

Member's Quarterly

Fall 2019 Edition

Ask the Expert

The Five Roles of a Master Herder

Leadership redefined

Q: What makes an exceptional leader?

A: The answer is someone who has access to all the five roles of a "Master Herder" and knows when to use them. This article is the first of two to introduce a different way to think about mastery in leadership.

The Five Roles of a Master Herder, a book by Linda Kohanov, is a leadership model that breaks down social influence into five distinct roles. The model evolved after years of academic research, ethnographic study and practical experience working with herd animals. Through the research, Kohanov drew heavily from the wisdom of the ancient nomadic pastoralist cultures. She coined the term "Master Herder" to describe their highly skilled ability to move large animals through massive territories without the aid of any restraining devices. This required mastery of the roles of **Leader, Dominant, Nurturer/Companion, Sentinel and Predator**. These roles are the ones we as leaders need to be able to balance so that we can effectively lead others.

Each role has its own set of strengths and challenges. In order to move away from the unproductive behaviours associated with the roles, we must be capable of operating within all five, including those that may not be our natural inclination. When each role is exercised in its mature form, one's leadership is compelling, collaborative and capable of producing intended results.

When we overemphasize a role, its challenges are bound to come out. It is crucial not to judge or shame ourselves or others when these unproductive behaviours show up. Furthermore, when we avoid or abdicate using a role, we are actually causing others to overemphasize the role we don't like using, therefore encouraging unwanted behaviours. The solution is to develop a healthy use of all five which will in turn help others to do the same.

In addition to understanding the roles, we need to be able to distinguish between the use of predatory and non-predatory power. The main difference relates to who benefits from its use and how it is being employed. Non-predatory power is aimed at generating the win-win as in mutual gains. Non-predatory power is aimed at benefitting the whole, whereas predatory power is aimed at benefitting an individual or small group at the expense of others.

Let's explore the roles of Leader and Dominant.

Leader

The Leader is the visionary, the one who can see out in front of the others. This role draws people toward a vision or goal. Those who are naturally inclined in this role will be attracted to novel situations, easily assess the possible benefits and exhibit a curiosity and confidence that others find contagious.



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To step into a Leader role, we must get out in front so others can follow. This presents challenges when a leader gets so far out that others can't keep up — we lose touch with those we are trying to lead. When an individual overemphasizes this role, they may become unsympathetic or easily frustrated by interpersonal dramas and appear aloof and self-absorbed. Too much focus on this role can also result in taking on too much responsibility due to difficulty in delegating tasks.

When used in its mature form, the Leader exhibits exceptional creative and visionary qualities, calms and focuses others during tense or novel situations and motivates through inspiration.

When the Leader role is combined with predatory power, the Leader will often blast ahead with blatant disregard for the impact or wake that is left behind. The intention is to achieve that vision no matter what the cost.

Dominant

Despite its notoriety for being misused and abused, being able to step into this role is a necessary and invaluable skill to have. The Dominant drives from behind as opposed to the Leader who draws from the front. A healthy expression of the Dominant is the orientation to "direct and protect" for the benefit of the team.

When overemphasized, unproductive behaviours emerge such as: using intimidation as a management tool, sometimes attacking others for little or no reason to keep everyone a bit on edge, refusing to follow through on the requests of others, pushing a personal agenda and making unnecessary demands on others. When a person slips into these behaviours, they become the most feared, least trusted member of a team. This makes it difficult to lead in a crisis because immature dominance increases panic and decreases problem-solving abilities.

Predatory dominance might look like someone using the above immature dominance tactics solely for personal gain, regularly using others' vulnerabilities against them.

Mature dominance looks like setting appropriate boundaries, stopping unproductive behaviours in groups, managing disagreements between team members, handling aggressive or passive aggressive power plays, motivating resistant individuals to take action and protecting valuable resources from those who would take advantage.

Next time, we'll share insights about the Nurturer/Companion, Sentinel and Predator roles. In the meantime, check out the Master Herder Assessment at <https://masterherder.com/professional-assessment/>

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