

QC0068 - Who's the CEO in the Relationship?

Are you the CEO in your relationships? At first, you might think, "Well, no! of course not!" But then you might stop and say, "What do you mean by that?"

DO RELATIONSHIPS HAVE CEO'S?

Every company has a CEO, or Chief Executive Officer. This person is the highest-ranking person in the company and the one ultimately responsible for making managerial decisions.

By this definition, you might say, "Relationships don't have CEO's. They're not a business or a corporation." And you would be right.

But many relationships still have a CEO. I call them the Chief Ego Officer, and they function much in the same way as the CEO of a company. They carry a lot of weight in the relationship when it comes to direction and decision making.

DECIDING WHO'S THE CEO.

How you can tell if you're the CEO in the relationship? Ask yourself the following questions...and try to be honest with yourself:

- Do you tend to make most of the decisions?
- Do you get upset when the other person makes a decision without checking with you first?
- Do you often explain to the other person why your idea is better?
- Do you have trouble listening to and considering their opinions and approaches?
- Do you get frustrated or angry when they don't take your advice or do things as you wanted?
- Do you look down on the other person for thinking or believing as they do?
- Do you see their difference of opinion as a threat to you or the relationship?

You may believe this list better fits your spouse, or the other person in the relationship. But, the more you answer "yes" to these questions, the more likely you are to be the Chief Ego Officer of the relationship.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF A CEO IN A RELATIONSHIP?

Though a company benefits from a strong CEO, a relationship suffers with a strong CEO. When a relationship has a strong Chief Ego Officer, two things typically happen:

The relationship becomes oppressive.

Whether it's implied or stated out-right, the CEO of the relationship has a my-way-or-the-highway approach to the relationship. The other person's thoughts, opinions, or approaches are ignored, dismissed, and not considered. The CEO increasingly stifles the other person, not allowing them to be themselves.

This is a slow poison that will slowly kill the love, affection, and attraction in the relationship. And, the longer this continues, the harder it becomes to recover the relationship.

Then, the second effect a Chief Ego Officer has on a relationship is...

The relationship becomes abusive.

Many CEO relationship stay stuck in the oppressive stage. But there are some relationships that will progress on to the abusive stage.

When the Chief Ego Officer experiences disagreement or push back from the other person, they will begin to push back themselves. At first, the CEO will try to convince or cajole the other person to see things their way. If that doesn't work, the CEO's approach will become more pointed and frustrated. If that doesn't work, their anger will come out and they will become emotionally abusive, and possibly physically abusive.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE IN A CEO RELATIONSHIP.

If you find yourself in a CEO relationship, what should you do? Well, let's start with what you need to do...

If You're the CEO...

If you're the Chief Ego Officer in the relationship, you need to take the following steps...

- **Humble yourself.** Apologize for being so dominant and inconsiderate. This is hard; especially for a CEO. But you need to start here. And your

apology must be sincere, not just a way to get the heat off or get the other person to soften back up to you. If you're not really repentant for your behavior, you've not changed and the relationship can't change.

- **Invite and listen to the other person's opinions.** This is not just something to check off the list so you can then get on to how you want to do things. Take your time and honestly listen to them. To paraphrase Stephen Covey, seek first to understand them before trying to get them to understand you. Hear their thoughts, their heart, and their desires.
- **Look for reasons to defer to the other person.** This is hard for the Chief Ego Officer in the relationship, because the CEO is usually focused on why the other person should defer to them. But try hard to defer to the other person whenever possible. I know, as the CEO, chances are you feel your way is better. But don't push your way through. Share it with the other person and make sure you both agree that your way is better before implementing it.
- **Make the above a way of life.** If you just do these things to get back on the other person's good side, then you've not really changed; you're just manipulating the situation to get back in the other's good graces. These changes need to be a way of life for you...even if the relationship fails.

If the Other Person is the CEO...

If you're in a relationship with a Chief Ego Officer, your options are much more limited. You can:

- **Continue on as it is.** Some people decide they will just go on tolerating the CEO's behavior. Perhaps they don't want to rock the boat out of fear of the CEO's response, concern for others in the family, or their own insecurities. Though this is a valid option, it rarely improves over time.
- **Begin to push back against the CEO's behavior.** This could move from standing up for yourself and your opinions, to not being easily coerced, to insisting on counseling, to threatening to leave the relationship. Chances are, the CEO will not react favorably to this change, and they will do whatever they can to get things back to "normal." If they feel they've got no other option, the CEO will seem to concede, but it usually doesn't last.
- **Leave the relationship.** If all else fails, you may decide you can no longer tolerate the relationship and make plans to leave. The CEO may have a variety of responses to your decision to leave. They may act shocked and say they didn't know anything was wrong. They may try to convince you that things are not that bad. The CEO may get angry and blame you for all the problems. And if all else fails, they may concede and

offer to make changes. But...often times their changes are only an attempt to get you back in the fold.

A FINAL THOUGHT...

Can CEO relationships really change? Yes! But...the ego of the Chief Ego Officer will not change quickly or easily. It will take work and practice to learn to exchange ego for humility. But it can be done. So, if you're the Chief Ego Officer in a relationship, honestly and humbly enlist the aid of close friends, accountability partners, a pastor, or a counselor. Do whatever it takes to resign as CEO of your relationships. You...and they...will be the better for it.