

4 Modes of Being Narrative

AA Mode (The Defector) - With a high degree of anxiety and a low degree of presence, the Anxious Absence mode embodies the weaknesses of both scales. All the damage of anxiety is present. This not only shuts down creativity and compassion in the leader, it introduces his or her anxiety "into the ether," even in his/her absence. This contributes to the overall anxiety of any situation even though there is no connection with the leader being absent. Therapists refer to this state as "emotional cut-off." Every family has at least two members who have reached this point and now refuse to speak to each other. The anxiety present in this mode creates chaos. The lack of presence assures that things will stay that way. This mode crystallizes anxiety in any situation and locks it into a frozen state.

NaA Mode (The Hermit) - Non-anxious Absence at least spares the leader of the damage of anxiety. This might be best described as "Live and Let Live" or "Survival Mode." Its strength is the self preservation of the leader. There are times when a situation is so toxic that this mode is necessary. The problem with this mode however, is that it abandons any hope of change. Sometimes, this is realistic, but the strength of great leaders and visionaries of history displays a stubbornness and a tenacity for not giving up in a situation. There are times when the NaA path is the smart path. But there are also times when this path is the easy way out and represents a deficit of compassion, courage and resolve.

AP Mode (The Savior/Problem Solver) - Enter Anxious Presence. Woody Allen is famous for saying, "80% of success is just showing up." At least this mode has the guts and the resolve to stay connected in a particular situation. There is no hope for influencing anything in a situation where one is not connected. The problem with the AP mode, however, is that anxious presence makes the situation worse. Trying to change a situation (i.e. lead) in AP mode is like being a "step up" transformer in an electric circuit. The most "effective technique" possible will either backfire or produce change that is only temporary. The anxiety that accompanies even the best methods will only perpetuate the present chaos and make it more solidly entrenched.

NaP Mode (The True Leader) Non-anxious Presence has all of the strengths of the other modes and none of the weaknesses. Edwin Friedman describes this as "defecting in place." Because anxiety is in check, it does not contribute to the present problem and its "stuckness." Because one is fully present and connected, true influence is possible. NaP mode can be described as requiring the greatest of courage. It is easy to be anxious, whether present or absent. It is easy to be non-anxious and absent. It is hard to be non-anxious AND present. This takes the ultimate in courage - the courage to take responsibility for one's own anxiety AND the courage to fully show up.