REVIEWS

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The Enemies of Excellence: 7 Reasons Why We Sabotage Success
Greg Salciccioli

Excelling is the goal of every endeavour. No one wants to be mediocre. Everyone wants to excel at what one does and reach the zenith of performance in that field. Very few can actually excel. Often the cause for not excelling is a general lack of discipline and a wrong understanding of the very parameters of excellence. Humility leads to excellence, both on the worldly and spiritual fronts. However, excellence eludes many because of the arrogance, latent or explicit, that one gains with one’s wrong perception that one has gained some knowledge or skill. Essentially, the factors that disturb the mind become obstacles in achieving concentration on the task at hand, makes one deviate from one’s goals, and leads to a disarray of discipline. Not only does the mind get disturbed, the whole personality of such a person is totally fragmented. People coming in contact with such a person are upset by the total disregard for sense that such a person exhibits. Finally, the person who was slated to be a leader ends up being a leader of a different kind, a leader of failure, a leader of all the don’ts that one should follow if one wants success in life.

This book carefully analyses seven reasons why we are unable to succeed. The author, Greg Salciccioli, uses the term ‘We Sabotage Success’. His choice of words is quite poignant and pregnant with meaning. The clear idea that comes out of this usage of words is that it is the individual alone who is responsible for one’s success. Success or the lack of it does not depend on any other person or cause. It is our penchant to blame external factors for our failure. Salciccioli is clear that the truth is anything but that. He makes a scale of the risk levels of the enemies of excellence and divides them into three sections, low, medium, and high. Salciccioli tells us that the failure of leadership can be addressed, is difficult to be addressed, and almost impossible to control respectively, in these sections.

In his foreword, Patrick Lencioni says that when a leader or a great personality fails, she or he does not get sympathy. The reasons for this apathy are mainly that such a personality brings failure because of one’s own doing and that people love to see a previously egotistic person become humble. There is also another reason that when a leader suffers failure, it is not restricted to one person but percolates to the lives of numerous others, who are connected to that leader and her or his organisation. However, as Lencioni points out, Salciccioli’s theory states that ‘there is something inherent in being a person of influence that creates a likelihood of pain and self-destruction’ (viii).

The seven enemies of excellence, egotism, life mismanagement, bad habits, indulgence, broken relationships, isolation, and self-sabotage are discussed, each in a separate chapter. Salciccioli begins the book by warning against playing with matches. By ‘matches’, he means problem areas or areas known to create havoc. He also clarifies that the problems that leaders face are much like the problems non-leaders face. He likens these problems to fire and asks us to soon identify them and to pull away from them. He advises us to heed the warning signs, which he assures, are always present, because failures do not happen overnight.

Salciccioli’s language is direct and lucid. Many of his near-poetic maxims are rightly italicised and serve to remind us of some cardinal truths.
For example, he says: ‘Few people consider how to sustain their success because they’re too busy trying to achieve it’ (9). Or: ‘Replace the energy you expire’ (37). According to him, the first step in getting rid of the enemies of excellence is to identify the ‘intrinsic dangers in leadership’ (7). He asks us to identify our vulnerabilities in personal and professional lives. He then asks us to think of ways to address these vulnerabilities. The most important thing that matters is that we make the right choices. Salciccioli says: ‘When we decide to do what’s right, regardless of the outcome, we will always discover greater opportunity’ (23). He cautions us against arrogance and asks us to seek help in tackling it. He asks us to find out the exact enemy of excellence that is creating problems for us the most. However, he says that sometimes the enemies might remain and yet one can be successful. He shows us ways to reduce the risks that such enemies pose to the possibility of success.

To counter the enemy of egotism, Salciccioli suggests that we develop altruism. He asks us to implement some altruistic best practices in our organisations and requests us to list our egotistical behaviours. According to him, evaluation, gaining insight, and initiating new behaviour are the three steps in getting rid of egotism. For tackling life mismanagement, he suggests that we take the steps of determining, planning, and practicing priorities. Physical, emotional, and spiritual health are important in tackling this problem. For countering the enemy of bad habits, Salciccioli advises us to create good habits in the place of bad ones and live an intentional, purposeful life. He asks us to do this exercise with one’s team, so that it would be easy to achieve the goal of completely getting rid of all bad habits.

The biggest hurdle in identifying the enemy of egotism is that most leaders who suffer from this problem, and there appear to be really many, are highly charismatic, articulate, capable, and usually know their way through their industry and society. Needless to say, they also control the bastions of power and very few people, if any, like to critique them for the fear of ruffling the wrong feathers. Leaders who are insufferably egotistic characteristically are highly reluctant to share power or control, much less heed to new ideas and innovations. Salciccioli is quite confident that the most easy way to be free from the enemy of egotism is to develop a selfless altruistic outlook to work and life. When the mundane is tied upward-looking to an ideal, it becomes easier to inspire and integrate one’s team members.

Why do we let the enemies of excellence destroy our lives? Salciccioli says that it is primarily because of three reasons, pride, lack of understanding, and lack of experience. He assures us that character is the best antidote for indulgence. ‘The stronger it is, the greater defense it offers. The weaker it is, the more susceptible to sabotage we become’ (60). Salciccioli tells us that the enemy of broken relationships is an emotionally and mentally exhausting enemy and he suggests that we should resurrect our broken relationships by analysing what we value in life and building our critical connections. The importance of emotional quotient, EQ, or emotional intelligence is stressed and Salciccioli says that we should be able to track our accountability on account of ethics, morals, emotions, relationships, money, recreation, and thoughts. This tracking of accountability should be done with a core group of people who would be honest and would have access to our full disclosure.

Salciccioli says that the enemy of self-sabotage begins with a great gap created between our public and private images. This arises because of self-deception that comes out of egotism, he says. Such self-deception manifests often in the form of seeking praise, postponing doing important tasks, developing bad habits, and so on. In effect, the enemy of self-sabotage could give birth to all the other six enemies of excellence.

Each chapter begins with learning outcomes and ends with coaching tips. Charts, diagrams, questionnaires, tables, and a listing of valuable resources make this book more like a workbook designed to enable any one to be free from the enemies of excellence. This book is an essential read for all leaders and other people, who influence numerous around them. A spiritual guide and a management book, this volume is sure to bring some sweeping changes to one’s way of thinking.

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