

Member's Quarterly

Winter 2020 Edition

Ask the Expert

The Five Roles of a Master Herder

Leadership redefined (Part 2)

Q: What makes an exceptional leader?

In the Fall issue of the newsletter, you were introduced to the Five Roles of the Master Herder, in particular to the roles of the Leader and Dominant and also the concept of predatory and non-predatory power. This segment introduces the Nurturer/Companion, Sentinel and Predator roles.

Nurturer/Companion

Although it may sound soft, there is ample hard evidence to show the importance of this role. Research shows that the number one reason employees quit their jobs is their relationship with their immediate supervisor. Aside from wanting to minimize turnover, having the ability to create trust and connection with others is the social lubrication required to communicate projects clearly, find solutions to problems and get better results.

Those strong in this role monitor the well-being of others and want to make everyone feel comfortable. If more of an extrovert, they will be able to socialize with a wide variety of people, where as an introvert will be an invaluable source of loyalty and support. This role is the glue that holds a team together.

When the use of the Nurturer/Companion role is out of balance we see: trouble differentiating between assertiveness and aggression, avoiding stepping into leadership, using gossip as a bonding tool, using passive aggressive moves to avoid direct confrontation, and when confronting directly, communicating with frustration or rage.

When this role is used with predatory power, we might see someone using their well-honed social skills to learn private details about co-workers, only to use that information against them for personal gain.

Sentinel

This is the observer, the witness and the lookout. The Sentinel keeps an eye on the environment, culture or larger economic/political/social system. This role is needed to alert leaders when the organization is in danger of losing track of its purpose or needs support or protection. The Sentinel stays on the edges but remains tuned into the group, sometimes smelling smoke before others see fire. When this role is performed well, others can do their job with less stress, knowing they will receive information on changes with time to adjust.

When a person overemphasizes the Sentinel, challenges appear like: seeming overly logical, aloof and detached, emphasizing group needs at the expense of the individual, overly focusing on spreadsheets/budgets/data/procedures while becoming oblivious to emotional needs, interpersonal struggles and creative ideas of co-workers. They can become hyper-vigilant and problem focused without offering solutions. They rely on others to intervene in conflict, create new policies and invent new products or business models. Ideally, this role is not left to just one person on the team. Team members need to trade off this role, minimizing the intense anxiety that can occur when it's continually left to one person.



Gail Boone
MPA, CEC

*Next Stage Equine
Facilitated Coaching*



Carmen Theobald

*Leadership Coach,
True Presence
Horse Sense*

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A predatory use of this role may look like a person withholding crucial information or failing to warn of impending disaster as a reaction to feeling devalued or as a power play to undermine designated leadership. Insider trading is also an example of a predatory use of this role.

Predator

When performed well, the Predator role is needed to make those tough decisions. It's imperative to be sensitive to energy and resource drains and to "cull" what is no longer needed in a timely, respectful and sensitive fashion. Learning how to use the Predator role in a non-predatory way is an invaluable skill.

When overemphasized, unwanted predatory behaviour includes: being too quick to fire those who may simply need more support and training, creating environments where colleagues feel attacked which breeds mistrust and paranoia, wanting to win at all costs even when it's not in the best interest of the company, and attaching too much importance to a survival of the fittest and competition mentality.

These roles can be used in a clear sequence of escalation with a struggling employee. Begin with a Nurturer/Companion conversation to check-in with the individual: gain insight into their reality or propose additional training. Next, the Sentinel: communicate what you see about their performance/ behaviour and how it is affecting others. Then, a Leader conversation: point to the vision of the organization, looking at how they can help to create that future and what opportunities could be there for them.

Assuming not much has changed, it's time to move into a Dominant role. After two or three Dominant meetings that are more direct with increasing consequences up to and including the notion of termination (that are actually followed through), if nothing changes, it is time to bring in the Predator. The Predator will tactfully and respectfully end the employment relationship. Ideally the escalation through the roles and clarity that is offered along the way will minimize the need for the Predator.

Moving through the five roles provides a way for us to master socially intelligent leadership. It is executing leadership in a way that puts significant responsibility on the "Master Herder" to be able to know what is required and to shift behaviour to match. It puts the emphasis on the self. It asks each one of us to be mindful and intentional about the way we show up to build trust and invite collaboration and cooperation to produce the desired effect. Check out the Master Herder Professional Assessment at <https://masterherder.com/professional-assessment/>

Gail Boone is an Executive Coach and Owner of Next Stage Equine Facilitated Coaching and can be reached via email at gailboone@ns.sympatico.ca.

Carmen Theobald is a Socially Intelligent Leadership Coach and Advanced Eponaquest Instructor and Owner of True Presence Horse Sense. She can be reached at carmentheobald@gmail.com.