

Musings from



Musings from Gate 44 is a series of papers written from one of the most sacred reflective places in a consultant's life – the airport. As we depart our client's cities, we are often decompressing, celebrating, venting, strategizing and reflecting on behalf of those we serve. We're inviting you into our private thoughts about...you. "You" means those of you leading complex organizations trying to grow, change, improve and compete. These "musings" are stimulated by patterns we see over and over again as we work. Our hope is that letting you into our inner thoughts will help you grapple with the issues that frustrate your noblest aspirations and thwart what you seek to achieve. (We hope we'll also have a chance to laugh gently together at some of the silly things organizations can do.)

Leading Green: When Envy and Leadership Join Forces

By Ron A. Carucci

Life is full of contradictions and I get that not all of us can enjoy the same privileges. I got annoyed today while waiting in a long airport security line while others got to "go right to the head of the class" just because of some special status. This really ticks me off. If I'm honest, though, I have to admit that I wanted to be one of the ones getting the special treatment. I know it's irrational, but standing at the back of the line makes me feel somehow inferior and simultaneously contemptuous of the line jumpers. I could hear grumbling all around me, so clearly I wasn't alone. I was struck at how fast this reaction happened. It vividly brought to mind a conversation I overheard in my client's lunchroom yesterday while we were on a break. They'd announced a few big promotions this week amidst some major changes, and people were buzzing about what it meant. And where's the first

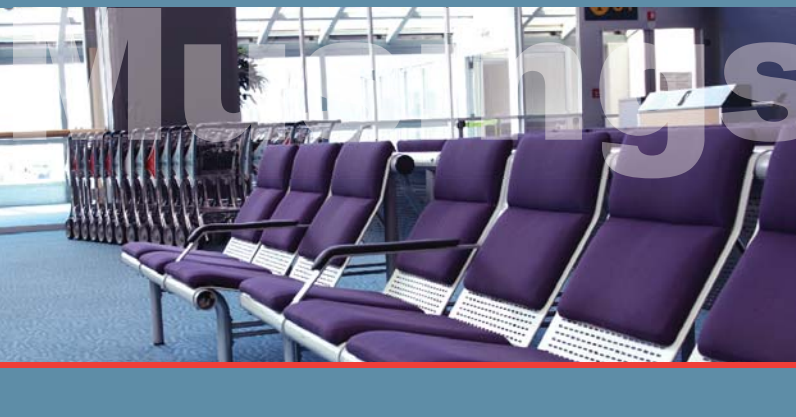
place they go? Why so-in-so didn't deserve it, how others were political appointees, how unfair the process was, and how they couldn't wait to see one of the people fall flat on their face in a job way over their head. What is it that drives us to such sinister places where maligning others in comparison to ourselves becomes the easiest response to another's good fortune?

Fewer measuring devices have more destructive power than those we use to compare ourselves to others. Those devices are anchored in the power of envy – a pernicious emotion that leaves us emptier, more troubled and less satisfied than ever.

The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that envy involves the perception that another is more fortunate or better off than we are, regardless of whether the other shares the view or not. It also suggests that envy involves feelings of ill-will or "mortification" toward that other. This implies an active desire to damage or witness damage being done to another. Genuine gratitude for anything positive the other has done is destroyed. The implications for leaders and

forward motion for leaders and organizations

PASSAGES



communities are hardly trivial. Envy can be a breeding cancer that erodes the very fabric of an organization if left unchecked. Worse, it may be encouraged by the complicity of leaders unwilling to own their own envy, their failure to mitigate unwanted envy of others, or even to resist the temptation to invite it.

Let's begin by asking the fundamental question: Why should leaders of organizations care about envy? Don't you have more important things to worry about besides people's pettiness? And doesn't a leader get dangerously close to moralizing by treading on this ground? All fair questions. According to Bruna Martinuzzi, author of *The Green Eyed Monster*, "Emotions are a powerful instigator of behavior, and envy, the unmentionable emotion, is perhaps one of the most pervasive and powerful of all the disruptive emotions that affect our corporate environments. We are not used to talking about envy in polite society or in our workplaces. Yet it is there, woven within the fabric of our organizations, and it affects employee moods, organizational morale and culture and, ultimately, it is one of the causes of employee disengagement and productivity loss." And according to one 2007 study by Patty Malone, the correlations between envy and performance are striking – the stronger the feelings of envy, the less committed one is to their job and their organization. Depending on the studies you're looking at, the cost of employee aggression, property damage, and interference with production fueled by envy can reach as high as \$200 billion annually. The implications for management are hardly trivial.

Let's also clear up the commonly misconstrued differences between envy and jealousy. The simplest way to make the distinction is to think of jealousy as the threat of losing something you already have and the determination to keep it at all costs, while envy is the threat of not having something you feel you should, and the malevolence to pursue it at the expense of others. In essence, jealousy is the overprotective watchdog; envy is the underprivileged thief. For the purposes of this article, we are focusing on the thief.

I spend many of my days working alongside leaders presiding over very large and complex organizations. I've seen newly promoted leaders immediately begin

counting the square footage of their offices to make sure theirs is commensurate with those of similar rank. And if it's not, they will complain bitterly until they get their due. In one organization in which I was working, one senior leader, upon his promotion to a broader role, said to his boss (the person running the entire organization), "I assume I'll be getting a bigger office now. Since I'm now Janet's peer, we wouldn't want to confuse the organization about the value of my role, so it will be important to send a message by moving my office to one more befitting my new role." Sadly, this leader became so fixated on competing for the trappings of rank and garnering the appearance of greater status, that within six months of being appointed, his excessive distraction and obsessive pursuit of the spotlight led to his failure to produce any tangible results. He was removed from the job. The odd currencies that symbolize one's importance, and therefore become the spoils over which people in a community will ruthlessly contend breed envy, entitlement and distrust faster than most care to believe. Worse, they derail performance. Justifying their envy under the shroud of "fairness," many will campaign for what they believe is their due by making apparent disparities an issue of basic justice and defer attention away from more important matters of the organization.

One of the most sinister aspects of envy, then, is its ability to appear in other forms. Masquerading as a noble cause, an opportunity to send important messages, or righting unjust inequity, leaders can justify their envy with manipulative and nasty tactics that at first glance can seem almost reasonable. Underneath, however, envy remains committed to the destruction of community, and this destruction is especially painful when it affects the leadership of an organization.

Ask yourself this question:

Can you tolerate or ignore envy in your organization? I would argue that you simply cannot. Regardless of whether it appears in a Fortune 500 Corporation, an NGO, a church or your own family, envy sets a foul tone in an organization. More importantly, envy among leaders quickly leads others who've been watching to conclude that significance in the organization requires one become self serving and that comparison to others is the prime currency by which one's value will be established. Contribution, relationship and commitment are cast aside as the currency for determining merit, as everyone quickly learns to fiercely compete for the social scraps available in a zero-sum Darwinian battle. We've all experienced it and all too often, we've thrown up our hands in disgust and resignation.

Understanding the role of envy in leadership

Envy is far uglier and lethal than we care to admit or even imagine. Indeed, if there are ways to restrain its menacing effects, we should pursue them vigorously, especially when the leadership of others is at stake. Let's start by looking at the three contexts in which envy primarily makes an appearance in the leadership arena:

FIRST: The *wanted* envy of others

SECOND: The *unwanted* envy of others

THIRD: *Your* envy of others

The Allure of Inviting the Envy of Others

"Experience the joy of being resented" boasted a large billboard over a Seattle interstate. More than just a clever advertisement, its message not only urged its readers to flock to the nearest convenience store to purchase a mega-millions lottery ticket, but while sitting in rush hour traffic, to inventory where exactly in their life they had a leg up on someone else.

Let's be honest. Who among us would say we don't enjoy the envy of others? Their adulation and even on occasion their idolization? It feels good. And when you are a leader, you have the power to invite it, even engineer it. The casual dropping of names of highly influential people with whom you socialize, the emphatic "downplaying" of the new luxury car, the unassuming insertion of a daughter's recent acceptance to an Ivy League school into a conversation, the saccharin sweet demeaning of the work of another in comparison to an acclaimed piece of one's own work – these are all examples of the ways leaders can sway the self-perceptions of others toward feelings of inadequacy, resentment and competition. In exchange for the cheap purchase of a quick rush of self-importance, the envy-inviting leader is unwittingly destroying the organization over which they have been invited to preside. And if that organization has been charged with a specific mission – be it the well-being of its members, the production of a specified set of results, the creation of goods or services for a market, or the well-being of a family, those important outcomes will be dangerously compromised over time. The envy-inviting leader parasitically feeds off the community and saps its ability to grow, transform, contribute, and thrive.

There are three factors that contribute to a leader's impulse to invite the envy of others. Each could easily be the topic of its own paper, so I'll be brief.



1. An inflated sense of power and influence: The leader who trusts her sense of power and influence has little need for excessive admiration. However, the leader who feels perpetually too inept to be influential must compensate by contriving conditions that force the veneration of others. This leader has a misguided sense of their role. At a fundamental level, she views her role as one of controlling rather than serving others. The saddest consequence is that the strategy can succeed, and those around this leader forfeit their voice and heart and simply become "yes" people to the whims of a leader too difficult to engage with on any meaningful level.

2. The temptation of false humility: We've grown up in an era where the acquisition of capability is faster than ever. Our world has acquired more knowledge in the last ten years than in the previous two thousand. That's staggering. Consequently, we are more capable than ever before. But somehow we've gotten the notion that enjoying this capability is wrong, so we have learned to diminish it. We dismiss compliments directed our way. We deflect acknowledgements away to look humble while we secretly long to believe their truth and hope the sender believes it too. To compensate for the gulf in our psyche created by the repelling of others' delight, we are forced to construct elaborate fishing expositions that bait and lure in the very same admiration and delight we've turned away.

3. An appetite for winning – at any cost: Most leaders will gladly acknowledge they have deficiencies. But most won't acknowledge how much they fear the extent of them. Often a leader's greatest strength, over extended, becomes her Achilles heel. A gifted achiever of great results can't bear to face the carnage behind her of those burned in the wake of her pursuit of such impressive aspirations. The highly creative leader whose uncanny instincts generate brilliant ideas can't stand being reminded that his impulses are also excessive impulsivity, and his colleagues are driven mad by the perpetual abrupt changes in direction he forces on them. Such leaders are often threatened when having to face the notion that others have talents that are complimentary to theirs, or may expose the limitations of their brilliant gifts. So their mission becomes to eliminate the competition. Reminders of



the need to temper one's talents, be more aware of one's impact, be more sensitive to others, are met with umbrage, and often the marginalization of any voice that threatens or exposes the flat sides of the otherwise gifted leader.

The leader who can develop enough self-reflective muscle and self-restraint can contain the terrible effects that an unrestrained appetite for the esteem of others can bring. This takes years of work and intentional self-honesty many leaders sadly never acquire. The good news is that the emerging generation of leaders appears to have far more natural acumen toward that end than their predecessors.

If the allure of inviting others' envy is one dark facet of how it lurks in the leadership arena, the *unwanted* envy of others' can be an equally toxic force for leaders as well. Let's look at that next.

Being Assaulted by the Envy of Others

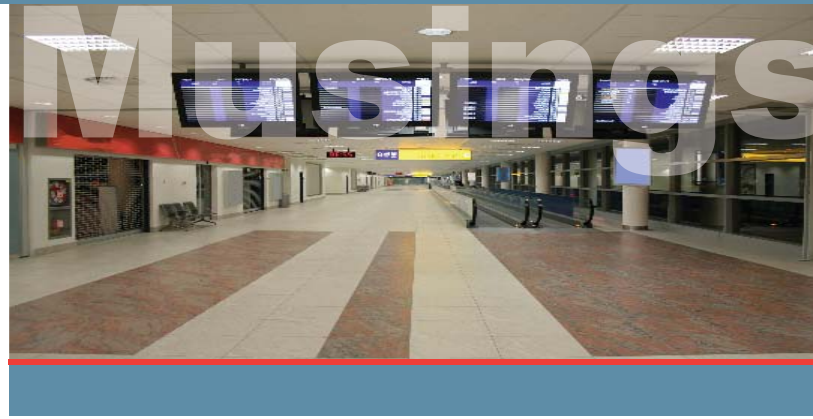
Leaders in organizations bear unique, often private burdens from which most members are shielded. What is most visible to the organization or community is the special status and "privileges" accorded to leaders. And of course the higher one's rank or status, the greater the perceived privilege the leader is accorded. Whether true or not, most leaders are seen as "fortunate" for being in their positions – they command higher salaries, are seen as having greater degrees of freedom over their time, have perquisites that come with the job, get a greater share of say-so about decisions and directions, and get "automatic respect" because they command positional authority. They also get "automatic resentment" because everyone knows the top jobs command stratospheric compensation packages. The 2008 Watson Wyatt report says that 78% of institutional investors believe that excessive CEO pay creates employee resentment.

That's one side of the story.

What most who do not play a role that requires leading others – by that I mean having the responsibility to help guide and direct the work of multiple interacting parts of an organization – fail to understand is how hurtful those envious perceptions can be. While it is difficult for anyone to acknowledge dependence on others for anything, when members of an organization are faced with feeling that they must rely, or depend on, leaders, their resentment of that dependence can result in showing enormous contempt for leaders. This can put the leader in an unending state of feeling off-balance and fatigued. Mark Stein, in his research on envy and leadership, suggests that when members of an organization begin to compare what they have or are to what a leader has or is, then:

"On occasion this may evoke both a sense of inferiority and also a desire to attack the leader and destroy their good fortune....such an attacking is more likely when individuals within the group are dependent on the leader's skills or qualities for their own survival and development. However, it is often too difficult for the individual or group to acknowledge – even to themselves – quite how envious they feel of others in leadership positions. Acknowledging such feelings would imply recognizing the limits of their own achievements. Worse, it would involve being aware of a side of themselves that is hateful towards others' good fortunes and their desire to destroy it. By consigning these emotions to the unconscious, the individual is left free from the painful awareness of their destructive feelings toward the leader."

Sadly, leaders are often relegated to suffering in silence the burdens and complexities of their jobs, and the misperceived luxuries others think they are enjoying. Leaders who are unaware of or unsympathetic to the conflicting emotions of those in the organization who want both dependence, when it feels protective, and independence to find their own voice, will poorly navigate the relationships with their people. They will unsuspectingly perpetuate their people's feelings of envy. Leaders who can accept that, as humans, we come equipped with the often contradictory desires for community, intimacy and relationship while at the same time wanting to protect our individualism, voice, and independence, will fare better in the marathon of leading organizations. This is a tension not ever resolved, but a paradox we must embrace. Leaders are afforded the special privilege of having to navigate their own internal battle with this while at the same time helping those in their organization contend with the same tensions. Frequently, it is the leader herself who is the very object of transference that triggers the conflict amongst people in the organization, and then must help them navigate the conflict so they can remain productive contributors. It can be like an ever tightening noose that hangs you even as you try to help others get the noose off their own necks.



Leadership, in any context, is ultimately a privilege even though the realities of the role often belie this. Part of that privilege is the requirement to work simultaneously on one's own transformation while assisting with the transformation of others – often transformation they don't yet know they need or should want. And that type of leadership will often incite the resentment and envy of the very community the leader is attempting to guide – even in her own clumsy, human way. The good news is, over time, if the leader can withstand the assaults and persist with offering regard in return, the defenses and resistance of the community, especially in the form of envy, will eventually soften. They will give way to mutually beneficial and trusting relationships that ultimately are the catalyst for sustainable transformation.

Let's look now at the final context in which envy appears in the leadership arena – when the leader herself is the envier.

When Leaders Hate the Good of the Other

By now I hope it is clear that envy is an act of hatred – a malicious desire for another's harm. A leader who envies doesn't necessarily seek his own gain for self serving ends. But he has such intolerance for the gains of others, often those he leads, that he seeks to destroy the good fortune of others. He can't find pleasure in the success and growth of others, but instead wants to obliterate them.

Excessively envious leaders can often be referred to as narcissistic. Rosenfeld connects envy and narcissism in leaders who have an image of themselves as uniquely special. These are leaders who simply can't bear the success or uniqueness of others, especially those they believe may be out to displace or outshine them. While these leaders are often drawn to leadership because of their ability to envision greater things and invite the devotion of others, they are often ill suited for leadership because they are unable to see or develop the gifts of others. This then is one of the primary consequences of the envious leader – he creates a learning impaired organization. The ability to grow, learn and adapt is limited because the leader's example is one of preventing growth and change, and as such, the notion of pushing one's capabilities to new heights becomes too dangerous to consider.

In addition to the threat envious leaders perceive from those with substantial talent and distinction, leaders often can be provoked to envy by those with less burdensome roles. Many leaders commonly hear from people in the organization, especially during times in great stress, feelings such as, "Gosh, would hate to be you right now. Glad you have to deal with this mess and not me." This leads the leader to resent the

degree of freedom and lack of responsibility others in the community enjoy at the leader's expense.

What's distinctively sad about this particular genre of envy is its far reaching implications within organizations. Once a leader's envious contempt is known, boundaries get drawn and unwritten rules are adopted. Rules such as, "don't ask hard questions," or "don't outshine the boss," or "keep the really good ideas to yourself or you get shot down," or "tell her what she wants to hear if you want to keep your job," or "if you want your idea adopted, make it look like it was his" – all dangerous conclusions for a community to draw, and all too frequently the start of a slow death.

Leaders who are drawn to easily hate are a frighteningly common commodity in the ranks of organizations. This helps explain why so many companies so woefully under-perform against their objectives. It can also explain why a recent OSHA factsheet stated that two million Americans annually are the victims of workplace violence. The pathologies that provoke a leader's hatred can be numerous. Suffice to say that any of us are susceptible to them, and ruthless self-reflection and a continual invitation to those with whom we work to tell us their experience of us can go a long way to preventing the noxious effects such behavior can have.

Here's the really damaging reality. Envy can become a self perpetuating cycle that destroys both success and possibility. Like a cancer, it replicates itself with envy begetting more envy. Leaders who invite the envy of others create an insatiable appetite for admiration that requires constant replenishment by drawing ever greater attention to themselves. This in turn invites the resentful envy of the community of the leader's exploitation, thus further isolating the leader from the community. The leader then resents the ostracizing separation from the community and begins to envy the privileges of relationship others enjoy at their expense. And so the cycle repeats. And in its path it leaves a burned down forest of wreckage in the form of muted beauty and squandered possibility. Success – the balance and limits of our achievements and talents – hides and fades when others are out to destroy it. Possibility – the chance to dream and



hope for something more – is exchanged for cynicism and resignation about whether anything more is even possible. Breaking the cycle will take something far more powerful than the artificial social rewards envy promises. It will take levels of delight and gratitude that can eclipse the toxins of envy and ultimately, disarm their addictive allure.

Rites of Passage: Moving From Rivalry to Revelry

So how do we turn the tide? How can we help the allure of envy lose its charm for something more appealing? It really comes down to asking yourself what measuring stick you are using to determine your own value. If it is one of comparative assessment, you may be doing more harm than you realize. Comparisons that lead to the war in your heart that must prove you are better than another, or worse than another, can ultimately take down entire organizations, or as we have seen in recent years, entire nations.

In one organization where we worked, there were two rival division presidents, whose objectives were set up to actually compete against one another. They waged such malicious warfare, that they consumed the attention of the whole organization and customer defections began to rise rapidly. The organization's highest margin products were produced across the two divisions and consequently their production was hampered, eventually causing mass customer dissatisfaction. The sales force in one of the divisions actually began to tell customers not to buy that product in favor of an inferior product produced only by their division. Once customers realized they were being used as pawns in this company's internal rivalry, they walked away.

What if you make a different interpretive choice of the measurement? What if on the faces of those with whom you lead you choose to see partners in a common endeavor instead of rivals whose schemes you must out-manuever? Your personal yardstick then becomes far more difficult to measure up to than if you dismissed others with cheap and simplistic envious

contempt, but it also has far more transformative power than any other metric of your leadership behavior. As a leader you must determine early in your run whether you desire more to be right, or more to be good. True the two don't always have to work at odds, but when they do, who will you be? There are two compass headings I will offer as a way to begin reconstructing your navigational dashboard with different measuring devices than perhaps the ones to which you have become accustomed.

From Indictment to Invitation: Using Standards That Unleash Others' Possibilities

As leaders, our proclivity to affect change, to realize results is an important and healthy component of our work. But what we measure tells much about what we value. What if one of the most important metrics we used was the progress our companies were making toward realizing their full potential? What if you actually made the formation of others a priority, and believed that your own formation was interconnected to your ability to contribute to the formation and indeed the transformation of your colleagues? And what if, whenever they made clear strides in the direction of transformation, you cheered and celebrated with genuine delight? Instead of collecting data that displays your relative position to them, why not collect data that displays your shared relative proximity to the success of the whole group? Use measurement to invite others to greater levels of their own performance instead of indicting them in comparison to others when they fall short.

From Antipathy to Appreciation: Learning Gratitude for the Contributions and Gifts of Others

Having made the choice to change what and how you measure, you are now free to see potential where you once saw inadequacy, to see triumph where you once saw threat. It is your gratitude more than anything else that will unleash the greatest potential of your organizations. Nouwen says it so beautifully:

"Gratitude goes beyond the "mine" and "thine" and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift....Gratitude as a discipline involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when my emotions and feelings are still steeped in hurt and resentment. It is amazing how many occasions present themselves in which I can choose gratitude instead of complaint. I can choose to be grateful when I am criticized, even when my heart

still responds in bitterness. I can choose to speak about goodness and beauty, even when my inner eye still looks for someone to accuse or something to call ugly. I can choose to listen to the voices that forgive and to look at the faces that smile, even while I still hear words of revenge and see grimaces of hatred.... there is always the choice between resentment and gratitude...."

Clearly to abandon envy requires more than just abandoning some flawed paradigms of how leadership works. It requires abandoning fundamental views of yourself and others in the context of community. It requires abandoning your right to be right and choosing to be good. And it requires a setting aside of a base delight in competing through petty, envious rivalries.

But you must begin by being honest about your own proclivity toward envy. Do you know at whom you aim your own spears of comparison? Who are your nemeses in the organization? Your arch rivals? What justifications have you chosen to rationalize how you undermine those rivals? How have you told yourself, and others, that the ends justify the means in your campaign? Have you minimized, or even denied, the consequences of your envy?

And in the context of your envy, for what are you grateful? Do you notice the correlation between the level of your gratitude, or envy, and the level of your commitment? Do you see it in those you lead? In those who lead you? Of course these are painful questions. But if the character of your leadership, and the reputation you form of your organization are important to you, you ought to decide how they get answered. You will answer them one way or another by how you lead. What will those who are watching you say of your leadership? That you envied, or that you were grateful?



I've finally gotten to the head of the line here at Gate 44, so I have to shut down my laptop. I hope I've given you some things to think about as you grapple with envy.

At the very least, think about how this powerful and all-too-human emotion impacts you and those around you and think about how you can change that situation for the better.

If you want to hear more, drop me a line at ron@passagesconsulting.com

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