

“The challenge and opportunity is for South African managers to learn the art and science of good management.”

Carl Jung, the groundbreaking psychologist who boosted our understanding of the human psyche wrote about a thing that all leaders should study with care. It should be mandatory for leaders to get to know this thing intimately. It is a very big thing; it is a very powerful thing. In fact, it rules us without us knowing.

It is The Shadow.

What is the shadow? Jung said that we all have one – it is part of the experience of living life. It is the part of you that is hidden or undeveloped, neglected or suppressed. The part you that you are unaware of, yet it exists and speaks through your actions – it slips through the consciousness cracks, unnoticed and potent. The shadow is not necessarily bad or wrong or evil; it is purely that which is unconscious. If you are completely unaware of a special and unique talent that you use on a daily basis, that is a shadow too.

In his must-read book, *Shadow Dance*, David Richo defines the shadow as “that part of us that is incompatible with who we think we are or are supposed to be. It is the realm beyond our limits, the place where we are more than we seem. The shadow is ironically humorous because the opposite side of our self image proves to be true in spite of all our tricky attempts not to believe or display it. Fear of that wider self keeps it in the dungeon, but there are

ways to release the prisoner”.

The part of the shadow that is vital to work with is its negative side. What is particularly confronting about the existence of the shadow is that you can be very destructive, hurtful and annoying...without knowing it. People see it, they talk about it with each other, but you are left without any insight.

To have the best intent, yet end up doing a lot of damage is a scary possibility, if not downright illogical. How can it be that you want to be a good friend, boss or parent, yet end up making the person you care for wince? Why would you repeat mistakes if you are actively trying to turn over a new leaf?

“Understand how your shadow operates”, is what Jung suggested. It is your shadow that is causing you to fall into the same old traps and habits. If you want to change the patterns that bring you unhappiness and frustration, befriend the shadow. Shed light on it. If we fail to get to know this shadow self, we are at its mercy. Jung says that “that which we do not bring to consciousness appears in our lives as fate”.

Does Robert Mugabe think he is a tyrant? Does Julius Malema think he lacks good judgment? Does Judge Hlope think he lacks integrity? No, no and no. The shadow is visible to the audience, but the actor is blind.

Leadership development requires a good dose of shadow work: the commitment and action to be open to feedback

“We have a long road to travel when it comes to the development of broad-based competencies.”

that helps you see what your shadow is. If you are willing to let your eyes adjust to the dark, you might see the parts that lurk. Then you can do something about it.

This world in this time needs leaders who are prepared to acknowledge that by virtue of being human, they contain the seeds of abusing power, of being utterly selfish and self-serving. Is this you? You possess the potential to squash people's self-esteem and to steal others' ideas. Do you recognise that? You have the impulses to boost your ego at the cost of another. Do you do that?

If you choose to face the shadow and acknowledge that it is there, your awareness is heightened and the risk that it will come out in a way that destroys good things is already halved. But this is not quite the end of the journey as Jung saw it. He was excited about what it brought with it – opportunity.

Personal development does not only come from further strengthening your strengths. You can find the gritty shadow aspects and gently clean them up, face them, speak to them and recognise the potential they harbour. You can transform arrogance into assertiveness. You can transform manipulation into direct communication. You can take blame and transform it into personal accountability if you can face the reality of what it means about you and if you have the grace to see a different future.

Unfortunately I see most

leaders pointing fingers at the shadows of others, chuckling about the weird traits and behaviours of colleagues, while being blissfully and unashamedly closed to self-reflection and feedback from others.

Someone expressed how difficult it is to find one's shadow by saying it is like trying to find the lion that swallowed you.

It is a standard complaint in the organisations I work with that when people challenge their leaders, their leaders say they are being negative. Can it be that the employees who moan so consistently are all energy-sappers? I think not. Some might be, but I see shadow behaviour: leaders do not like being challenged or disagreed with.

They want to be cajoled and supported and followed and respected. They don't want people to be disappointed or annoyed with them. Yet, every leader I have interviewed sees themselves as open, as welcoming feedback and as a person who enjoys a good debate and a challenge. Yet, they quickly shut a challenge down and label the person “a whiner”. Another classic way to steer away from any challenging situation, a common leader's cop-out, is to “take it off line” or to “look into it” - without ever raising it again.

The shadow behind this behaviour is obvious. It infuriates followers when leaders speak in interviews about how fervently they believe in participative leadership (nogall!).

Jung's leadership challenge

“The reality is that more than 95% of all tasks fulfilled by people come from a grey mass owned by the employee: the brain..”

is one that requires courage. To look at yourself is tougher than facing your biggest competitor in the market place. Your own demons are tough, but way less scary if you decide to bring a torch to the meetings.

How do you discover your shadow? Look at the patterns in your life you keep on repeating – your shadow is most definitely landing you in those ruts.

What presses your buttons? The things that irritate you most are probably the very things you do. There is a rule of thumb: if you spot it, you've got it!

Try to identify when you over-react – everyone else is confused when you go off at the deep end.

Look at when you don't react

at all, when, logically speaking, you should feel something.

Ask for feedback from people about the things you do that stand in the way of you living out your potential. The things you hear again and again are sure signals of your shadow acting out. Therapists, coaches and facilitators worth their salt will help individuals, teams and organisations identify and work with their shadow. This is key to transformation.

It is our duty to own, work with and transform our shadow, because the shadow is what takes us to the dark side. It leads leaders, rather than leaders taking charge of it. Organisations don't transform; leaders do.