

LYSSA ADKINS

# #future-fit leaders

INTEGRATE THEIR  
SHADOWS

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Cover image of butterfly and shadows by [Joshua Woroniecki](#) from [Pixabay](#).

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SHADOW INTEGRATION IN LEADERSHIP

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Leadership models and philosophies abound! There are so many already out there and I follow several of them. They're all partial and most are useful. The characteristic of future fit leadership we are exploring this time is one I rarely see in other leadership formulations, though. It's this:

#Future-fit leaders integrate their shadows.

“Shadow” is a term coined by the psychologist Carl Jung and refers to our unconscious process of pushing away anything that you see as “not me.” It takes a great amount of energy to push away, fight, resist or try to ignore the recirculating emotions that keep the “not me” part at bay.

# The cycle of unconscious shadows

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Let's take an example.

Let's say you are in a negotiation and you are getting frustrated because the other person is being greedy. They actually don't need all of the deal points they are asking for. They're just being greedy. If this is where your thoughts end about their greediness, then all good. No shadow. On the other hand, you might find yourself thinking about their greediness, getting pissed about it, making up plausible stories as to why they are so greedy, waking up in the middle of the night just furious that you have to deal with their greediness, and/or having intrusive thoughts about how much you hate greedy people and how it should not be this way.

If any (or all) of that starts recycling in your thoughts and emotions, especially when you don't want it to, well, then you may be dealing with shadow material. You may have detected one of your shadows.

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## The Cycle of **UNPROCESSED SHADOWS**

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Now, it might be objectively true that this other person is greedy. That's not the point. The point is that their greediness has triggered a cascade of thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations in you that are taking up time and energy. They are binding you up and restricting the full range of options you would otherwise be able to access. You're spending your time dealing with these uncharitable thoughts, which I remind you may be well-deserved. A whole slice of your energy is channeled into ruminating on the situation and in recycling those thoughts, which create emotions and sensations,

which create thoughts,  
which create emotions and sensations,  
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you see how this is becoming circular.



# The Psychology Behind Shadow Work

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Psychologists tell us that we get so “hooked” by something, like someone else’s greediness, because we have not accepted and integrated the part of ourselves that is greedy. We keep pushing away any identification with being greedy by spending tons of energy, time, and attention bolstering the idea that it's “not me.”

‘I’m not greedy,’ you say to yourself.

But you are.

Of course you are.

We are all greedy about something, even if it's just a teeny tiny bit. Doing what's called “shadow work” allows you to see that, to make peace with it, and to integrate your greediness into your personality. That little shard called “greedy” that got carved off at some point in your life gets to come home and be included in a healthy, holistic way. When this happens, then the ability for greediness to grab you and take over your thoughts and emotions subsides.

# The Benefits of Shadow Integration

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When you encounter the next greedy situation or person, which you will, you may dislike it. You may think it's uncalled for. You may even have a judgment that being greedy is wrong, but it won't "hook" you. It won't take over your system and make you less skillful because your energy is bound up in pushing against greediness. Instead, you will have the full array of options open to you to work creatively with the situation.

When you start to work with your shadows, you'll start to see them everywhere. The good news is, perhaps surprisingly, that shadow work need not be hard work. Sometimes they can almost be instantly liberated and included by understanding where and when the "not me" got carved off. Spoiler alert: this happens most often in childhood. Other times they can be integrated through cognitive methods that bring the shadow from a third person objectification to a first person experience and recognition. They can also be transfigured from a low frequency (stuck) pattern to a high frequency (free) pattern.

# THE VALUE OF SHADOW WORK FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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There are lots of ways to work with shadows. The whole point is that when you are activated by shadow material, so much of your energy goes toward being activated that the skills you spent so much time developing just fly right out the window. This is why it's worth looking at, understanding and integrating those shadows.

From an adult development perspective, I believe that at some point all the work becomes shadow work. After you've worked through the earlier stages of development, after you have expanded your own sensemaking and done the other things mentioned in these newsletters, pretty much all that's left is integrating the shadows.

One of the shadows I have been integrating lately is judgment. I create judgments about “it should not be this way” when I detect flaws. I'm a pro at it. I can detect flaws 24-7 with no loss of energy. Well, except for the loss of energy it takes to hold all those flaws in judgment.

# JUDGMENT AS A SHADOW

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My flaw-detection-to-judgment machinery was operating at full capacity recently as I witnessed a group of well-meaning and mostly self-aware people try to make a decision together. Oh, the crappy communication dynamics! Flaws everywhere. All the typical ones. Dominating voices, withdrawal by others, lack of momentum, confusion as a tactic to delay engaging, And, generally, difficulty staying on topic and completing a task.

Now, let me set the stage. We're talking about advanced humans. They have skills. Lots of them. Most have been trained in various aspects of effective communication and most have been in intensely collaborative work settings for years. And still, they fall into the predictable traps.

Since I spend so much time thinking about humanity — as in all of us — and the coming era of inescapable planetary challenges, my mind leaps to that scale and I think, ‘OMG! If these well-meaning, self-aware, advanced folks can't communicate well, what hope is there for humanity?’

(I know. It's a bit overwrought, maybe even a bit hysterical. Felt good to get it out, though.)



# Finding Balance and Perspective

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After working with these particular folks I went to my favorite place, my husband's arms. I told him how concerned I am. I relayed much of what I've said here and he responded with a hug and, "There, there dear," which somehow really works for me. It calms me and I can take myself maybe a tad less seriously. Then he said, "For all those reasons, it sounds like you're in the right place working with these people and you are doing important work." Yes. I suppose so.

Which brings me full circle to my practice of seeing the perfection by including the flaws. If you zoom far enough out in time and in scale, everything really is perfect.

In the meantime, I can work with my judgments. I can vent about them, get over feeling like a victim to them, and then breathe. Breathe. Contact my inner wisdom, amp up my curiosity, and then inquire, 'How might I work *with* this 'flaw'?'

I wonder what you are working through, or maybe what you now see as a shadow.

# A Preview of FUTURE-FIT INSIGHTS

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To give you a sense of where we are going, let me whet your appetite with the next headline:

**#Future-fit leaders take responsibility for their state at all times**





# LYSSA IS A LEADERSHIP COACH & AN EXPERT IN THE FUTURE OF WORK

Explore being coached by Lyssa

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