

LEADERSHIP, PEOPLE AND ENVY**Prof. Dr. Kim Cheng Patrick Low****PhD. and Chartered Marketer (CIM,UK)****Abstract**

In this review research paper, the academician-practitioner attempts to answer such questions or issues as: Why a person or worse, a leader becomes envious? How to reduce these green feelings of envy? Should leaders not be liberated of envy? How can leaders minimize their feelings of envy or being green with jealousy? And even if so, what then are the benefits especially for the organization and people within it in terms of the leaders reducing or eliminating such feelings of jealousy, desire and resentment?

Introduction

What is leadership? What is envy? And interestingly, we can also ask: What if an envious person becomes a leader, how would it be? Would he or she be happily helping or serving others? And if he or she is a leader, what would be the benefits and downsides of such a leadership, let alone as a person?

Paper's Aims and Objectives

All of us ask questions for many reasons – learning about the past, imagining the future or solving a problem. Most researchers must really know what to ask; they need to form great, if not good research questions (Fontichiaro and Johnson, 2013). These are questions that make the (research) world work. In this review research paper, it is thus an attempt to answer these questions or issues: Why a person or worse, a leader becomes envious? Should leaders not free themselves of being envious? How can leaders reduce their feelings of envy or being green with jealousy? How to reduce these green feelings of envy? And even if so, what then are the benefits especially for the organization and people within it in terms of the leaders reducing or eliminating such feelings of jealousy, desire and resentment?

What is Leadership?

According to Quick and Nelson (2013: 380), “leadership in organizations is the process of guiding and directing the behavior of people in the work environment.” Often the people would look at the leaders as role models (Low, 2013; Peterson and Seligman, 2004) for their growth and progress.

Why Leadership and Envy?

All and any one of us can get envious, and “leadership is important”; besides, “leadership is everyone’s business” (Achua and Lussier, 2010: 3, 4); and hence the importance of this topic: Leadership, people and envy. Besides, by marrying envy to leadership and people (the leader’s followers), we get to know more about leadership, its importance, its role and functions as well as the leaders’ interactions, dealings and relationships with their people.

What is Envy?

Envy is “a feeling of discontent and resentment aroused by and in conjunction with desire for the possessions or qualities of another” (The Free Dictionary, 2014). Envy is the desire, perhaps an unquenchable desire for others’ traits, status, abilities, or situation; and according to the Catholic moral thought, it is one of the seven deadly, cardinal sins or capital vices.

Envy was one of the most powerful and forceful causes of unhappiness (Russell, 1930). And it is a dangerous but natural emotion that all of us are faced daily, especially in these times when we “operate in a dog-eat-dog world of copy-cats and a race to the finish line” (Llopis, 2012). Not only is the envious, resentful or begrudging person rendered unhappy by his or her envy, but he or she also wishes to impose or exact bad luck or hardship on others. “Almost like cursing the other party or

others, he or she may wish ill fate of them! And at times, she may also choose to rudely ignore one's greetings or pretend not to hear one's well wishes to her. She can be a bully too. As a director and sitting in the committee she seems to be victimizing people whom she is envious of, those who are more competent or able than her and give them hell in their lives." [One interviewee's inputs; interestingly, this interviewee approached this researcher to opine his views upon uncovering or knowing that the author was doing this review study. Note that what is interesting in this review research's methodology is that when combined with qualitative interview, it had its advantages; chiefly, because the interviewee's free and voluntary participation, he was very enthusiastic and shared much of his feelings. He was very expressively candid. Hence, the interview/ interviewee really supplied rich data on leadership and envy. On the downside of such a research methodology, researchers who have to interview such respondents should be patient since such interviewees may operate, in a way, like a bee in the bonnet, and perhaps acting like a broken record, expressive but non-stop in talking and highlighting what they (are affected by – their feelings – and claim to) know best].

Additionally, an envious person too can develop much anger against others which is no good (anger destroys goodwill and relationships), and anger, if unchecked, can be "a raging flame that devours all goodness" (Takamori, 2012: 20). Although envy is ordinarily seen as something negative, Russell also believed that envy was a driving force behind the movement towards democracy and must be endured to achieve a more just social system (Russell, 1930: 90-91).

True, envy too can be a driver of success. One looks around and sees someone else who has what one wants. One figures out how to emulate that other person or even surpass their efforts so that one can reach one's goal of getting the goodies (Schapiro, 2013). Yes, envy can really create powerful motivation to succeed, and can drive people to work harder and smarter to achieve their goals.

Nonetheless, interestingly, one can be self-reflective, and ask oneself these insightful questions: Can an envious person be happy? Can a jealous person be having a peace of mind? Can he or she be a leader? Often or forever, looking and feeling green with jealousy when seeing others, can such a person be happy; of course, not. Can such a person love others too? Can he or she be compassionate, filled with love? This author really doubts it since the focus of such persons is often on themselves, their self-interests and what they need or want irrespective of what others need or want. The world indeed needs leaders who, having their own high moral standard, shall walk the talk, be consistent between the words and actions; be sincere and be fully in control of their own behaviors (Low, 2013; Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

"The envious person's (even if (s)he is the praying type or a leader of a church/ temple – but so what?), his (or her) needs or interests seem to be paramount, and worse (s)he can be very callous or insensitive to the needs or interests for others. Perhaps (s)he is entrapped in his (or her) own psyche, a prison of his (or her) own dark inward, sickeningly narrow dimension - so agonizingly miserable! Yet (s)he can be angrily envious of others... and his (or her) anger continues... even showing his (or her) wrath, and making those she is jealous of as his (or her) victim(s)! Interestingly, this person can diabolically use anger to hide his (or her) anger, and the best way to defend is to attack and victimize others, poor others." (one interviewee's inputs).

He also continued that, "Why be envious? It's often the tiniest and the simplest of things that make us smile the most. All of us are more of emotional beings than intellectual creatures; educating the head or the mind without educating the heart, often feeling envious, is little or worse, no education at all." (one interviewee's inputs).

Why Leadership and Envy do not go Together?

One must become in order to do. Looking over the shoulders of others, envying what they got; envy may even paralyze one. Envy, "commonly known as the green-eyed monster" (an interviewee's

inputs), may even also paralyze one's leadership. It is difficult, if not almost impossible, to become when one cares more about being what others are, rather than being oneself. (Llopis, 2012).

Additionally, it is difficult for an envious person let alone a leader to be other-centered or better still be community or socially responsible. Most leaders (e.g. Andrew Carnegie cited in Fenster, 2000) are humble and are willing to serve others or their people. Take another example in the form of the generous philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, besides donating totaling over USD 150 million to educational, medical and religious charities, he took a personal interest in helping any of his old neighbors from upstate New York or Cleveland who fell on hard times (Fenster, 2000: 171).

In Hinduism, far from being envious and self-centered, (business) leaders “are (often) generous, possess attributes like: moral and ethical values, a sense of responsibility towards society and environment, and humane approach towards duties. Our great saint Swami Vivekananda said, ‘Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal’. I remember his words on the eve of his 150th birth anniversary (Swami Vivekananda was born on 12th January 1863). Hence service to fellow human being is service to God”. (Dattagupta, cited in ResearchGate Q & A, 2014).

When a person or a leader is envious of others, his or her ego is affected; he or she would often want or act in one-upmanship ways to cast light that he or she is better off, more superior or of higher standard and/ or that the other party(ies) is indeed lesser off and being more inferior or sub-standard. Traditionally, leaders need to be humble to serve and service their people, be or practice servant leadership. Being envious, boastful or egotistic leaders can brusquely hurt or injure their people including their feelings and more so, their confidence and self-esteem.

When out of envy, leaders bulldoze their way, mistreat their people and/ or others with rudeness, abuse or slander and other harmful actions, they indeed cause miseries and sadness to their people (and also to others). They are not attending to their people's needs. In the Confucian leadership style and ways, leaders are to be compassionate; they are to care for their people and truly show concern for others. For Mencius, a leader should attend to and satisfy the needs of his or her people.

In Buddhism, one practices detachment and prefers or rather should have the right perception (Lowenstein, 2005), detaching oneself from such emotions such as feeling envious towards others. Besides, other than these three negative mental states, that is, hatred, greed, frustration, envy is one negative mental state which leads to suffering. And in Buddhist leadership, leaders certainly wish that all sentient beings be free of suffering and its causes; they also attend to their people's needs. There is also much compassion. In love, one would certainly want others to be happy but in compassion, one not only would want others to be happy, but also not to have pain, problems, frustrations, sadness or unhappiness. As leaders, “to help us bring benefit to others through our words and actions, it is useful to cultivate an attitude of sympathetic joy in others' achievements and good fortune. This attitude is a powerful antidote against envy, which is not only a source of unnecessary suffering on the individual level but also an obstacle to our ability to reach out and engage with others” (Dalai Lama, 6 Feb 2012)

How or what are the various ways in which a Leader can Stop Being Envious of Others?

As a leader, how or what are the various ways in which one can stop being envious of others or dare I raise this oxymoron issue of even being envious of one's people which in the first place such an issue should not even exist – for after all, a leader needs to serve and indeed take care of his or her people. In the first instance, (s)he should be wishing others well which leads us to the first pointer as below:

1. Wishing others Well

All of us – especially the leaders in us – would certainly want others not only to be happy but not to have pain, problems or unhappiness. If other parties do well, then wish them well. Enjoy his success as one's own; share it with them. And be glad and happy too.

In the Talmud, learning how to appreciate the world we were given is related to what Judaism refers to as the *ayin tovah*, or “the good eye”. This goes something like this. When one is truly in sync with one’s world and sees everything as a blessing, even when someone else is getting that blessing, we say that (s)he has “a good eye”. Being happy for another person is a nice, polite and considerate thing (Parry, 2004).

In Confucian terms, such a person, living without being envious, is a superior person; only a petty person or a *xiao ren* would be envious, green and begrudging of others. The superior person is not only a big-minded but also, a big-hearted or magnanimous person.

And other ways in which a leader can stop or discontinue being envious of his or her people and others include:

2. Being Positive and Counting One’s Blessings

Marcus Aurelius once said that, “Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking.” Harold Coffin cited in Edberg (2013) aptly highlighted that “envy is the art of counting the other fellow’s blessings instead of your own.” One thus needs to be positive to count one’s blessings.

It is always good to think good and think positively. And it is worthy to note that in Buddhism, positive mental states which lead to happiness include love, compassion, patience and generosity. And one then attains happiness through learning which mental states to cultivate and which to eliminate, and then making a sustained effort to implement this knowledge (Marelisa, 2014).

One needs to relevantly ask oneself: what do one has that other people could be envious of? Perhaps it resides in one’s own health, one’s looks, one’s home, the fact that one can afford three square meals a day or whatever.

In Buddhism, one can meditate on mindfulness and be aware of ‘oneself’ and others/ one’s surroundings, and thus meditate on love and compassion. Lowenstein (2005: 61) speaks of becoming generous, seeing from another person’s point of view and that “there are almost always people and communities in much greater need than you”.

Besides, basically, there is no need to be so petty and envious, just be present therefore to what one has rather than living in another ‘might have’ world. In Zen, life is process, not a result (Wu, 2008). In Zen leadership and living, Zen sums up an Asian wisdom that can help secure a peace of mind and happiness through the process of living (Wu, 2008) and leading (Low, 2013; 2010). There is no need to live in the future or would-be/ might have world; live now. And that’s life.

Overall, as Dattagupta, cited in ResearchGate Q & A (2014a), has pointed out, “Envy is a negative emotion, which ultimately will lead to negative perceptions and will trigger a self-destructive mechanism. Envious person (or) leader is not likely to be happy. On the other hand a good person/ leader will have positive outlook and will view the achievement of others positively and is likely to develop competitive spirit and zeal, which will certainly lead to superior performance”. These also coincide with Brody’s (2011) remarks, that is, leadership requires positive thinking and a can do attitude. He also highlighted that a leader should surround himself with a small group of advisers or people who look at things from the positive, not attempting to demolish or bring everything down.

3. Being Happy with Oneself

One has to find one’s own way or level of contentment.

If one lives in the Western world, chances are that one is better off than everyone except royalty was even a hundred years ago. One has access to exotic foods that even kings and queens would never have seen as recently as a century ago. One does not have to grow one’s own food or physically battle with others to keep one’s human rights. Be content about this! One’s happiness will help one’s envy to move on or move away. Envy does not much like happy, contented people.

4. Being Humble

One of the vital leadership skills is that of being humble (Owen, 2006). “When a person feels envious of others and having a sadist streak, he or she would run the other party(ies) down; the

envious person often wants to have the upper-hand, be better off or assume a superior position” (an interviewee’s inputs).

So the best fight against being envious is to be humble or adopt a modest position. For a Confucian, “on Mount Tai, the world becomes small” (Jing Xin cited in Ng, 2013: 122); one indeed needs to realize one’s insignificance or smallness in relation to the massive universe. Those who have seen the ocean will find it difficult to think much of puddles of water. “To be humble, one has to open one’s mind up and be broad in one’s thinking and perspective. (In other words,) one should truly practice humility” (an interviewee’s inputs). In this regard, most Buddhists have this message in mind and they practice: “whenever I am with others, I will practise seeing myself as the lowest of all, and from the very depth of my heart I will respectfully hold others as supreme”. (Khadro, 2007: 33). In other words, instead of being envious, one develops humility and respect towards others.

5. Being Grateful for what one Has

One should be grateful for what one has (Edberg, 2013). One needs to count one’s blessings (John, 2008), one can count them by thinking abundantly. One can think abundantly and affluently. One can think abundantly by adopting the thinking or attitude of “win-win” or “prosper-thy-neighbor” rather than that of “beggar-thy-neighbor”. For the Malays, the term “kembang semangkuk” is essentially referring to a type of dried flower which basically mixed in syrup drinks, and it has some medicinal value to ‘cool down’ the body. The dried flower is usually soaked in water; and once place in water, it will absorb the water in the bowl. That is why it is commonly known as ‘kembang semangkuk’. This commonly refers to illustrate that some individuals just prefer to bloom or to be known on its own just within the scope of one bowl and very individualistic whereas the opposite is true as one can benefit and grow and others too, that is, ‘kembang se taman’, meaning blooming in a garden. In another words, to bloom in a garden is basically to be collective, having a win-win situation and sharing the prosperity, the beauty and advantages as a group. And what an abundance! (The author attributes the above insight to his former colleague and Malaysian friend, Dr. Habrizah Hussin)

Of significance, all, if not, most of us, as a matter of fact, want to feel joyful, be healthy and happy, and enjoy vitality in every moment of our existence. And that is affluence. Deepak Chopra (2000) writes that affluence is the experience in which our needs are easily met and our desires spontaneously fulfilled. Low (2012) has also argued and in fact highlighted the various ways – including being positive and finding happiness in small everyday things, the happiness and benefits of creating affluence and feeling joyful so that we can better our lives in whatever ways we can.

6. Making Intra-person Comparison(s)

One very usual and destructive everyday habit is to constantly compare one’s life and oneself to other people and their lives. (Edberg, 2013a). Comparing or bench-marking what one has to what others have is a good way to make oneself unhappy (Edberg, 2013). It feeds one’s ego when one buys a nicer car or gets a cushier or better job than someone else. One feels great for a while. But this frame of mind and the focus on comparing always winds up in one noticing someone that has more. That someone has an even better job or car than you. And one then does not feel so good. The thing is that there is and will always be someone with better or more, so one can never “win”. One just feels good for a while and then that good feeling vanishes.

A more useful way to compare is to (*reflect or*) just make intra-person comparisons, that is, compare yourself to yourself (Edberg, 2013, *italics author’s*); one then further understands oneself. And one then understand how one affects others; Owen, 2006. Also, one needs to look at how one has grown and what one has achieved. Appreciate what one has done and what one has. See how far one has come and what one is planning to do.

7. Snipping it off at its Bud or Root

The next time, the very moment one finds oneself envious of another human being, snip or cut that dangerous emotion off at its bud or root. Don’t allow it to take hold or eat one up.

John (2008) pointed out to this issue of chilling against any envious feelings. He spoke of human nature; it is common for people to think that other people “have things better than us”. Whether it is the greenness of one’s neighbors lawn, the brand new sports car they have just driven up in or the salary raise that a colleague got (naturally they did not deserve the raise – it should have been us!). Indeed it is the training of the mind (Happiness can be achieved through training the mind; Dalai Lama, cited in Mareliisa, 2014), and this must be applied. One needs to relax as best one can. Switch what one is thinking about so that the feelings of envy disappear or at least diminish. Overall, thus take note that the person one is envying or desirous of is probably busy envying something else.

8. Being Awakened

Awake at work (Carroll, 2004), one is open. One would be kind to oneself and to others too; and one would also detach oneself from one’s feelings including feelings of envy, resentment and jealousy. There is no attachment to material things; whether they exist or otherwise matter little or has, in fact, no effect or consequence on oneself. Whatever others may have or owned is also of no consequential to one, and hence one is also free from any feeling of envy, greed or resentment.

9. Not Bottling up one’s Envy

Most of us like to bottle up our feelings. And sometimes all of us are so good at bottling up our feelings; and envious thoughts are no exception to this process. If one holds on to one’s envy as though a part of oneself would disappear if one’s envy left, one’ll find that one’s envy starts eating away at one (sometimes literally). Instead, allow one’s envious feeling to drift off into the universe. And watch it float away and fizzle out – that’s a fun thing to do and astonishingly easy as well.

10. Turning the Envy Around

Rather than being envious of that movie star’s multi-million dollar salary think about all the joy and happiness they have brought into people’s lives. Thank God, the Universe or whatever one believes in for one’s good fortune to witness this. Chances are that if someone or something makes one feel jealous there is an attraction for the person. Twist, twirl or turn that envy around and work out how one can share the goodness that one is envious of with others. By turning one’s jealous feelings into happy ones, one will feel better in oneself and help one’s people or others to indeed feel better as well.

What Are then the Key Benefits Especially for the Organization and People When Leaders Eliminate those Feelings of Envy?

Note that when a leader faces an envious and petty follower, (s)he would also have some problems at hand. Indeed leaders have to endure putting up with the negative and envious individuals that invariably exist in every organization; they may also seek people’s attention to them. If a leader is not vigilant, they also end up occupying far more time and attention than they deserve; it can also really waste the leader’s time. Envious individuals should be given their say, but an effective leader can ‘turn the situation’ around by asking them for ideas and vision, and paying little attention or regard to negativism (Brody, 2011). An effective leader truly understands that envious people merely want to control him or her, because they feel that they and not the leader should be leading the organization. These envious people are often closed-minded and envious, and rather than have a plan for helping the organization, prefer to always cast dispersions and think badly of others (Brody, 2011).

True, it is essential for leaders to prioritize so that the most relevant, critical and essential organizational items are the ones that the most effort is expended on. And accordingly, to this author, it is better for the leaders to pay care and thoughtfulness to their behavior; after all, their behaviors set the tone and standard (Price and Price, 2013) for the organization. And when leaders eliminate or minimize envious feelings, they set the example to the followers and as role models, leaders should focus more on leading effectively, and there would be less politicking; and they would in fact

achieve more. Leaders should then attain things not for themselves, but also, more for the organization and people, their followers.

It is also said that it is difficult to be competitive when a leader is paying too much attention on wanting to be like others. One loses one's passion and desire to unleash one's own innate assets and talent; this is why leaders or people do not advance their careers. They declare themselves "unable to compete" because they spend too much time observing others as rivals and "threats" rather than unleashing their true potential. When one is blinded by envy, one cannot see one's own opportunities staring at one; one clouds one's circular vision (Llopis, 2012).

Besides, rather than being envious and seeing the big picture, they would positively select and hire even better or smarter people than themselves. In this aspect, Low (2011: 88-89, *italics author's*) spoke of the Matryoshka principle: "Commonly found in Russia, a set of nested matryoshkas consists of wooden figures which separates, bottom to top, each is subsequently bigger, and so on, and the wooden figures usually come in a set of matching five. When applying the Matryoshka principle to talent management, it simply means that leaders should always employ or engage someone, much more (*talented,*) able or better qualified than him(her)self as well as the fact that they share the same set of values." Overall, the organization can truly benefit from this; such leaders will be able to attract and retain talents within the organization.

Next, envious feelings are really petty and insignificant, and when leaders and people in fact avoid, reduce and/ or minimize their envious feelings, they would engage in fewer conflicts and feel less resentful; instead they would productively cooperate and work together. It is also said that when their interactions were more genuine and sincere, inter-department and/ or inter-divisional cooperation will evidently increase to benefit the organization in terms of better coordination and teamwork.

Low (2009) has highlighted that successful leaders indeed collaborate and develop strong teams while cultivating their team members' ability to work with diverse people. They also see others through the positive visor, and when it comes to negotiations, win-win solutions are sought. Strategic alliances are formed. Co-operation and synergies are also tapped such as the synergies between countries, and also that between the public sector and private sector harnessed.

As a prelude to concluding this piece, the author would like to express these: One, it is good to know oneself through self-reflection (Low, 2013a). Two, knowing - is "so what?" One indeed needs to put into practice say, e.g., of not being green. However, even before practicing, sometimes, alas, some people think that they know and that they are ripe. And then stop short at there. Practicing (not being envious) - is really "so what?" too if one does not know the "how-to" or even reflect on oneself! Perhaps these call for self-reflection at each step/ stage; and one needs to ask oneself - at each stage (being aware, knowing, doing and practicing well) - a sort of self-check to move on or to practice (not being green or envious) and do it knowingly.

Conclusion

To reiterate, all in all, envious feelings are really trivial and unimportant, and when leaders and people in fact avoid, diminish and/ or cut their envious feelings, they would engage in fewer conflicts and instead fruitfully cooperate and work jointly with people.

While as in the above – what have been discussed – will make it so that these envious leaders and/or people are not still annoying or irritating, at least using some of these steps or measures will make the leaders function effectively and reduce their distraction. What is vital is that, as Brody (2011) well put it, leaders must certainly realize that leadership envy do exist, and do distance themselves from them. (S)he must also understand that they can be grave or dangerous, and destroy the goodwill of an organization as well as a leader's relationships with others. For this reason, a leader must stress on communicating with members, and using every effort to motivate his membership to help the organization achieves its vision and mission.

And overall, organizational leaders can learn to grow as effective leaders while adopting the various ways in which they stop being envious of others or even of their people. And in turn they achieve much for their organization and people.

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