

The Heliotropic Effect

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According to Dr. Kim S. Cameron, “all living systems are inclined toward that which is life given and are disinclined or avoid that which is life depleting.” What is he referring to? Dr. Cameron is referring to the heliotropic effect. A perfect example to describe the heliotropic effect is to imagine placing plants onto a window seal and exposing them to sunlight. You will notice that as this occurs, the plants will lean in the direction towards the sun. In contrast, however, when the sun goes down, the opposite will take effect. Instead of showing life and promise, the plants will shrivel up and appear lifeless.

This is the example that Dr. Harry Cohen gave in his TEDx talk on Heliotropic Leadership. Dr. Cohen describes how this same rule of thumb applies outside the rules governing nature and takes place in almost every aspect of our lives as well. One area of our lives where this is prevalent is in our daily interaction with one another. For instance, imagine me randomly walking up to you with a mask on and a gun in my hand, would you give me a hug and tell me how much you missed me? On the other hand, what if I held the door open for you, said hello, then told you to have a nice day. In both scenarios, which one would you be more inclined to respond to me positively in? I think the answer is obvious.

Another area of our lives where the heliotropic effect plays a significant role is in organizations. Organizations are made up of people, and people usually display either positive or negative characteristics. Studies have shown that when people come together to form a collective, they are more inclined to exhibit positive behavior when doing so (Krebs, 1987). This is not to suggest that negative people are excluded from this process. How many of us knows that employee who brings negativity into the workplace? Dr. Cameron states that, “...abundant evidence supports the idea that negativity has an important place in producing outcomes”

(Cameron, 2011). So, what is it? Does the heliotropic effect impact us both positively and negatively? Some would argue that there is a significant difference between plants on a windowpane being impacted by the sun, and individuals and/or leaders being affected by people. While I agree that there is a difference, I do think that individuals and leaders (both positively and negatively) can both take advantage of the heliotropic effect. In the Universality of the Heliotropic Effect, Dr. Cameron talks about virtuousness and its ability to produce improved outcomes. When these practices are placed at the forefront of an organization, they can have a positive effect. Similarly, when virtuousness is lacking in an organization, it can create conditions that breathes life into employees who become leaders that inject virtuous values into the organization.

In closing, the heliotropic effect has a major impact on living systems even if those systems be plants or humans. In addition, the heliotropic effect can also benefit individuals and leaders in and out of the organizational setting. Finally, the heliotropic effect has proven to have positive and negative consequences associated with it.

References

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