

## Self Esteem / Life Strategies or Life Scripts II

### *For People to Satisfy their Indirect Self-Acceptance Addiction*

*By Jaime Jusidman*

In my first two white papers in the “Self-Esteem” series, I wrote about how our sense of self-worth or self-esteem evolves. I described the stories of David and Mike and introduced the concepts of Indirect Self-Acceptance Addiction (ISAA) and Self-Esteem Vampires. The “Active Approach” life strategy or life script that David and Mike live by is the same — it’s to satisfy their ISAA while enhancing or protecting their sense of value or esteem.

This next article illustrates how a life strategy or life script driven by perfectionism can have a negative impact on the way we interact with others. Take a moment and ask yourself, “does my perfectionist style come across to others as blaming or controlling?” or “am I striving to be perfect whatever the cost?” Does criticism or disapproval send you into a defensive rage since any mistake means that you’re not perfect. And when things go wrong, do you have difficulty accepting personal responsibility and acknowledging your imperfections? Is there a Self-Esteem Vampire hiding within you?



I have found in many situations that when Self-Esteem Vampires are threatened, at first they will run and hide, but then they will be confrontational.

What is so threatening that they want to run away and hide in their coffin in order to avoid dealing with their issues of feeling devalued or worthless?

As you read the following story about Rose, perhaps you’ll recognize a similar pattern of running away and hiding when you feel your self-esteem threatened instead of addressing a situation in a more healthy and transparent manner.

I met Rose at a Senior Executive meeting at one of my pharmaceutical clients. Her title was EVP (Executive Vice President) for Compliance and Regulatory Affairs.

As the meeting went on, I saw her as a very well-mannered, controlled, and intelligent executive and when she offered her points of view, they were clear, concise, thoughtful, and to the point. When it was time for her to present the deck of slides describing the pipeline for the new products to be approved by the FDA and their schedule for release, they were in perfect order and beautifully aligned with the corporate



brand identity and color scheme. She knew the content of each slide, and the timing and emphasis throughout her presentation never lost a beat. The cadence and tone of her speech pattern were impeccable and at the end of her presentation, Jack, the CEO, congratulated her on her outstanding job.

However, he did raise one issue regarding some of her assumptions of the timeline that had been set for a specific medication that needed to be strategically released by the FDA within a precise time frame in order for it to be in the marketplace during the coming flu season. At that moment, she got flustered and I could see a high level of anxiety building inside her. She became mildly argumentative but mostly apologetic for not having the required information at her fingertips in order to address her boss’s concern.

At the end of the meeting, she left the room in a hurry displaying clear signs of distress. Later, when everyone had left the conference room, I was approached by Jack who asked me about my observation of the meeting.

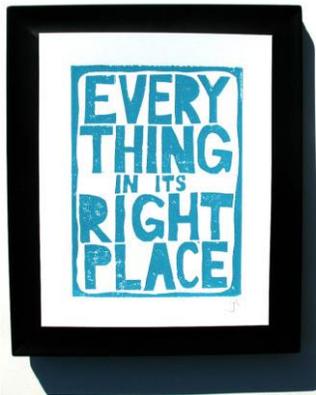
He specifically asked me about her reaction to his question and if I thought that his tone or line of questioning were in any way offensive or inappropriate.



---

I responded that, based upon my observation, his question was quite appropriate and that I also thought it was necessary to be asked to ensure the alignment of his Executive Leadership Team for a successful launch of that product line into the market. At that point, Jack asked me to help him figure out how he could work better with Rose, and then proceeded to share some of his experiences of working with her. According to him, whenever he or any other executive in his team raised an issue, which might challenge some of her work, she would get “bent out of shape,” defensive, and proceed to work extra long hours in order to find the mistake she may have made or to find the data to prove that her work was perfect.

I suggested to him that it would be beneficial for me to spend some time with her, to get acquainted with her, and to learn more about her. I asked him to help me set a time to meet with her the following day. On Tuesday at 9:00 a.m., she was already waiting for me. As she saw me approach the reception area, she stepped out to shake my hand and introduced herself in a very cordial but formal manner. She proceeded to invite me to her office, and as we walked towards it, we passed



through the area where her team was sitting. The space was open and bright with individual cubicles. There were also small offices with windows for her direct reports, and a very nicely appointed meeting room. What struck me at first was the quietness and how everything had its place, and that nothing was “out of place.”

Every member of her team was focused on a task and there was little or no chitchat. Her office had a window overlooking a courtyard and her desk was clear of clutter. There was a set of Montblanc pens in their stand, a calendar, a wide-screen computer monitor, and a phone. Behind the desk, on the credenza, there were some pictures of her two daughters and her husband as well as a picture of Rose in her dressage outfit riding a beautiful, black quarter horse. Her bookshelf was nicely appointed with some personal pieces of art as well as an assortment of legal and regulatory compliance books and magazines. Our conversation started when she said, “Jaime, I understand from Jack that you are an Organization Development Consultant and that you are going to work with us—with the Executive Leadership Team—so that we can improve our effectiveness as leaders and as a leadership team.” I nodded in agreement and

then she followed with a simple question, “So, tell me how you would like to spend our scheduled, one-and-a-half-hour meeting?” Obviously, she was setting her time boundaries with clarity without being offensive. I responded that I was meeting with all members of the Senior Team so that I could get to know them and they could get to know me.

At that point, I pointed to the picture of Rose with her horse and complimented her on how beautiful she (the horse) was. Rose immediately remarked that the horse was not a she but a he and that his name was Rebelde. I shared with her that I loved horses and that I had two Icelandics of my own at home. The conversation changed in tone and became more relaxed. She told me all about Rebelde and how much she had worked with him, and how important it is to communicate with your horse to get the appropriate response, which is critical for receiving perfect scores during a competition.

As the conversation progressed, I felt comfortable enough to ask her about the meeting from the day before. I commented on how I thought her presentation was impeccable and that at the end, I had noticed that she was somewhat upset and had left the room in haste without any time for me to meet her. “Was it that noticeable?” she asked, and I responded that for me, it was. Then I asked her, “What’s going on?” Her response came with an unexpected intensity. “Well, Jaime, I work long hours, and I’m very diligent in my work and with the work of others on my team. I take pride in my work and the work we produce here. People have accused me of micromanaging but my feeling is, if that’s what it takes to get the best results, so be it. Yesterday, after my presentation, I felt that Jack’s line of questioning was intended at second-guessing me and as a consequence, it undermined my credibility in front of my colleagues. Jaime, I know my time frames for the approval are right on the money. You can see (as she showed me her Critical Path Chart) that I have covered all the angles and I know what I’m talking about.”



The following week after meeting with all of Jack’s direct reports, I met with all of the executives who report to Jack’s team. After five days of interviews, I had a clearer picture of the Senior Team’s dynamics as well as their impact on the organization. Rose’s image among her peers was very consistent. They saw her as extremely competent, knowledgeable, and almost

---

flawless but if anyone dared to question her assumptions, she tended to take it as a personal affront so her peers had to treat her with silk gloves. Her subordinates described her as an “icon” in her field. They shared a great admiration for her knowledge and her ability to read the regulatory interpretations. On the other hand, they described her as obsessive-compulsive and felt that everything that was produced or processed in the department needed to be revised and approved by her. She would check content, grammar, spelling, format, and aesthetics, and nothing



could go out without her approval. Often, she would take on tasks that she believed no one could perform better than her, and they often felt as if they were “back in junior high school,” even though all of them were experienced lawyers from top law schools in the nation. They all had very divided feelings about her. On one hand, they felt admiration for her knowledge, experience, and prestige, but on the other

hand, they felt resentment for feeling devalued by her drive of perfection and her distrust of their ability to perform the quality of work that she expected.

With all this information, I suggested to Rose, as well as to Jack, that it would be very beneficial for me to spend some time working with her on a one-on-one basis to help her better understand her impact on others and the roots of her style. She reluctantly accepted my offer and immediately proceeded to inquire about my findings regarding her during the interview process. She also wanted me to provide her with the solutions to any problems she might have and that I may have identified through my interviews, so that she could act on them. She was anxious and tense and wanted to uncover the best solutions so that she could act as soon as possible and maintain her image of being perfect. I suggested that we take things one step at a time and not rush through our process. After she felt heard and able to express her tension with no repercussions or criticism on my part, she agreed to proceed with the process.

Through the work we did together, I learned that she was born in a small, Midwestern town, had two sisters and a brother, and that she was the oldest. Her father was a small farmer who enjoyed working and fixing his farm machines. He was the person to go to when a piece of equipment was not working; a friendly and likeable man, happy with the world, and content with his life. Her mother, on the other hand, had significant mood shifts that affected her behavior, so sometimes

she was very happy and sometimes she was depressed and angry. When she was angry, she tended to focus her anger towards Rose, and as a child, Rose took all the criticisms and devaluing statements as a true description of who she was.

She spent a great amount of time and energy trying to be the “perfect,” responsible daughter that she needed to be in order to avoid her mother’s anger and criticism. In her mind, Rose believed that she was a defective child who needed to be perfect in order to be valued, loved, and respected by her mother. As she grew older, this need for approval from her mother was transferred to any authority figures who crossed her path.

Rose’s life script of “perfection” was a result of the events in her childhood and adolescence. In her life script, the only one who she could trust and count on to do things perfectly was herself. She

learned not to trust others, particularly when the work performed by others might in any way reflect on her work. She would not run the risk of any work being imperfect that



could have an implication that she wasn’t perfect.

As she grew older, her perfectionist tendencies or style became the way to satisfy her Indirect Self-Acceptance Addiction. Her life script is a combination of a “Passive Approach” whereby she blames herself and runs away from confrontational situations and an “Active Approach” when she will blame others and her behavior or actions will come across as over-controlling and micromanaging. This “hiding” is often at the cost of her own self-deprecation and her blaming and micromanaging is often at the cost of someone else.

---