



Psychological Appraisals • Executive Search • Private Equity

From the desk of David Simpson

October, 2020

“To be successful you have to be selfish. And once you get to the highest level you must be unselfish.”

—Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013), UK Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990

Let's face it. High performing, successful individuals and executives are not particularly well balanced—on many levels. They are often very competitive (perhaps to an extreme), demanding of themselves and others, and frequently verge on being workaholics. Further, there is absolutely no way the exceptionally successful people we are referring to have not made a sacrifice that ultimately revolves around a certain degree of selfishness in order to accomplish all of the things they accomplish. So there is little doubt that at the earlier stages of one's career, selfishness works—and it works well. These types of people accomplish considerably more than their less selfish peers and, as such, receive the bigger promotions.

But there comes a point where the selfishness ceases to be a positive and flips over to being counterproductive. Consider that a study of 444 CEOs (*Harvard Business Review*, December 2016) found that those with an MBA were more likely to put themselves first at the expense of their companies. The end result was the MBA-designated CEOs produced consistently poorer results, over a time period of many years, than their non-MBA counterparts. The study was quite extensive and covered too many points to make mention of in this note. But it is well worth the read, if for no other reason than that HBR, part of a world-renowned business school, actually had the courage (or otherwise) to publish this research! Ultimately, at some point, a senior leader needs to be thinking more about the company, their team members, stakeholders, etc., in order to excel. Yes, the best of the best remain, at times, rather selfish. But they have found a way to modulate that selfishness and put it away when that specific behavior is not productive. In the words of business author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek, “The cost of leadership is self-interest.”

Perform better!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".