and being passed over for promotion despite their hard work and loyalty to the organization, carps often “burn out.”

DOLPHIN STRATEGY - Dolphins are driven by both a deep sense of vision and a pragmatic realism that enables them to mobilize others towards effective organizational change. They have an abundance mentality that allows them to seek solutions to problems which incorporate the needs of all parties (win-win). They also recognize that there is often truth in a variety of differing perspectives and have the capacity for “both-and” rather than “either-or” thinking. When in doubt, they look to underlying principles such as fairness and personal accountability to guide them.

While the sharks are plotting their next move and the carps are looking for a safe place to hide, dolphins are busy working cooperatively to zero in on what needs to be done and the best

way to do it. When stuck, they step back and reexamine both their methods and goals. As a result, they adapt fluidly to changing times. Since dolphins have a positive sense of identity that is not based on whether they win or lose, they are free to take risks and view their failures as learning opportunities. They know that they always have options even if all they can do is to change their perspective on a problem they are unable to solve.

Dolphins, like sharks, can be highly assertive in going after what they want. However, unlike sharks who simply want to further their own interests, dolphins strive to achieve a larger vision which serves the organizational mission.

Please note that:

- 1) Most leaders have some shark, carp and dolphin qualities although, under pressure, one style generally predominates. Many dolphins were carps until they tired of playing the role of victim and began to take charge of their lives.
- 2) Sharks usually change only after an extraordinary external event forces them to examine themselves (often for the first time). A highly talented dolphin can sometimes motivate a shark to change through persistence, focused confrontation and the use of resources such as Employee Assistance Programs. However, this process can be highly draining and take up time and energy which might be better spent in other areas.
- 3) Dolphin leaders can help carps progress towards dolphinhood by encouraging them to take calculated risks, resolve rather than complain about problems and overcome the fears which hold them back.
- 4) Once they have eaten all the carps, sharks usually turn on each other, creating a very bloody pool. Dolphins use their intelligence and jujitsu skills to outmaneuver sharks, who are usually highly predictable and therefore easy to outwit or sidestep.
- 5) When sharks make it to the top, their time on their coveted throne is often short lived due to their inability to respond effectively to external changes, internal strife (often caused by those who resent their arbitrary use of authority and attempt to motivate through fear) and their own arrogance, which blinds them to personal weaknesses or external pitfalls. Sharks who survive usually do so with the help of a large group of loyal carps who run interference for them and are quick to repair damage when it occurs. Organizations run by sharks are usually rife with serious internal problems such as battles over turf, excessive hierarchy, low morale, rule by memo and “power plays.”
- 6) Carps rarely make into top management levels because they do not have strong ambition or leadership skills. However, they sometimes land in upper level management positions due to their perseverance, popularity and deep loyalty to the organization. Carp run organizations are usually conservative and stable, but lack vitality and a sense of collective purpose.
- 7) Organizations led by dolphins usually have a clearly articulated mission statement and a group of employees dedicated to fulfilling this mission. They are often non-hierarchical and organized around task completion rather than rules or rank. Since dolphins use their excellent

intuition to anticipate and respond to trends, their organizations are usually on the cutting edge, creatively trying out new products and services. When what they are doing is no longer working, dolphins regroup, critically examine relevant issues and quickly make necessary changes. This process of self-evaluation focuses on process issues as much as outcomes.

8) While sharks always seem to be swimming upstream and carps treading water, dolphins recognize that they often have no control over the “flow” of the organization. They are adept at “going with it” until just the right moment to shift direction (like steering a canoe around obstacles while gliding downstream).

