



Winners in a no-win world

Alphas – both male and female – are characterised by a desire to win. They are estimated to make up about 70% of the executive workforce. However, the current economy means the opportunity for an Alpha to get the requisite highs from winning in the external business environment is greatly reduced. This causes some subtle but high impact negative dynamics to emerge.

Over many years of coaching Alphas, I have identified three common 'Alpha traps' that emerge when Alphas are thwarted in their desire to win. In 2009, many Alphas are being propelled into these traps.

The first is the **Confidence Trap**. Part of the Alpha make-up is supreme confidence, or at least the appearance of it. Alphas often struggle to admit their fears and vulnerabilities. As a result they find it difficult to reach out, ask for help or build mutually supportive relationships. Under severe stress, they want more than ever to look like they confidently have everything under control.

The second pitfall is the **Competition Trap**. Alphas are programmed to compete. When the external wins are not forthcoming, this competitive energy can get directed internally into the organisation. Subtle but insidious rivalries build up as the high from winning comes by scoring points off peers. This is dangerous territory and is happening a lot right now with Board relationships particularly vulnerable.

My Way or the Highway, the final trap, is also increasingly visible. Alphas love control. Pushed too far, this tendency seriously limits their capacity to get the best from their people.

Take the divisional MD who has recently fallen into all three traps. Initially confident that he could add value by himself, he did not build relationships with HQ. He jostled with key peers and colleagues and told people how things "should be done around here". When the market changed and his division came under pressure, he found his network was weak. HQ did not consult him on the way forward, key players did not trust him and he lost out, despite having real experience that the organisation wanted.

Alphas who are self-aware and honest enough to spot these traps early and manage them will be the winners in a no-win world. They will be the players who can bring the best of themselves to bear in these turbulent times.

Alphas at their best can provide exactly what is needed psychologically and emotionally to lead through a crisis. Firstly, **swift but carefully judged action**. Operating at pace is easy for the Alpha and being decisive comes naturally. Secondly, **straight talking** – being honest about the difficulties and telling it like it is. Thirdly, staying **emotionally connected** to their people. Alphas can find it hard to show how much they care but those who have built their emotional intelligence can stay in tune with how others are feeling. Finally, providing **inspiration** – the Alpha's energy and self belief is contagious. This galvanises others and builds confidence in the face of difficult circumstances.

The Alpha who stays in touch with and manages their emotional state is best placed to win in a no-win world.

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