

Why Do They Do It?

by Dr. Jack Lin, Chairman of the Board, National Technical Systems, Inc.

“Why did I do that, I know better?” Have you ever heard yourself utter these words? Almost everyone has at one time or another found themselves doing something where in hindsight they know it was inappropriate, maybe even criminal. So why do we do it?

Looking back over the last few decades we can list a long stream of corporate leaders such as Michael Milken, Ivan Boesky, Charles Keating, Bernard Ebbers, and Ken Lay, who have come into the public eye for criminal actions. Today we have Bernard Madoff and Ramlinga Raju of Satyam Computer Services.

And one has to question what is behind the decisions made by many of today's corporate leaders like the CEOs of GM, Chrysler, Country Wide Financial, Bear Stearns, AIG and Lehman Brothers. Though their actions may not be criminal as the others noted, they have certainly contributed to the economic crises we are facing today.

One can only ponder - Why do they do it? Why do talented, respected, intelligent, capable, hard working, affluent individuals, in the prime of their lives and at the top of their professions, commit high level corporate crimes or corporate suicide?

First, some words for the good guys – most business leaders don't commit crimes or destroy companies. All business leaders make mistakes but most of them do not lead to corporate disaster. Most leaders are focused on building their organizations to provide the goods and services that contribute to society. Their focus is on the contribution their organizations make, not on how to turn a quick buck or “get away with something.”

So why do these highly acclaimed, highly successful people fall prey to such faulty decision making, which at its worst leads to malfeasance and criminal acts when the vast majority of their peers do not? Is there some character trait, some circumstance, or some genetic marker that separates those who commit corporate crimes and suicide from those who do not?

The dominant explanations tend to fall into one of three categories – greed, power, or entitlement. And while these three “culprits” are probably lurking within the causal arena, I believe they are more symptomatic than root cause. To understand the root cause we must drill down underneath these three symptoms for something more distinctive and comprehensive.

To travel to the arena from which these symptoms arise we must travel below our behaviors, below our outer personality and into the layer of our unconscious. Our unconscious harbors forces that impact our behaviors in often uncontrollable ways. They are uncontrollable for the very reason that they are unconscious that is they are not available to our conscious awareness.

Before we start our journey we will need a map to help us navigate our way, for these are uncharted waters for most of us. I have found the work of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, to provide the most useful set of tools for understanding this complex arena. I will limit the explanation of his work to only those aspects necessary to give us insight into our question – Why do they do it?

Carl Jung defined the *archetypes* which is an important concept to understand. To keep it simple, one can think of archetypes as energy patterns that guide and determine behaviors. Much like DNA determines the probable outcome of biological formation, archetypes determine the possible behavioral responses to any given situation.

Think of an archetype as a colored filter placed in front of a projection lens. When light passes through the lens it affects the color pattern we observe. An archetype pattern is like a filter and when energy flows into the physical dimension it passes through this filter and determines the behavior we observe, including our own behaviors.

Jung and his followers recognized certain behavioral patterns in unique combinations for each archetype. To help us visualize these patterns of behavioral characteristic, Jung personalized them with descriptive names: the Great Mother, the Royal King, the Caretaker, the Warrior, the Sage and the Magician are some examples. Each of these archetypes, these filter patterns, are universally recognized because they are viscerally experienced by people throughout the world. Think about the term Royal King and I imagine a series of images and feelings are invoked within you; a sense of “sure I know what that means.”

Another place to look to see the archetypal patterns at play is the great works of literature. The play Romeo and Juliet, for example, has such a lasting quality because it touches on timeless patterns and every generation everywhere can feel and experience its themes.

Each of us in the course of our lives tends to identify more dominantly, though not exclusively, to one of these universal themes. Jung describes this identification as attaching to the archetype. Mother Teresa may be said to have attached to the Great Mother, The Dali Lama to the Compassionate Buddha.

Jung identified another aspect of archetypes; these patterns are not only filters passing through only certain dominate behavior patterns, these patterns are in fact living energy forms, and these energy forms seek expression into the physical world. So while we attach to a dominant archetypal pattern, the archetype also attaches to us. In this mutual attachment we derive energy for our life patterns and at the same time the archetype patterns experiences expression into life.

With this map in hand let us return to the question at hand. Why do they do it?

As part of my doctoral research I discovered, which supported my experience of over 30 years as a CEO of a public company, that most business leaders are attached to the

archetype of the Warrior-King, the archetypal pattern that is most successful in achieving, maintaining and benefiting from a position of leadership.

In Gods in Everyman, Bolen, a Jungian therapist, noted that her CEO clients all followed a familiar pattern of behavior, that of the mythical Greek god, Zeus. Here is how Bolin describes Zeus.

As chief of the gods, Zeus was required to lose touch with the earth in order to gain an overview; to see the forest but not the trees; “a perspective that exalts control, reason, and will.” He was King, husband, father, protective, generous, and trusting toward many of his sons and daughters (although his generosity was motivated by his desire to control them and was tied to his expectations of them), sought authority and power, risk taker, focused and single minded (the eagle), alliance maker, philanderer, ambitious, pragmatist (not an idealist), accepted the world as it was and wanted his piece of it, never an intellectual nor introspective, didn’t waste time on other’s feelings or dwelling on the past, “Power is an aphrodisiac”, everyone was expendable to him, but there is no profit in making enemies, the “alpha male.”

We can see in this description many of the attributes associated with CEOs and in fact any leader. We see the positive attributes that helps one build and lead an organization. And we see the negative attributes, where the king is a tyrant, insisting on his own way and establishing control for his own sake at any price.

Drawing on the positive aspects of the Zeus archetype for success, the leader is also drawn into the expression of the negative aspects of Zeus since the archetype seeks full expression through the leader. The positive side of the warrior sees boundaries to protect or challenges to overcome; but, from his negative side, the warrior uses his skills for personal gain without thought of morality, ethics or his effect on others.

To help you personally experience and relate to the power of these energy fields, especially the influence of the negative aspects of the archetypal energy pattern, simply reflect back to a time when you found yourself doing something and then asking afterwards, “why did I do that, I know better?” Whenever you find yourself doing things that “you know better, but do it anyway” it is likely that the negative aspects of the archetype is seeking expression.

It is also important to know that not all aspects of the archetype energy patterns carry the same level of intensity. There are many ways for the negative aspects of Zeus to expresses itself: aggression, intimidation, belittling, and harassment are some examples. And the expression of these attributes alone, do not necessarily lead to criminal actions or corporate suicide.

What leads to the unwanted and criminal behaviors is the confluence of the negative aspects of the archetype with the competitive nature of the marketplace.

At one time, to compete (Latin *competere*) meant “to seek together” – for the competitors to challenge each other and hence improve each other’s skills. Over the centuries this definition has morphed to where the competitive character of the market place is “to win at all costs.”

It is not hard to see how the negative side of Zeus considers its behavior as just an extension of win at all costs, and is blinded to their impact on others or society. Is it any wonder that all of the leaders convicted have said, in one form or another – “why did I do that, I know better?”

Lest you think I am professing these people did not have a choice and that they were simply overcome by the titanic forces of the unconscious, let me emphatically state, No!

While it is clear these unconscious forces are at work and these forces cannot be ignored, a person still has free will. It is the very act of choosing, of exercising free will that breaks the forces of the unconscious and furthers our process of maturation. It is the human condition, perhaps our opportunity, to be tempted by the negative forces of the archetypes and choose not to fall prey to its forces.

Several times in my career as CEO and chairman of a public company I have had to make difficult decisions. Many times I too faced the challenge of having less than desired results and the choice of publishing the results as they were or hiding these results to maintain stock price. I, like many other CEOs, have felt the temptation to conceal these results but, like the vast majority of my peers, I recognized the pull of the negative forces and chose the principled path. While I often paid the price of economic setbacks I grew from those choices and so did my company, growing continuously over 30 long years.

This is but one of many challenges a CEO faces in the exercise of their duties, one of many challenges where the negative forces of the archetype will come into play. What I also recognized is that it takes more than just my own will and determination to work with these forces. It is not easy to escape the pull of the negative side of Zeus, and it is impossible to do so as long as these forces remain unconscious.

Left in the unconscious these forces take over and they exert undue power over us. Yet, once understood, the individual has the opportunity to control the archetype, rather than vice versa. And though it is very difficult to recognize them within oneself, others will often see them quite clearly. This is the real value of surrounding oneself with trusted advisors and listening to them. .

Much of my success I attribute to the people who served as my mentors, coaches and friends. Of course many of these people provided guidance and valuable advice on running the business, but their most valuable contribution was their ability to help me see aspects of myself I would not normally see.

These trusted advisors must however be outside the company. Like all systems of energy a company's culture will create a vortex of energy that inducts all those involved with the company. Jung would call this the group collective and it has very powerful influences over everyone within the group. And while many of the executives within the company are often trusted advisors to the CEO on many issues, because they are part of the collective much of what is unconscious to the CEO is also unconscious to those involved on a daily basis.

Legislation can never define one's morality! Sarbanes-Oxley and some of the new legislation being proposed may change the environment in which these unconscious forces play in; it cannot change or control the fundamental forces themselves. Only the individual can bear this responsibility.

And only through the wise council of trusted advisors, individuals who can hold up the mirror that reflects the negative aspects of the archetype in our behaviors, do we have the opportunity to choose differently.

May we choose wisely and never ask the question; "why did I do that, I know better."

[Editor's Note: I have been one of Dr Lin's trusted advisors for over 20 years and often provided him with a view of a problem that he wouldn't normally have seen. This was especially true when this involved the negative side of the Zeus archetype.

This was not always easy for him to hear for even the most aware among us will resist the often negative side of our personality. But because I was not part of the collective forces and because I was a trusted advisor I was able to hold up the mirror in such a way as Dr Lin could respond positively and learn new aspects of himself. Once aware of his negative attributes he would take on the challenge to learn the lessons they provided.

Yet the collective is a very powerful force. Even when Dr. Lin would adjust his behaviors his executive team would object for they too were caught up in the forces of the unconscious. Since I was outside the collective forces I could help him maintain the commitment to the new behaviors, which in turn would change the collective over time.

These are not easy forces to work with, and certainly no one can do it without the aid of an outside trusted advisor. Dr. Lin's commitment to his own growth and that of his company is why he always took on the challenge and his successful career and the success of his company speak for itself.]