

# Me and My Shadow

IT HAS TAKEN you many years to arrive where you are today. Years of learning, working, attending to the world and the people around you. As a fellow worker in HRD, I'd guess that setting your personal goals and clarifying your values have been important to your aspirations. Our profession encourages us to make goals out of aspirations if we want to get somewhere.

That positive approach to work and life is reinforced by others. It is admirable and upbeat; it fits with our American culture and mythology. And, as wonderful as it is, it is only part of the path toward our potential.

I am well aware of that part of myself that is reaching and moving toward some of the grander goals of my life and work. This aspiring me is essential to what I do in this field; my years of consulting and writing have been fueled in large part by this more idealistic and enlightened self. But this enlightened self has a less visible partner that hides from public attention and works outside the light—a shadow self. During the past 10 years, I have increased my appreciation of how this shadow self motivates my movement through the world.

You, too, are moved by this combination of forces, enlightened and shadowed.

Consider what you reach for and what you run from, what you desire and what you dread; these two sides of you are partners in your progress. Satchel Paige, the former star baseball pitcher, is noted for saying, "Don't look back; something might be gaining on you!" Well, let's take a quick look back at what might be gaining on us, and at how important this unexplored and often scary self is to what we accomplish in the world.

The shadow is that side of ourselves that we have not yet shined a light on. This lack of light blinds us to part of who we are. Our shadow side is not necessarily virtuous or wicked; it is mostly unknown. Shining a light into your shadows could make sense. Not a searchlight, and not every corner at once, but lighting up the edges a bit at a time.

Think for a moment about your recent training or consulting. Recall an especially compelling program or project, one that you just could not quit thinking about, one that consumed your interest and energy. Consider what you were reaching for in this project, what new height you were trying to attain, what you hoped to help your client accomplish. Now ask yourself: Why was this important? Why did you bring all of this focus, energy, and talent to the project? What were your underlying motives and purposes?

Because we are not face-to-face to discuss your answers, I will share a few of my own (and notice my array of lighter to darker responses). I brought energy to my project because I want to help create organizations that succeed by using human talent well. I want people to get more satisfaction from the work part of their lives. And I brought energy because I am both afraid of powerful people and I want to be powerful. I want to help organizations change in a direction where people like me are more powerful, get more respect, and have their ideas honored. I want people with authority and power to move over and make room for the power of *my* expertise, for *me!* So all of my motivation is not as selfless as it may outwardly appear. I am in this HRD work partly because of my own unresolved issues regarding power, authority, and control.

I don't talk about those issues often, but that does not decrease their influence on how I approach organizations. Those issues have emerged from my shadows over the past 10 years, and I am a better consultant for knowing about them.

What about you? What might be your less-lit motivations for your work? What personal wrongs might you be trying to right? What agenda do you bring to each client, whether the situation calls for it or not? What is it in your work that predictably sets you off, excites you, stirs you up, or maybe angers you? Notice your patterns of being drawn to or of avoiding certain issues.

It is often easier to become aware of others' shadowy patterns than our own.

Consider the clients you have worked with. You likely are aware of patterns in how they approach their work that they may not know themselves. Recall the hidden motivations you have rightly or wrongly attributed to them. From the outside, you "know" something about them that they do not yet know. Well, what is true for your clients is also true for you. You have patterns too; becoming aware of them is the challenge. When you are aware, you can change a pattern if you wish.

How might you look for what's tucked away in your shadows?

- ▶ Accept that you have much to learn about yourself, that you have a shadow side, and that it helps shape your life.
- ▶ Try to learn more about your shadow by moving toward it. Reflect on your actions, thoughts, and feelings. Be especially aware of patterns in what you say, do, and feel that point to unresolved issues within you.
- ▶ Describe the shadowy parts of yourself that you discover. Name them, like, "My controlling self says...."
- ▶ Talk with trusted co-workers and friends about this. Reveal to them something from your shadow that you have not discussed before. Note their reactions and your reactions to doing this. When all this is encouraging, discuss and reveal more; they likely will do the same.

Your shadow will always be there, never fully revealed to you. What you moved into the light is connected to another part of you that you have yet to discover. This is part of the beauty of self-discovery and learning. And that is what we are primarily about in HRD.

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