

Bill Cosby and 12 Signs of Abusive Leadership

As has been reported repeatedly over the past several weeks in the news and entertainment media, numerous women—23 as of late Sunday—have come forward and alleged that comedian Bill Cosby took advantage of them sexually. To make matters worse, most of these women fit a profile of a young aspiring model or actress, who was living alone, vulnerable, and looked to Mr. Cosby as a mentor.

I hope these allegations prove to be untrue, because I have always been a big Cosby fan. But, if true, this unfortunately fits a common pattern of abuse in which leaders use their position of authority to take advantage of subordinates who look to them for help.

There are many signs of abusive leadership, which can relate to leadership in the family, church, business, politics and any organization or voluntary association. Also, abusers often were themselves the victims of abuse earlier in their life.

The following are 12 characteristics and traits of abusive leadership:

(Abusive leadership can take one or many of the following traits.)

1. Such a leader uses his position of power to receive favors from their subordinates

Whenever a leader throws around his or her title with subordinates to extract personal favors from them, their motives are impure and said favors can get increasingly illicit. Unfortunately, subordinates and or mentees often want to play the game as much as their leader to satisfy their

ambitious quest for success. In that case, both are equally wrong.

2. A leader threatens or manipulates subordinates to get what they want

When abusive leaders don't get what they want, they often resort to political, monetary or relational manipulation to coerce their subordinates into submission. When this doesn't work, said abuser often threatens to carry out actions detrimental to the family, career or life of their subordinate to force compliance.

3. A leader uses their title primarily for entitlements rather than to serve others

An abusive leader often desires positions of power so they can be served. They want the perquisites of their position without having a commensurate sacrifice for those under their auspices. They love the influence and power that comes with their position; this is always dangerous and can lead to leadership abuse.

4. A leader attaches to the most vulnerable in their midst

Abusive leaders often stay away from smart, confident, independent subordinates who are able to think and take care of themselves. They prey upon the naive, the vulnerable and the stargazers who will do anything to have access to power. Leaders who elevate the vulnerable in their company but shy away from confident individuals with strong core values demonstrate that their desire is to control and manipulate others more than to develop and nurture others.

5. A leader uses father wounds in others to gain paternal trust.

In a world rampant with family fragmentation, a large

percentage of people in organizations have an orphan spirit or father wounds as a result of their biological father's neglect, abuse and/or abandonment. Abusive male leaders can easily discern this need for paternal affirmation and utilize this felt need in subordinates to take advantage of them. They first gain their trust by showing them attention, earning their loyalty and then eventually eliciting sexual or other favors from them as an expression of some sort of perverse paternal bond.

6. A leader makes subordinates inordinately dependent upon them and isolates them

An abusive leader often makes vulnerable subordinates monetarily, relationally or emotionally dependent upon them by "taking care of their needs." Their goal is to isolate subordinates so they can continue to control them and extract from them whatever they desire.

7. A leader demands absolute loyalty

Abusive leaders do not want their subordinates or mentees to receive help or instruction from anybody else. They demand absolute authority and feel threatened when or if their subordinate goes to anyone else for counsel or aid.

8. A leader threatens or attempts to scandalize those who don't comply with their demands

Abusive leaders slander those who turn away from them or whom they can no longer control. If they see that a person is or becomes self-aware or independent and refuses to "drink their Kool-Aid," they bad-mouth them and try to limit their ability to succeed without them.

9. A leader uses and objectifies others for their own agenda

An abusive leader views others merely as a means to an end to

satisfy their personal agenda. They don't value people for who they are but objectify them to extract from them things they desire for themselves. Once said abuser gets what they want from a person, they ignore them and go on to the next person they perceive can help them.

10. A leader gets violent and exhibits rage when they don't have their way

Often an abuser has a short fuse and goes into fits of rage to intimidate their subordinates. If a person has a leader who attempts to elicit obedience through the use of threats, they should disassociate themselves as soon as possible or they may become co-dependent and complicit with said abuser's abuse of others.

11. A leader may be narcissistic and focused only on self-gratification

A leader who attempts to use their position merely as a means for satisfying their ego, to satiate selfish desires, and enjoy a lifestyle of consumerist idolatry are narcissistic and don't care about the well-being of subordinates. This myopic obsessive self-focus always leads to sacrificing others for the sake of their own aggrandizement and pleasure.

12. Abusive leaders are control freaks

Abusive leaders freak out when those in their family or organization do not bow down to their every demand. These "control freaks" are motivated by insecurity and fear and try to create followers in their own image and likeness. They demand predictability and obedience to the status quo, and they squash critical thinking, creativity and independence. They would rather have robotic obedience that produces mediocrity rather than flourishing family members or subordinates who fly like eagles.

In conclusion, God gives dire warnings to leaders who only care about themselves to the neglect of those they are supposed to serve. (Read Jeremiah 23:1-4 and Ezra 34:1-10.) Effective leaders understand that the main reason they have been entrusted with influence is to facilitate growth and maturity in the lives of those under their care.

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