



Good Self, Bad Self: How to Bounce Back from a Personal Crisis

By Judy Smith



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From the real-life crisis expert who inspired ABC's *Scandal*.

Everyone must learn to live with personal missteps. Whether you've put yourself in an awkward situation, or you find that you've unwittingly created a full-blown crisis, Judy Smith is here to teach you how to look within to diffuse, mitigate, and resolve issues at their root.

Good Self, Bad Self will teach you how to face and overcome potential problems before they send your life spinning out of control. Using the straightforward and incredibly effective POWER model—which incorporates the same strategies Judy uses with her high-profile clients—you can learn to master and expertly handle any sticky situation in your own life. Smith distills years of experience, sharing tools we all need to face our mistakes and overcome them.

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Editorial Review

Review

"I have known Judy Smith for many years and she is one of the best crisis managers out there. "Good Self, Bad Self" is a really important book and offers a unique way of looking at crisis." -- Larry King

"Judy Smith and her team are a reference encyclopedia of knowledge combined with experience that can command, guide, handle, influence, instruct, steer, supervise, and take overall charge of media relations with laser sharp understanding of the complex issues of law, medicine and forensic science." --Dr. Michael Baden, Host of the hit HBO Show "Autopsy", and author of "Unnatural Death" and "Dead Reckoning"

"Judy Smith is the uber media management guru of the 21st century. In a 24-7 breaking news world of sound bites, there is no better media veteran to have on speed dial than Judy Smith." -- Linda Kenney Baden, high profile trial attorney, media legal commentator, and co-author of "Remains Silent" and "Skeleton Justice"

"Judy Smith has a profound understanding of human nature, and we're fortunate that she's sharing what she knows about the importance of balance in our lives. "Good Self, Bad Self" isn't just about getting out of a crisis once you're in one--it's a powerful, inspiring book that will help you better understand yourself in every situation." --Marci Shimoff, "New York Times" bestselling author of "Happy for No Reason" and "Love for No Reason"

"It takes a lifetime to build a good reputation and only one thoughtless act to damage it. "Good Self, Bad Self" is a book you want to read "before" you need it. Smith provides a blueprint for how to act with authenticity in building, maintaining and, when necessary, repairing your personal brand." -- Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D., author of "Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office" and "Stop Sabotaging Your Career"

"Judy Smith has been doling out practical, no nonsense advice for over 20 years to her clients and her friends. "Good Self, Bad Self" is Judy in book form. Having worked with Judy and one her clients over the course of several months, I got to witness her style and effectiveness first hand. She is detailed, thorough, relentless, frank, and smart. Her course of action while strategic is also very thoughtful, and client-sensitive." --James Brown, Network Broadcaster CBS Sports

"Judy Smith is a very savvy problem solver, and she's incredibly tough. I've seen her handle head-strong clients and also senior producers of major television shows, and in each case, she was in command and relentless in working to implement her strategies. I hope to continue to watch her work her magic from afar, and never to need her services as a client." --Wayne Pacelle, president & CEO, The Humane Society of the United States

"Clean, well-organized and easy to read...Smith provides a good overview of how to identify and curtail egregious behavior, with just enough celebrity misbehavior to hold the reader's attention." --"Kirkus Reviews"

"Crisis guru Judy Smith knows her way out of a catastrophe...She brings her PR balm to the masses with "Good Self, Bad Self". " --"More" magazine

"This book is for everyone. Every person, at some point in his or her life, has desperately wished for sound,

experienced guidance while trying to navigate the treacherous waters of a personal or professional crisis, be it large or small. With GOOD SELF, BAD SELF, crisis manager extraordinaire Judy Smith provides clear and concise instructions for how to recognize our individual strengths and weaknesses and how to handle those dire situations. Those of us lucky enough to know Judy Smith wish we could take her and her wit, wisdom and expertise everywhere with us. With GOOD SELF, BAD SELF now we finally can!" --Betsy Beers, Executive Producer, "Greys Anatomy", "Private Practice", and "Scandal"

About the Author

Judy Smith is one of the premier crisis management experts in the world and has become the go-to person for corporations, politicians, and celebrities in times of crisis. She has worked on the Iran Contra investigation, the impeachment process of President Clinton, as well as the Enron Congressional inquiry. She also served as a counselor to BellSouth, Starwood Hotels, Nextel, Federated Department Stores, United Healthcare, Wal-Mart, Deloitte & Touche, and AIG, among other companies.

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Good Self Bad Self

1.

EGO

NEEDING TO BE THE SMARTEST PERSON IN THE ROOM

He was considered a brilliant attorney: charismatic, good-looking, and with one of the best conviction rates in any major metropolitan area. He was considered a shoo-in to be the next State Attorney General and he was being groomed for much more, Governor, Senator, maybe even President. At least to hear him tell it. "You know what it is, Judy? Truthfully, a lot of people are jealous of my success. Did you know that I'll be the youngest State Attorney General in history?" You haven't been elected yet, I thought to myself, although I'm sure as far as he was concerned that was just a formality. He had no problem with confidence, which, along with his other assets, made him attractive to the public. Yet he had run into a glitch; he was being accused of having withheld evidence in a trial he received a lot of publicity for winning. "It's absurd. With my conviction rate why would I need to cheat?" I could see that I would have to craft his media responses for him and insist that he adhere to them, but it was going to be an uphill battle because I could tell he thought he was always the smartest person in the room.

When people talk about someone who has an ego, it's almost never meant as a compliment; it's a three-letter dirty word, used interchangeably with "arrogance" or "pomposity," and the word "big" usually precedes it. But ego isn't inherently bad or good. It's merely one quality among many that make up a human being. Back in the day, of course, Freud used the word to talk about the conscious mind—our amazing human ability to impose control on our wild id. Now, though, the word has fallen out of favor with psychiatrists, precisely because it means so many different things to different people.

We're not looking at it in the Freudian sense, but rather how most of us use it colloquially. In this chapter, we'll take a look at ego in both its positive and negative sense. Indeed, having a healthy ego is essential to a happy, successful life, and like the other aspects of the self we discuss in this book, you have to own the quality and make it work for you instead of against you.

First off, what's good about having a healthy ego? Many, many things. A strong sense of self is essential to accomplishing anything in this world. Ego gives us that. We need to like ourselves, to think that we're

deserving of attention and our opinions and ideas are worthy of consideration. That isn't arrogance; it's the key to emotional health. "This is not a bragging or self-assertive liking," wrote Carl Rogers, one of the founders of humanistic psychology, in 1961's *On Becoming a Person*. "It is a quiet pleasure in being one's self."

Embracing your healthy ego doesn't mean being a domineering jerk or spending your days trying to make the world fit into an overblown conception of who you are. A strong ego can confer confidence, independence, leadership, as well as the strength to buck conventional wisdom and stand up for what you believe. A powerful sense of self can help you lead and give you the passion to sell your vision to others. Our country was built on the values of self-reliance, confidence, drive, and bootstrapping your way to success, and there's no question that the men and women who founded it had generous egos under their powdered wigs. But there is a fine line between encouraging a strong sense of self with high expectations and creating an atmosphere of arrogance and self-importance. It is important that aiming high does not turn into stomping on others on your way to the top. Arrogance is not an admirable quality. We've all encountered self-promoters who are eager to tell us how fantastic they are rather than let us figure that out by ourselves—this is just one example of how off-putting it can be when ego is used for ill rather than for good.

The balance that keeps someone with a healthy sense of self from becoming a self-involved, egocentric person is tipped when the ambitions of the self run roughshod over the needs of others. Because when the ego rampages unchecked, it stomps on good judgment, self-analysis, and self-control. An ego without limits is like a car with no brakes; if you can't figure out how to regain control, you may well wind up driving right off a cliff. This chapter is about finding your own point of balance and making sure that your ego is a reliable copilot and not a carjacker taking you for a ride.

In this chapter, we'll talk about different ways ego manifests and how it can get the best of you. We'll look at entitlement; engaging in risky, provocative behavior; having a sense of self that depends on external validation; failing to consider the consequences of one's actions; and refusing to admit you've made a mistake—all of which allow your ego to blind you to the landscape you inhabit. These are all both evidence and consequence of an ego run wild, and it's easy to see how someone who is unaware of the effects of his ego can get embroiled in a crisis that feels impossible to get out of. This chapter is about finding the line between being motivated by ego and being consumed by it. If you can begin to recognize when your ego is taking over in a negative way and check it, you'll be able to channel the positive aspects of ego—those that lead to business accomplishments, ethical leadership, and healthy relationships—to your benefit.

Ego Run Amok

As a crisis manager, I unfortunately tend to get called in when the balance between the good and bad aspects of some-one's ego has already shifted way out of whack. I've heard celebrities wailing about the unfairness of the universe more times than I care to count—even when it's clear to everyone around them that they alone are responsible for their downfall. To get out of their situations (or at least control the damage) they sometimes need to realize the problem is internal, as well as external. That can be a terribly difficult concept for egocentric people to wrap their minds around.

Take Kanye West, for example. The man is a brilliant hip-hop artist, but most of his public missteps appear to stem from an inflated ego and a refusal to see his own role in each debacle. I hardly need to list the flubs: from his televised declaration during the benefit for Hurricane Katrina relief that "George Bush doesn't care about black people," to his comparing himself to Jesus Christ, to his predilection for awards-show outbursts—most notably cutting off the very young Taylor Swift at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards to say that Beyoncé should have won the award that Swift was in the middle of accepting. Even President

Obama called him a “jackass.” West’s arrogance isn’t just cringe-worthy for those of us who watch him make similar mistakes again and again. It also affects his public image.

West, of course, is driven by passionate emotions, which is okay (necessary, even) for an artist whose job it is to express thoughts and feelings that we all can recognize. The recording studio is the ideal place for his ego to receive full expression, a forum for all his ideas and emotions that would serve to make his music even more affecting. But when he’s not in the studio, West sometimes appears to fail to analyze those emotions fully before they come flying out of his mouth, and context does matter. Everyone, from artists who are paid handsomely, precisely because of the way the expression of their emotions touches others, to parents whose ability to teach their children relies on appealing to their kids’ emotions at specific moments in their development, needs to remember that no one wants to see or hear you unfiltered all the time.

To me, the first step in reining in an ego that has run amok is taking an accurate read of your own emotions and their intensity; when you feel a burst of anger or aggression coming on, pause to consider those feelings. Often a strong emotional response is a sign that your ego is dominating rather than your objectivity. In West’s case, his strong emotional response at the show was a sign that his ego was caught up in the circumstances. So take a deep breath. You don’t have to respond to a perceived provocation right away. You cannot accurately make a rational assessment and come to a solid decision if you are acting from a place of unexamined, uncontrolled feeling.

There are two things you can do when you have an intense emotional response and suspect that your ego may be out of balance. First: Wait. Taking that deep breath will give you some time until your feelings are tempered. Second: Write an old-fashioned list of pros and cons for the possible responses you are considering. I am a big fan of lists. This will help you determine exactly what you are trying to accomplish by taking a particular course of action, and in the time it takes to write the list, your emotions will calm down, allowing your rational side to emerge. And if there are hidden egotistical motivations involved, you’ll soon uncover them.

West’s charging onstage wasn’t really about his need to defend Beyoncé’s art (and she certainly wasn’t asking for his intervention!). It seemed more about West’s need to declare himself the arbiter of taste, his need for his voice to be heard above all others that night, heedless of the context. Who won the award, of course, was not his decision to make. Many ego-driven people feel that no matter how they behave, they’re going to remain at the top of the heap through their own brilliance, cleverness, and indispensability.

Signs That You Need an Ego Check

It’s not hard to recognize someone who believes he’s above it all, is the center of the universe, or is obviously entitled. The stereotypical diva who swoops into a room with demands, expectations, and little patience for anything that doesn’t immediately support her view of herself as central to the universe is an obvious example of someone whose ego is off the charts. But most people with an ego problem don’t present that way. While not subtle, there are some less overt traits and behaviors I’ve noticed in my years of crisis management that are not thought of as being a sign that ego is running the show. They should be. Recognizing that the root of certain behaviors is an ego run amok is the only way to get back in a more productive ego balance.

Ego-driven Tendency 1: Displaying an Overblown Sense of Entitlement

Entitlement is the overriding sense that you deserve certain things in life, regardless of whether you’ve earned them. I’ve come to believe that certain types of people are prone to egocentrism, and with it, an

outsized concept of what they are entitled to. You would probably not be shocked to learn that a recent study by Celebrity Rehab host Dr. Drew Pinsky found that celebrities are significantly more narcissistic than the general population, after he had a sample of two hundred celebrities complete the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, a test measuring self-absorption. What's interesting is that the celebrities who had a talent (for example, musicians) tended to be less narcissistic than folks who were famous for simply being famous.

This squares with other research and my own experience: If you're good at something and have worked at it, as opposed to getting acclaim for something you didn't earn (inherited wealth, position, beauty, or having grown up with overindulgent parents), you're less inclined to feel like a fake. Persevering to get where you are (in the case of a musician, playing in small clubs and dusty dives, gradually honing your art and paying your dues) makes you more likely to have a manageable ego than someone who has catapulted to prominence without developing meaningful skills.

I will always thank my parents for conveying to me that working hard is essential. My parents taught me to treat everyone the same: with respect. My mom was an administrative assistant who cleaned office buildings at night. Once when I was little she took me to work with her; I was annoyed and a little embarrassed that my mom was the one pushing the vacuum cleaner. She told me firmly, "There is no work you should not be proud of. If you're earning an honest living and doing it well, there is no shame in any kind of work you do." Thanks to their influence, I've never let my head get too swollen as my business has grown. I don't feel entitled to my success. I had to earn it. I think I have a healthy ego about my work—I'm aware that I'm very good at what I do, but I'm also aware that I could lose it all if I don't keep my head on straight.

Ego-driven Tendency 2: Foolishly Taking Risks

When you lose perspective, as ego-imbalanced people tend to, you forget that everything you've worked for can disappear in the blink of an eye. That's what happened to a certain someone who wasn't my client, Congressman Anthony Weiner.

Weiner was hugely popular among his constituents—he won seven terms and more than 58 percent of the vote every time. At twenty-seven, he'd been the youngest city councilman in New York City's history. The ego that gave him confidence and allowed him to make a bid for office at such a young age (and defeat far better-known candidates) is the same ego that fueled his fiery, flamboyant demeanor and caused him to lose perspective.

As you would have to have been in a coma not to know, Weiner tweeted photos of himself in his underwear to at least one young woman. He was supposedly happily married, with a baby on the way. Nonetheless, Weiner had text or phone dalliances with at least five other women. Before owning up to the truth, he spent a week bobbing and weaving while late-night comedians had a field day at his expense (it didn't help that his name is slang for the very part of his anatomy he photographed and then tweeted). Finally, when his reputation was thoroughly tarnished, he held a tearful press conference during which he owned up to sending the pictures. He admitted that it was "a very dumb thing to do" and added, "But if you are looking for some sort of deep explanation for it I don't have one for you."

Well, I do, at least in part. Some of us are simply hardwired to get off on risky behavior. Brian Knutson, a neuroscientist at Stanford, conducted a study in 2005 in which he put Wall Street traders into MRI machines. Then he scanned their brains as they evaluated whether to buy or sell certain stocks. The higher the risk entailed in the decisions the traders needed to make, the more activity was visible in the pleasure centers of their brains on the MRI. I believe that part of the appeal for people who are attracted to high-risk professions like gambling, trading stocks, or politics is feeling as though they're superior to the people who aren't taking

the bold chances, that they know more and can juggle more. That leads to a certain sense that you are not subject to the same pitfalls as others, or that you are so good you will not get caught.

That is really a form of ego. Politics itself is a risky business, and you need a certain amount of healthy ego to believe you can serve others, put yourself out there, and get elected. Weiner's ego took an unhealthy turn when it drove him toward the risky thrill of tweeting dirty pictures. The problem was that this same too-healthy ego blinded him to the fact that he would inevitably get caught and would lose everything as a result. He thought himself above risk (a form of denial we discuss in the next chapter). And losing everything is exactly what ended up happening.

Ego-driven Tendency 3: Doing Anything to Be Validated

“Fragile high self-esteem” is what social scientists call the need for perpetual validation and praise in order for someone's sense of self to remain intact. The person appears to have a healthy ego, but it's an illusion. Without positive feedback, his sense of self flounders. People with fragile high self-esteem need affirmation all the time because despite their bluster, they actually aren't as secure as they seem. They can't afford to be wrong—they can't afford to even admit the possibility of being wrong—because that would pop their puffed-up sense of self.

It's not surprising that the insecurity found in those with fragile high self-esteem is correlated with lower psychological well-being and more defensiveness, as Brian Goldman, a professor of psychology at Clayton State University, has found. People with “secure high self-esteem,” however—which is what I'm calling an ego in balance—are genuinely confident in who they are and value their strengths, but also understand and learn to adjust to their weaknesses. Because they are not invested in being perceived as having it all together, they don't need to be defensive or act out as much when that premise is challenged. In short, if you have an in-balance ego, although it is still nice to hear it sometimes, you don't strictly need outsiders to keep telling you how fantastic you are in order to feel good about yourself. You've internalized that you're a good person doing a good job.

Being dependent on the praise of others is a very precarious way to live, and I see that in some of my work. The risks of relying on the affirmation of others are quite high, especially if you're a performer or politician, because if you fall out of favor (and most do at some point or another) and your acolytes trot off to find someone else to fawn over, you have no solid foundation to fall back on. Some people spend an inordinate amount of time and effort cultivating people to tell them how attractive and brilliant they are. A person with secure self-esteem needn't do this, and is not likely to throw all the good things in his life away (whether over time or in a single tweet) in the pursuit of external praise.

We see this all the time in parents. Parents with fragile high self-esteem often seek ego gratification through their kids, feeding off the praise and achievements of their offspring. It's seen in soccer moms or dads who are more competitive and invested in the game than their children are, or people who feel where their children attend school is a reflection of their worth as parents.

Here's one example: Despite doing well in school and in her career, Serena always felt a little intimidated by people who'd attended Ivy League schools. It didn't dominate her life, but after she married and had children, this insecurity, which had been dormant, was reawakened. Serena secretly decided when her kids were only infants that she wanted them to go to Ivy League schools.

Indeed, when her oldest was in high school, she began insisting that schools in the Midwest, where they lived, weren't up to par. Despite the fact that her son really liked Carleton, Grinnell, and Macalester—superb

small schools not far from home—Serena kept pushing him to apply to the Ivies. She believed with all her heart that it was about setting Henry up for success in the world and that he would thrive at Princeton or University of Pennsylvania or Cornell. The fact that Henry wanted a small college instead of a large university, and the fact that he wanted to be close to his family and high school friends in Chicago, didn't seem to matter to Serena.

Serena pushed him and nagged him about it to the extent that he felt alienated from her, and was even less likely to consider her point of view. He sensed that her desire for him to go to an Ivy didn't have to do with him. When he decided to go to Grinnell, which is in Iowa, over the one Ivy League school he got into, she was crushed and experienced it as a personal slight—if he loved and respected her, she reasoned, he wouldn't have “done that” to her. They didn't speak for his senior year of high school and well into his freshman year of college, which was painful for them both.

Parents like Serena don't truly see the distinction between themselves and their offspring, pushing the kids to excel in part because it's a reflection on them. They aren't truly interested in their children's interests or needs; they just need the affirmation of having other people be impressed by their kids' accomplishments. Her blindness to what her ego was doing to her outlook and opinions made her feel anxious and powerless.

Maybe you're not the kind of parent who's obsessed with the “right” school ... but have you ever pushed your children into a sport or performing art that you once participated in—because you were just sure they'd love it once they gave it a chance, even if they weren't naturally inclined to try it? Do you want your child to have friends from socially prominent or attractive families mainly because you feel that his associations will reflect well on you? Any pursuit in which a parent lives through his or her kid tends to be an unhealthy instance of egotism. Recognizing this can save you, and your child, years of misery and/or therapy bills.

Ego-driven Tendency 4: Overreacting and Catastrophizing

Another manifestation of ego is overreacting. The ego can be a frail thing indeed and people with a massive ego tend to protect and defend it at all costs. Excessive ego fuels emotional states that are prone to overreaction.

The London-born supermodel Naomi Campbell is notorious for her “world revolves around me” attitude. It probably doesn't hurt to have a healthy dose of ego when you work in an industry that constantly judges and critiques your physical appearance and demands adherence to its ideals of “perfection.” But a healthy balance of ego is perhaps a description that has never been applied to Campbell. Her emotional responses to confrontation and dissatisfaction in her life most likely stem from a warped perspective caused by an inflated self-importance.

People with inflated self-importance will tend to view every circumstance, frustration, or dispute as a personal affront to their identity, which needs to be defended—sometimes even in violent ways. Furthermore, because their self-importance makes them feel threatened and more vulnerable, egomaniacs will often view themselves as victims by unrealistically inflating the importance of neutral comments and occurrences—oftentimes finding nefarious meanings that aren't there, or tying a random event's origin back to themselves.

In 2006, Naomi Campbell was involved in a highly publicized scandal in which she was arrested for second-degree assault against her maid. The housekeeper alleged that Campbell accused her of stealing a missing pair of jeans ... and then threw a cell phone at her, hitting her on the head. Campbell initially pleaded not guilty to the charges and claimed that she believed that the maid was retaliating for being fired earlier that

day. But this was not the first time Campbell had been accused of assault using this MO.

Back in 2003, Campbell was sued by a former assistant who alleged that two years earlier, the supermodel had assaulted her during a fit of rage. She accused Campbell of throwing a cell phone at her in a Beverly Hills hotel. According to various news publications, the assistant claimed that she was grabbed by the arms and thrown down on the couch. Media outlets also reported, in a separate incident, in February 2000, that Campbell pleaded guilty in Toronto to assaulting her assistant over the course of several days in 1998.

Ironically, even when a reaction is spurred by a warped perspective, where people feel justified in their behavior, such as thinking they have been wronged in some way, they often have trouble accepting responsibility (notice how denial and ego align themselves in fueling crisis situations). Instead of saying “I was wrong,” which would threaten their ego, they often place blame on anything or anyone else. They also are quick to tie unrelated events together and assign meaning to them. Consider Campbell’s statement, issued by her spokesman, regarding her 2006 cell-phone tirade reported on People magazine’s website: “We believe [the charge] is a case of retaliation, because Naomi had fired her housekeeper earlier this morning. We are confident the courts will see it the same way.”

The court didn’t exactly see it the same way. There is no doubt that celebrities are often targeted with litigious threats by those who want to strike it rich using the court of law. But the public (including myself) gave a collective eye roll at Campbell’s attempt to downplay her role and minimize responsibility for her actions. In the end, in exchange for a guilty plea, Campbell was ordered to pay her maid’s medical fees. She was also sentenced to five days of community service and ordered to attend an anger management program.

Like many with an out-of-whack ego, Campbell also seemed somewhat confused as to who was the real victim. After her 2006 arrest, instead of publicly showing concern for the person who required medical attention because of her outburst, she made sure to assuage the fears that people surely had for her well-being by coyly stating to the press that she was being treated fairly by the police. According to People magazine, after her arrest, Campbell told reporters, “I’m fine. The police have been very nice. It wouldn’t be the first time I’ve been extorted.” I’m sure the public greeted those words with sympathy and relief.

This would not be the last time Campbell would face legal repercussions for her actions.

In 2008, Campbell pleaded guilty to assaulting two police officers at London’s Heathrow Airport. She allegedly spat at the officers following an argument about her lost luggage. I can attest to the frustration of being separated from your luggage, especially if it is at the fault of an airline, but a reaction to the circumstance should not result in arrest. USA Today reported that Campbell was charged with “three counts of assaulting a constable, two counts of using threatening, abusive words or behavior to the cabin crew and one count of disorderly conduct.” Media outlets reported that she has been banned for life from British Airways for her behavior. She was eventually sentenced to 200 hours of community service and fined \$4,500 after pleading guilty to assault.

It should be noted that Ms. Campbell, once the dust settled, would often issue apologies for her actions. Her apologies may have rung hollow to more cynical types, though, considering that some sources say that the model had been accused of assault ten times over the course of a decade. Then too, even though she apparently feels “regret” and “shame” for her outbursts, she is often quick to attribute her actions to extenuating circumstances. Regarding the 2006 incident, as reported in USA Today, the cause was in part due to “tiredness, lack of sleep (and) just so many things”—all of which caused her to, again, throw a cell phone at another human being in a fit of rage. Also, it was reported in the same publication that “[she] threw a cell phone in the apartment. The cell phone hit [the maid] ... [but] this was an accident because [she] did

not intend to hit her.” However, by 2010, Campbell’s ego appeared a bit deflated and she seemed to make a more sincere and honest appraisal of her actions. Appearing on The Oprah Winfrey Show, an emotional Campbell spoke of her history of violent outbursts: “I am ashamed of everything I’ve ever done. I take responsibility for the things that I have done, and I do feel a great sense of shame.” She continued, “I feel remorseful. I feel ashamed. I feel for them,” she said. “[I think,] ‘What have I done to them?’ If I’ve hurt them.”

Another way that egotists overreact and lose perspective is by ricocheting from perceived disaster to perceived disaster, perpetually in crisis and perpetually dragging others into their drama. Not only is this a waste of energy, but when everyone around you is caught up in the drama, others tend to share your perspective, not challenge it, which makes it harder to right yourself again. When someone turns a setback into a major disaster in his or her mind, therapists call this “catastrophizing.” To me, both over- and underestimating the personal impact of a setback are evidence of an ego-driven lack of perspective.

Here’s an example of a catastrophist in action. I know a woman named Yvette. If Yvette’s kid gets a B, she’s positive he’ll never get into college. If she misplaces her wallet, the entire criminal underworld is probably charging up the credit cards. If she’s having trouble on a project at work, she’s certain she’s going to get fired and wind up living in a refrigerator box. It seems that much of her distress is about pulling people into her own orbit, gaining sympathy and attention. She doesn’t do it consciously; she’s a lovely, funny person. She is just a drama queen, convinced that disaster is near.

If you are prone to overreaction, either because you want to appear to be important, or because you need to draw others into your orbit like Yvette, the first thing to do is recognize your pattern. Before you react, consider writing your thoughts down. Writing things down is a great way to gain perspective on them. Over a couple of weeks, you’ll start to see what situations lead to your panicking the most, which should help you to avoid them. Then ask yourself what your entrenched behavior is costing you.

If you remember that your ego is only one aspect of you and not in charge, you can “talk back” to your ego-controlling self: Am I really going to be fired because of one mistake in a spreadsheet? Am I really going to go bankrupt because my dishwasher broke? If I come down with an iron fist to solve a problem, might I be causing more harm than good? Then answer yourself honestly. You can’t gain perspective without conscious effort and awareness. But if you make the effort, you’ll find that the self-subverting behavior will lessen in strength and frequency.

Ego-driven Tendency 5. Failing to Own the Mistake

People with big egos, in order to preserve that elevated sense of self, are often likely to avoid owning up to their errors, which compounds the problem and creates multilayered crises that can be hard to climb out of. A healthy ego can acknowledge a mistake. Problems with ego often arise when the person with the huge ego happens to be wrong, and stubbornly clinging to the same way of doing things in the face of evidence that it isn’t working.

Happily, there are some examples in which a crisis resulting from an out-of-control ego or ego-driven decisions can be turned around. Look at Starbucks. Its leader Howard Schultz exhibited vision and hubris—both sides of the ego coin—with his continual drive toward expansion and disregard for costs and conventional wisdom. The company started in 1971 with six coffee shops in Seattle, then grew to 677 stores in 1995 and 3,505 in 2000, when Schultz left his position as CEO. But the expansion was happening too fast: Stores were dirty and poorly staffed, and consumers in Starbucks-saturated neighborhoods saw the company’s name as a synonym for corporate soullessness ruining the character of neighborhoods and

snuffing out unionizing and small businesses. The company's stock dropped almost 43 percent in 2007 alone.

In 2008, Schultz decided to return and take the reins again. To his credit, he was not so ego-driven that he couldn't recognize a mistake—that the business model he'd spear-headed was no longer working. In the eighteen months after he took the helm for the second time, Schultz closed hundreds of stores. He also announced that he would take a pay cut from over a million dollars a year to below \$10,000 in 2009. Schultz told CNBC's Maria Bartiromo that Starbucks would "go back to our roots and reaffirm our leadership position as the world's highest-quality purveyor of specialty coffee.... It reminds me of the old days when our company was very creative, very entrepreneurial, and we were fighting for survival and respect." The company initiated programs to become more environmentally friendly and began opening unbranded coffee- and teahouses in Seattle. The overall financial tides of the company began to turn. Schultz recognized that arrogance had driven the company off course and realized that it was essential to acknowledge their mistakes.

The earlier you recognize and own a mistake, the smaller your crisis will be. In the wonderful book *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me)*, the social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson point out, "If you can admit a mistake when it is the size of an acorn, it is easier to repair than when it has become the size of a tree, with deep wide-ranging roots." Shultz and the Starbucks example shows that far from it being a sign of weakness to admit your strategy has its faults, it can be a strength, and yield positive results on a public relations and financial level.

The Role of Perspective in Managing Ego

It's often been said that celebrities live in their own little bubbles, surrounded by people who live off of their earnings and who insulate them from the world. This isolation, combined with a big, potentially problematic ego, which as we've seen can be isolating in itself, can lead to complete loss of perspective. And often perspective from others who aren't invested in the same outcome you are is the only thing that can get an ego gone wild to calm down. This is just as true of people in positions of power in the workplace.

I call gaining this perspective "knowing your landscape." I find that people who find themselves in ego crises have a far more favorable reading of the landscape than they should, meaning they think that things aren't as bad as they actually are. Knowing the landscape means understanding what you're up against. It means being attuned to the facts, the circumstances, the players involved, and knowing how the issue is perceived by everyone involved, not simply adhering to your point of view in the face of constant opposition. An ego out of control can be incredibly isolating, because inherent in the problem is the belief that you are right, which makes you less likely to seek out the perspective of others. It can also lead to major crisis.

Bill, an executive in a small investment firm, was a boss who was all too eager to throw his employees under the bus every time there was a slip-up, delay, or setback. He was well-known for calling out underperforming underlings in business meetings and shaming them in front of their peers. If he thought an idea was bad, he mocked it roundly, which tended to stifle innovation and creativity. If a client had a complaint, he blamed specific workers or tried to bully the client into agreeing that the complaint was unfounded.

While Bill was at the top of the heap, he won his employees' deference, but only because he was the guy in power. What he didn't have was their respect. When his company was acquired by a larger one, Bill was pushed out. Because he couldn't find anyone with anything truly nice to say about him, he had a hard time getting references. He called me hoping I could help him get his job back; I had to let him know that was

impossible. Instead, I tried to help him see how ego—and his refusal to own it and manage it—had torpedoed his hopes.

There's plenty of research to show that ego is a hugely damaging force in the workplace; whether it manifests as a coworker who takes more credit than is due to him or her, an office mate who talks too much (while contributing little of substance) at meetings, or a boss who doesn't value his or her employees, there seems to be no shortage of excessive ego displays at work, particularly among management. A 2009 survey of over 1,200 employees by Florida State University College of Business professor Wayne Hochwarter found that 31 percent of participants reported that their superior exaggerated his or her accomplishments to look good in front of others, 27 percent reported that their boss bragged to others to get praise, 25 percent reported that their boss or the person in charge had an inflated view of himself or herself, 24 percent reported that their boss was self-centered, and 20 percent reported that their boss would do a favor only if guaranteed one in return. "Having a narcissistic boss creates a toxic environment for virtually everyone who must come in contact with this individual," Hochwarter says. "The team perspective ceases to exist, and the work environment becomes increasingly stressful. Productivity typically plummets as well."

Nobody sets out to be an egocentric boss, of course. Bill certainly didn't. As I often do, I took a tough-love approach with Bill. After he filled me in on what happened from his perspective (he felt that people had thrown him under the bus for political reasons) I asked him pointed questions that revealed what had truly taken place with his subordinates. He wasn't completely clueless about his manner. In fact, he took pride in the way he took people to task in public, believing it to be motivational and character building.

I walked him through times in the past when he could have been more of a team player and a more supportive boss, and accomplished similar ends. I encouraged him to speak to a job counselor and a therapist to see how his behavior was harming him professionally and personally. I encouraged him to call some of his former co-workers with whom he'd clashed the least (those who truly hated him were a lost cause; I'm all about looking forward, not backward) and tell them he was sorry for the excesses of his behavior. If he could be specific about ways he'd wronged them, so much the better. Targeted, thoughtful regrets are always better than generalities. I had him spread the word through his network that he was job-hunting and urged him repeatedly to be humble. If he came off as unappreciative or disgruntled, he'd hurt his job-hunting chances still more. He had to show his colleagues—and put the word out into the grapevine—that he was willing to change.

Bill was truly roiled—not to mention deeply embarrassed—by being booted from the company where he'd been a hotshot for so long. But he was willing to do the work of change. It would have been unrealistic to expect an ego-driven guy like Bill to do a complete turnaround, even from a crisis as big as this one, but he was willing to do what he could to repair his reputation and gain employment again. What's more, being humbled actually had a positive impact on his family relationships. A crisis became an opportunity for meaningful change.

Here are some of the questions I had suggested that Bill consider about how large a role his negative ego played in the outcome of his situation; you too might ask them yourself, wherever you fall in the workplace food chain.

In meetings, what percentage of the time are you the one doing the talking?

Do you give credit for others' ideas?

Do you give other people's contributions and concepts a fair shake, or are you only half listening, looking for evidence that your way of doing things is the best?

When someone comes to you with a problem, is your first reaction "How can we fix this?" or "Who is responsible for this?"

These behaviors are all manifestations of the negative aspects of ego.

If answering those questions sets off your warning bells—and it's OK if they do, because it means you're reading this book openly and with honesty about yourself—here are some steps to try to help get your ego back in check before you reach the point Bill did:

First, recognize the benefit of change. Your work life (and quite possibly other areas of your life) will improve if you take action. If you don't internalize that and truly accept that change is necessary, any change or efforts you make will be purely cosmetic and you'll be prone to backsliding.

Ask for and respond to feedback—that's the perspective component. For example, if you know you tend to talk over everyone else, ask a trusted colleague to help you listen better and integrate the ideas of others.

Think about the example that you're setting. If you're about to demand something nearly impossible, think through how the work will actually get done. Reconsider whether that is the best way to inspire your team. A good way might be to ask them what it will take to get what you want done and let them help to set the deadline, so they will be invested in the project, as well as to make yourself available to supervise, not just to expect results.

Make it a point to be empathetic. If you're about to make a snarky public comment about someone's shoddy work, visualize being on the receiving end. You might be correct that the person's work is shoddy. Where someone with an overblown ego is often incorrect, though, is in thinking that any manner in which this fact is pointed out is valuable. It is not. The way in which a criticism is delivered can make the difference between effecting the change you want and simply coming off as mean. Take a minute to think about the best way to improve the quality of the person's work.

Finally, give yourself marks and guideposts and stand by them. For instance, if you tend to dominate meetings, promise yourself you won't speak for the first ten minutes of every meeting. Or vow to ask three information-gathering questions before offering your opinion.

Getting Ego Back into Balance: Reassess, Reevaluate, and Know the Endgame

Getting your ego back in balance is no small feat. In most cases it requires you to step away from the situation, reevaluate, reassess, and really figure out what your endgame is going to look like.

Tiger Woods is a good example of someone who underwent this process. As you no doubt recall, in 2009 Woods was involved in a late-night accident right outside his Florida mansion. The window of his brand-new Cadillac Escalade was smashed. Some speculated that his wife, the former model Elin Nordegren, had used one of her husband's clubs to smash it.

Eventually the story came out that Woods had been unfaithful. Serially. Now, we are accustomed to

allegations of bad behavior (often denied) from players in more rough-and-tumble sports—soccer’s David Beckham, hockey’s Sean Avery, basketball’s Tony Parker—but not from a golfer. The sport tends to be very conservative. Tiger’s endorsement empire was based on his being above reproach. When he trashed that image, he put at risk everything he had.

So the first thing he did was acknowledge that he had screwed up. He offered a highly orchestrated public apology to an audience of friends, family (though his wife was notably absent), and sympathetic journalists. I thought this was good, in that it was starkly lacking in ego and took full responsibility for having let his fans and family down. And he took a long-term view of making amends: A year after the scandal, Woods made it clear that he was still working toward recovery and self-improvement. In another apology in Newsweek he wrote:

Last November, everything I thought I knew about myself changed abruptly. I had been conducting my personal life in an artificial way—as if detached from the values my upbringing had taught, and that I should have embraced.... But this much is obvious now: my life was out of balance, and my priorities were out of order. I made terrible choices and repeated mistakes. I hurt the people whom I loved the most.

That’s a very wise self-assessment. Woods pointed out that golf was a game that rewarded the individual. It’s not a team sport—to an extent, it’s about ego and believing that you and only you are the best—and he’d made the mistake of confusing life with golf. He seemed to understand intuitively what I’m saying in this book: the very same qualities that can make you a hero can also make you a villain. The individualism of golf suited Woods; he excelled at a game in which you can’t rely on others. But those very same traits of self-focus and raw egocentrism that made him successful at golf suited him poorly in his marriage.

What can you learn from this? That taking a step back is sometimes better than continuing to fight; that in a crisis, you need to figure out what you value and let everything else take a backseat. To Woods, the most important things were family and golf. He tried, and failed, to preserve his marriage but at least felt that the scandal put him on course to be a far better father.

Know your objective and the endgame whenever you hit a snag in your own life. What is it you cherish and fear losing the most? Where do you want to end up? What do you want the most? Do you understand that societal, legal, and moral rules apply to you as much as they do to others? Think of what you need to do and then trace the steps to getting there: don’t just react to the crisis in front of you. Think long term.

After all of those examples, it’s now time to think more directly about how you can make sure that your own ego is in balance, using the POWER model.

Applying the POWER Model

Pinpoint the core trait: In this case, egotism.

Own it: Acknowledge that it can be both good and bad.

Work it through: Process the role it's played in your life.

Explore it: Consider how it could play out in the future.

Rein it in: Establish how to re-achieve balance and control.

PINPOINT: Take a good, hard look at egotism in your life.

OWN IT: When you own it, you embrace the fact that without ego, you'd be sitting quietly in the corner like a dish-rag. You'd never take risks, stand up for yourself, or feel pride in your accomplishments.

WORK IT THROUGH: When you work through your feelings about ego, you'll realize that if you're afraid to ask for what you want, accept and promote your own work and desires, or put your own goals at the top of your agenda, you aren't permitting your ego to help you become the person you could be. But if your ego has become hubris, and you're using ego to domineer and demean, then you're not letting your ego help you become the person you should be.

EXPLORE IT: If your ego isn't in balance, whether that means you have too much or too little, you'll benefit from greater self-analysis (perhaps with the help of a good therapist or friend who is a great listener) to figure out how to make your ego work for you. Who can you engage as an ally in your quest to be your best self? How can you make it up to yourself if you've been shortchanging yourself, and how can you make it up to others, and resolve to do better, if you've been shortchanging others?

REIN IT IN: If it's necessary to rein your ego in, try reading a book like *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me)* by Carol Tavris, PhD, and Elliot Aronson, PhD; *Blind Spots: Why Smart People Do Dumb Things*, by Madeleine L. Van Hecke, PhD; or *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want* by Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD, to learn techniques for listening instead of talking and for taking in more perspectives than your own.

When you learn to notice your **POWER** becoming unstable, in ego or in any of the other traits we'll discuss, you can correct your course and begin to avoid falling victim to your own personality traits. Remember, all these traits can work for you as well as against you! A healthy ego leads to accomplishment, joy, healthy relationships, and work-life balance. If you do the work of regaining equilibrium and **POWER**, you can avoid the arrogance that is a hallmark of fragile high self-esteem and become your authentic, healthy-ego-possessing self. As Polonius says in *Hamlet*, "To thine own self be true, and it doth follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." That's the one un-joke moment in a comic speech. Even a doddering goofball character can tell us how vital the need for self-assessment and true self-evaluation are, unalloyed by layers of blind ego.

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