

Top 10 Traits of Narcissistic Leaders

By definition, a narcissist is a person who believes the world revolves around them to such an extent their desires blind them to relational reality, which makes them insensitive to the needs and perspectives of others. One of the sad realities in our consumer-driven, hedonistic culture is that we are producing millions of narcissistic people, including leaders of large organizations.

Because of our sinful nature as human beings, all of us have some narcissistic tendencies to deal with.

The following traits identify leadership narcissism:

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- 1. When leaders think others are there to serve them instead of vice versa.** This reverses the principle in Matthew 20:26-28 in which Jesus says a great person in the kingdom serves and that He didn't come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. In an organization or church led by a leader of this type, the ladder to success is based more on catering to the leader's narcissism than on merit or work output. (Note: I am not discounting the importance of loyalty with this statement.)
- 2. When leaders want the perks of the ministry without the pain of the ministry.** There are leaders I know who want titles, prestige, honor and the respect that comes with a leadership position, but they don't want to pay the price for it. Most successful senior leaders and CEOs already understand this, so this problem is more

prevalent with secondary leaders working closely with senior leaders. They desire recognition as top leaders but don't do the hard work necessary for excellent results.

3. **When leaders put their own needs before the needs of the organization they lead.** True spiritual leaders give their lives for the sheep in the same way the Lord Jesus did (John 10). Narcissistic leaders will fleece the sheep and financially jeopardize their organizations for their indulgent lifestyles.
4. **Leaders who are self-indulgent when it comes to the material things of this world.** Some leaders have an excessive desire to continually shop for the things that interest them (clothes, cars, computers and so on) to keep them happy and motivated to serve. Along with this may be an excessive desire for entertainment, pleasure or play.
5. **Leaders who look for close relationships with those who pander to them and avoid those who confront them.** Some leaders will only have people in their inner circles who pander to their need to feel superior. They do not want people around them who disagree with them or speak into their lives. These leaders continually fall for flattery, which opens a huge door for satanic deception.
6. **When leaders view people as objects to use for their advantage.** Instead of considering people as fellow image-bearers of God, some leaders view people's importance based on whether they can serve their agenda. As soon as they believe a person is no longer contributing to their agenda, they begin to ignore them and look for the next person they can use. To this end, they court and even flatter people they have their eyes on, treating them like the most important people in the world, which abruptly comes to a halt when their services are no longer needed.
7. **Leaders who are uninterested in other people's problems.** Some leaders have no attention span for others while

speaking about their issues or problems. They will engage in conversations as long as it is about them or something they are interested in. However, they will shut down emotionally when the conversation shifts to something outside their interests.

8. **Leaders who rarely give in to other people's ideas.** Some leaders are not good listeners, refuse to bend and even act emotionally immature when they don't get their way or when an idea of theirs is not acted on or agreed with. Once leaders like this have decided they want something, it is almost impossible to change their minds unless they hear another idea that is more beneficial to them.
9. **Leaders who cannot have intimate emotional connections with close associates or their spouses.** Because of a lack of interest in meeting the needs of others, some leaders will only have superficial friendships based on fun, entertainment and gossip. When conflicts arise, they shy away from relationships since they no longer meet their cravings for fun, escape and entertainment. Their marriages are great in the beginning when they are in the honeymoon stage and enjoying a robust sex life. But when the pressures of raising children, finances and time management kick in, they bury themselves in things that help them escape reality: another relationship, entertainment, hobbies and the like. Their marriage relationship grows more and more distant as they become emotionally divorced before the eventual physical divorce takes place (unless, through self-awareness and repentance, their marriages can be saved).
10. **Narcissistic leaders are more vulnerable to sexual sins.** Narcissistic people are easily bored and are prone to look at pornography and commit adultery because their main desire for sex is not emotional intimacy but physical pleasure. As soon as the excitement wears off in their relationships, they look for others who can sexually arouse them. In those cases where adultery has

not yet occurred, those with a high libido will gravitate to pornography within six months to one year of every serious relationship they are in and, in many cases, will hide their continual use of pornography throughout every relationship they have. Narcissistic spiritual leaders are easy prey to the flattery of those they are sexually attracted to—which often leads to adultery—even in churches they oversee. Unless the cross of Christ is directly applied to their deep emotional need to be the center of attention when their spouse doesn't meet their expectations, they will drift to someone else to satisfy their addiction to praise.

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To remedy these traits, leaders should:

1. Foster humility through self-reflection and acknowledging one's limitations and the value of others' contributions.
2. Practice active listening and empathy to understand and genuinely respond to the needs of others.
3. Build a culture of accountability where constructive feedback is encouraged and valued. This will help leaders recognize and adjust their behaviors and confront root character issues.
4. Encourage servant leadership, focusing on serving others and the organization rather than leading for personal gain or recognition.
5. Seek professional counseling or coaching to address deep-seated narcissistic traits and develop healthier relational and leadership skills.

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Dr. Joseph Mattera is an internationally known author, consultant and theologian whose mission is to influence leaders who influence culture. He is the founding pastor of Resurrection Church and leads several organizations, including the U.S. Coalition of Apostolic Leaders and Christ Covenant Coalition. For more information on this subject, please read his book "Poisonous Power."