

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Our Instincts Use Our Emotions and Our Cultures to Achieve Their Goals – So We Need to Use Those Same Tools to Achieve Our Goals

IT WAS CLEAR to me fairly early in the process of figuring out how our instincts actually influence and guide our behaviors that our instincts use both our emotions and our cultures as key and essential tools to achieve their most significant goals.

Those emotion-linked motivation approaches and culture-linked steering processes that instincts use to influence our thoughts and behaviors are described more completely in another chapter of this book. They are also described more extensively in the *Primal Pathways* book, *The Art of InterGroup Peace* book and the *Peace In Our Time* book.

That basic combination of cultures and emotions was, I learned, how instincts did most of their work. Instincts have major impacts on our lives. Emotions and cultures are their key tools that they use to achieve their impact. Instincts steer some of our behaviors with emotions and they guide other specific behaviors in various settings using our cultures as their key steering mechanism.

To figure out how to work most successfully and effectively with our instincts, I decided that I needed to figure out in practical and functional terms how I could take advantage of the fact that instincts used our cultures and our emotions to guide us and then use those same tools to achieve the enlightened sets of goals that we should all want to achieve.

My goal was to figure out exactly how those particular tools actually guided our lives and then to use both cultures and instincts intentionally and functionally to achieve a set of enlightened goals that we can each set for our lives using our intellect and a base set of ethical, enlightened, and morally sound values and beliefs as the foundation for our life choices and behaviors.

As a process improvement analyst who was looking to both discern and design process elements for intergroup interactions, I needed to understand how our instincts used our cultures and I needed to know exactly how our instincts used our emotions to get us to do what they get us to do now. That was a fascinating, engaging, intriguing, and ultimately highly useful analytical process and it led me to some very productive opportunities, tools, tactics, and overarching strategic approaches.

Cultures Help Instincts Achieve Goals

I learned very quickly that our instincts trigger multiple emotions to influence our behaviors. But emotions, by themselves, usually do not guide behaviors in sufficiently explicit ways. It was clear fairly early in the analytical process that our instincts cause us to build cultures in each group setting to structure our interactions in each setting in the explicit and direct ways that functionally help each instinct achieve its specific objectives for that setting.

As I began writing these books back in the early 1990s, I became particularly fascinated by the role and function of cultures relative to actualizing our instincts. I had not paid very much attention to cultures before that point in time. I knew the word, but I was very vague on the actual concept.

Then, I saw that our instincts functionally needed a context and a working process to accomplish their goals in each setting and I could see that our instincts tended to use our cultures to create the needed context for our thinking and to give us a guide for our behavior in each setting.

Our cultures, I learned very quickly, tend to be functional mechanisms that we use in what are often very creative and situationally appropriate ways in each setting to achieve our instinctive goals for that setting.

Each Culture Invents Hierarchies and Turf

The patterns are easy to see, once I learned to see them.

We have instincts to be hierarchical — so each culture invents the rules of hierarchy for each setting.

We have instincts to be territorial — so each culture invents the rules and the laws we use in each setting for ownership of turf.

We have instincts to mate, so each culture creates the rules for the mating process.

Cultures serve our instincts as their tool kit for making each set of instinct a reality in each setting.

Building cultures, I could see, was an instinct in its own right. We build cultures in every setting and we do that because we instinctively feel right having a culture in place in each setting. We also feel right when we behave in ways that meet the expectations of each culture.

As the culture chapter of this book points out, we even form cultures when we form lines — and we expect the people standing in the line to comply with the culture of the line. People can get very angry at a visceral level when people in a line violate a line culture — by “butting in” or otherwise breaking the rule in place on that issue for the line.

Our behaviors are influenced heavily by the cultures we build. The *Primal Pathways* book, *The Art of Intergroup Peace* book, and the *Peace In Our Time* book all describe that process and those cultural impacts and cultural uses in more detail.

I could see very early in my learning process that we instinctively create cultures and I could see that our cultures — once they exist — create their

own very clear sets of behavior expectations and their own levels of behavioral consistency.

I fell in love with cultures at that point in time — and I began to use them more explicitly and very directly as a tool for each of the settings I led as CEO or Chair.

Our instincts very effectively functionally give our cultures the very useful power to make explicit culturally aligned and culturally defined behaviors feel right. That attribute and that feeling gives cultures much of their influence and their power over our lives.

As part of that same perception package, both our cultures and our instincts can also cause a number of behaviors to feel wrong. Behaviors that work against an instinct or against a culture can feel very wrong — and that “wrongness” feeling keeps us away from many of those behaviors much of the time.

Stress Also Has Instinct Triggers

Stress also can have instinct triggers. Both our cultures and our instincts can also trigger a sense of stress that is directly linked to specific behaviors.

The ability to make a specific behavior “feel wrong” or “feel right” clearly steers our behaviors. Interestingly, the ability to make a specific behavior generate a level of stress for us also both steers and affects our thought processes and our behaviors.

Stress, I learned, is a less clear, but very influential guidance tool. Feeling right and feeling wrong are very clear levels of guidance. They tell us what to do and they tell us what not to do. Feeling stress generally just tells us that our instincts want us to pay attention to something that might be wrong in our situation or setting.

Stress doesn't always trigger a direct behavioral response in us, but instinct-triggered stress tells us we should be paying attention to something in our behavior or paying attention to something in our environment, situation, or setting that might not be good for us.

Instinctive Stress Reduction

Since I have been learning about my instincts, I have found that I could often reduce instinct-triggered stress in my own life when I clearly felt and identified the source of stress and when I carefully figured out the actual origin of each occurrence of situational stress at a functional instinct-triggered level.

That was a very useful process to learn. Instincts do create and trigger stress — often below a conscious level. People who feel stress, I could see, generally do not know or even suspect that their instincts have been the trigger at some level for their stress.

I learned to reduce or eliminate some levels of stress for me in my own life in some situations by either choosing to simply do what my instincts wanted me to do or by also very simply realizing and recognizing the instinct-linked cause of the stress and then intellectually shutting the instinct-triggered or culture-triggered stress pressure off at a cognitive and directly situational level.

We Can Intellectually Deactivate Some Levels of Stress

The stress felt by a mother who leaves her child in a daycare setting can fit that category of a behavior that triggers a purely instinct-linked level of stress. Being surrounded entirely in any setting by people from a different group can also trigger an instinct-linked level of stress.

Having a sense that a particular relationship we are having with a person from another group might be with someone who possibly triggers our group-linked traitor instincts in some way can also generate a sense of stress.

The book, *Primal Pathways*, discusses those issues and that tool kit in more depth and detail. Learning to understand the source of stress for each stress reaction and then dealing with the source of the stress at a conscious level can often help significantly to reduce stress.

The traitor instinct package is an easy example. When our traitor instincts are situationally activated because we are creating a friendship or having positive

personal interactions with someone from another group, our traitor-related instinct package can trigger stress.

Knowing that to be true at an intellectual level, I have learned that we actually can generally deactivate those traitor instincts in ways that can allow us to have stress free personal relationships with particular people from other groups.

That specific approach and that particular situation is explained more fully in *The Art of InterGroup Peace*, *Primal Pathways*, and *Peace In Our Time*.

Instinctive Behaviors Can Be Useful Management Tools

As I was studying the issues of instinctive behaviors, I learned very quickly to use instinct-related emotions and instinct-related motivations to help me with my day job. I used my understanding of those instincts to create hierarchical alignments that felt right to the people in them.

I also used my understanding of those instincts to create alliances and alignments inside the organizations I served.

I learned that we have Alpha instincts, Beta instincts, and Theta instincts that each can create a set of behaviors and emotions based on our relative position on a hierarchy. All three of those hierarchy-related instinct packages have been useful to me in leading and structuring the organizations I have led.

I have used the six key alignment triggers that are described in *The Art of InterGroup Peace* and *Peace In Our Time* books multiple times to help the organizations that I have led as CEO and to help the various coalitions, task forces, and trade associations that I have chaired or led come together in aligned ways.

A Sense of Common Mission or Values Can Be Bonding

I very directly used all six triggers on the Art of InterGroup Peace instinct-linked alignment pyramid — danger, common enemy, team alignment, shared

identity, common gain, and shared vision — repeatedly in both my internal work sites and in my interactions with external organizations.

In each setting where I have had a governance, leadership, or influencing role, I have worked to create a sense of mission and a set of common values as well as setting up team behaviors at multiple levels and identifying common enemies in those situations where having a common enemy can help create internal alignment.

I have also worked hard and very explicitly to create a sense of collective us for each team that I have led. Groups of people work better and are more aligned when the groups feel like an “Us” with other people in the group.

I have seen that to be true in many places and I often create that sense of “Us” in a setting by using those six key and basic alignment triggers in very intentional ways.

I have also generally very explicitly explained the role, function, and importance of instinctive behaviors to the senior leadership teams in my various worksites — to help create proactive intellectual alignment and to create shared understanding on cultural issues, on strategic direction, and on functional decision-making.

In each setting, I have very carefully and intentionally taught my senior leaders the instinct-linked benefits of being an “Us” and I have been painfully and explicitly clear about the instinct-linked risks, dangers, impediments, dysfunctional behaviors, and negative consequences that can result at multiple levels from any people in our setting being “Them” to ourselves in any way.

My First and Last Retreats Addressed Instinctive Behaviors

My very first senior leadership retreat topic at Kaiser Permanente when I became Chair and CEO was a two-day lecture and proselytizing session on the relevance of us/them instincts and thought processes and a working tutorial for the group on the need for us to be an “Us” inside our organization. I reminded

that senior leadership team of those same key issues over the next decade with consistent regularity.

My final coaching session with that same leadership team in that same CEO job just prior to my retirement was focused almost entirely on refreshing everyone's perception of those issues and reminding that team about that set of roles, risks, and opportunities for the future role in leading that organization.

One of the things I learned very early in the CEO role and CEO process was that if the leadership team in any setting has a clear sense of the overall strategy and if the leadership team shares the values of the culture, then the leaders in each setting are more likely to be aligned with each other and the on-site, tactical, situational, and strategic leadership decisions that are made by each leader tend to be made in self-coordinating and self-aligned ways that help us achieve our overall strategy and goals.

I call that management by remote control. It works.

People Tend to Be Clear About Their Relative Position on a Hierarchy

It has also been useful to study our various hierarchical instincts — including the instincts that are activated when we achieve Alpha positions in any setting.

We clearly have Alpha instincts that are activated when we are in lead positions.

We also, I learned, have another set of fairly consistent instincts that can be activated by being the number two person in any setting. I call those our Beta instincts. Beta instincts, I have seen, also came with their own very predictable and consistent expectations and patterns of behavior.

We also have a set of what I call “Theta” instincts that steer us in our thinking and our behaviors relative to other levels of our hierarchies. We create many multi-level hierarchies. Our Theta instinct package tends to cause people in each setting to be very clear and somewhat concerned about their own exact relative position in their own relevant hierarchy.

Those behaviors and those layers were initially invisible to me when I first started looking at instinctive behaviors — but once I saw them and understood them, I saw them everywhere that multi-layer hierarchies exist.

We have strong and relevant instincts that tend to cause us to each know and protect our relative status in any hierarchy.

If someone is a sergeant in an army, that position is regarded with great significance and great importance by the person who holds it. People in that position tend to take pride in their position and people in that position expect other relevant people in their setting to recognize and honor their specific position-based explicit relative status.

People can define themselves and measure their own lives in key ways by their own personal relative status level. Demotions for people in any of those relative positions can be extremely traumatic for the demoted people. Promotions on the other hand can be highly enabling and can feel very right to the people who are promoted.

Cultures tend to recognize promotions in hierarchies with ceremonies that cause people to feel rewarded and acknowledged in a visibly hierarchical way. Those kinds of visible and symbolic advancement celebrations extend to coronations, inaugurations, investitures, graduations, designated degrees, and various levels and categories of honors.

People Are Concerned About Losing Relative Status

People tend to take each level of designated status very seriously — and each level feels instinctively right to the person who is being designated as being in that level.

It was clear to me in looking at behaviors in multiple settings that we instinctively feel good being recognized in various hierarchical ways by our culture and it was clear that those processes and hierarchical tools could be used to both incent and reward desired behavior.

It was also clear that we feel both threat and loss at the loss of relative status. That set of feelings also has links to instinctive thought processes. We clearly do not want to lose any recognition we receive.

Protecting relative status can be a focus of significant energy for some people a significant portion of the time. Knowing all of those instinctive linkages to hierarchical positioning to be true has often been very useful to me as an organizational leader in managing the settings that I managed.

It was one of the factors that helped make mergers less stressful in several settings. When I understood in advance that those sets of relative hierarchical status instincts would be triggered by the merger, I proactively took those issues off the table quickly for the people affected by the merger whose relative hierarchy was relevant to the situation.

Some post merger settings drag on for long periods of time with people confused about their relative status. That confusion is both demoralizing and anger provoking — and organizations do not generally benefit from either demoralized or angry staff.

As I looked at our hierarchical instincts and behaviors, I spent significant amounts of time studying Alpha behaviors in particular. It became clear to me fairly quickly that our Alpha instincts often have a disproportionate impact on intergroup interactions.

The people who achieve Alpha status in any setting tend to activate sets of instincts that cause those people to be both territorial and prone to enter into conflict over turf issues with other sets of people who also have their own Alphas instinct-packages in place.

Those instincts create their own set of issues, behaviors, and thought processes for all of the people who have them activated.

The Leader Selection Process Feels Right for Each Culture

In any case, we use both our intellect and our cultures to define our own specific Alpha designation and selection process for each setting.

Our instincts clearly cause us to have Alphas of some kind for almost every setting. Our cultures give us the context that lets us create hierarchies and our cultures give us the process we use to select Alpha leaders in every setting.

We do that selection process in multiple ways — and it feels right in each setting to do that process in the way that the culture for that setting calls for it to be done.

People tend to like being in Alpha roles.

Once people are in Alpha status in any setting, people tend to want to retain that status and it can be almost addictive to the Alpha leader to be Alpha.

Term Limits Do Not Exist in Nature

There is a strong tendency for Alpha leaders in all settings to want to retain those jobs.

Term limits do not exist in nature for other species and they are also clearly not natural for people in Alpha positions.

As I looked at various organizations, various communities, and even various countries around the world, I have seen Alphas everywhere clinging to Alpha power for as long as the clinging could be done in each of their settings.

In the various hierarchies that don't involve people, the deposed Alpha leader is generally either killed or exiled. Lion leaders don't simply step aside and stay Peacefully in place into the future as a Theta or even Beta member of the group when they lose their power battles to the new Alpha. The old Alphas in lion prides are either exiled or they die.

For people, death isn't the usual consequence of losing Alpha status — but losing that status can feel like a death for some people and some categories of leaders for people do tend to serve in the Alpha positions until dead.

Observing My Own Instinctive Behavior Has Been Educational

I have personally held Alpha status in several settings and I have held fairly senior relative hierarchical status in several more settings, so I can also speak from personal experience in describing how the Alpha related, Beta related and Theta related package of instincts can influence behaviors and thinking — both for me and for other people in each setting.

I have enjoyed holding Alpha status in multiple settings. I have also gone through some grief and sorrow in losing Alpha status and turning over the Alpha role to a new leader for my old setting.

I have been the CEO for half a dozen organizations. I was never involuntarily deposed from any of those jobs. I have voluntarily left each CEO job, and I have turned half of those CEO jobs over to the person who was my current Chief Operating Officer when I left.

I can tell you from direct experience, it can even be a bit painful to turn over the Alpha position in a hierarchy over to another person even when the turnover is to a person I have worked with, and who I have intentionally trained and prepared for the job.

Part of the problem in those turnover situations is that when you are CEO, you generally think constantly about the job. As CEO, you generally think constantly about the issues that need to be addressed and about the full set of situations that need to be resolved. CEOs tend to focus a major part of their life on the functions and the thought processes that are linked to that job.

I have talked to other CEOs of major organizations about that focus. All agree that there is an inherent focus and concentration level that comes from being CEO in any significant setting.

Almost unanimously, CEOs say that you really do not understand at a complete level what it means to be a CEO until you actually have that job and until you actually do it for a period of time.

One function of the job for many people is that CEOs are never entirely off duty. The first thought focus of each day for a CEO is often the CEO set of things to do that day and the problems that exist for the CEO to solve that day.

So the focus on that job can be very time consuming and even intense. When you hand that CEO job over to someone else, your role changes and that focus and that intensity both melt away. It is a functional reality. You don't need that focus and you don't need that intensity if you aren't doing the CEO job.

That loss of intense focus can leave a real hole in the day and in the world for the former CEO. It can be disconcerting at best and it can be very painful at worst.

That sudden loss of intensity and complete focus can be disconcerting even when you expect it and it can be emotionally disruptive at a functional level if you do not expect it and did not want it to happen.

I have coached a number of wise, experienced, and mature former CEO's through the time just past their loss of the CEO position, and I haven't seen anyone yet who has enjoyed that transition.

It Felt Like the Gavel Had Been Amputated

My own personal most painful Alpha change was actually turning over the chair job for a national trade association to a new chair. I had served two terms as chair at that association and then I passed the job and the gavel on to the new chair. It felt like that gavel had been amputated from my hand when I handed it over.

That feeling stunned me. It took me totally by surprise. I was still the past chair of that board and I was still a full member of the Board, so I still had to attend future meetings. It actually took a couple of months before I could sit in that Board meeting without a twinge of pain.

That feeling was true even after I figured out exactly why I had those feelings and even though it was clearly the right thing for the organization to have a new

Chair wielding that gavel. Those painful feelings continued for me for months until time healed that particular wound and let me put those feelings behind me.

Part of the problem in many settings relative to giving up an Alpha role is that when you are the Chair — or the CEO — or the mayor — everyone in the setting tends to defer to you to at least some degree. That deference begins to feel both natural and expected in a relatively short time — and it feels as though it is happening to you because you are, in fact, a special person who deserves that deference. It feels entitled. But the truth is, the deference is entirely positional — and when you lose the position, the exact same deference is transferred very quickly to the new person in the position. You become a historical figure.

Direct Deference Deficits Happen

That can be a disconcerting change of status. People will hang on to some hierarchical positions with great rigor to avoid ever going through that direct deference deficit.

As I mentioned, I have voluntarily left CEO jobs six times. When I turn over my CEO jobs to the new CEO now in each setting, I find it best to literally leave town for a while until I am refocused and personally rebased at a high and intense level into my own next agendas.

I mention these personal reactions from my own life to make it clear that I understand exactly why those kinds of changes are resisted by so many Alpha leaders in so many settings and I knew exactly why so many Alpha leaders in so many settings stay in Alpha positions past their personal optimal performance levels for the job. It hurts to quit.

I Have Had Personal Experiences with Several Key Instincts

Turning over my own Alpha jobs and feeling the loss that resulted for me personally from having that role disappear has been very educational.

Alpha roles were not, however, the only set of instincts where I found my own life experiences to be good learning tools as I have been studying instincts related to intergroup interactions. I have found it fascinating to observe and experience the impact of several other sets of instincts on my own thought processes, emotions, and personal behaviors.

The Rage I Felt Was Clearly Primal

One of my most pure and powerful surges of rage in my life happened when I believed someone was harming my first-born child. That was several decades ago.

I can still remember, however, how pure and how primal that anger felt. I now know how instinct driven that pure and primal rage actually was.

I have had multiple times when I have owned property and have had my own turf instincts triggered at a very primal level by property line issues and disputes.

I still have one property line issue in one setting where that particular package of instinctive reactions is skewing my values, my emotions, and my thought processes a bit even as I write this page of this book.

That skewing of my thinking is happening today for me at a level that makes me cranky and unhappy even though I know at a purely intellectual level how purely instinctive my reaction to that specific property issue is and how little functional relevance and importance that particular issue and that particular piece of turf really has to my life.

Property Issues Are Easy Triggers for Instinctive Reactions

I can tell by the way that the factual issues that exist for that particular property line situation create a persistency of negative and almost irrational focus in my mind that very clear instinctive energy levels are being activated in my head by that particular turf-related situation.

I have learned over time to have a fairly good sense of when my own perceptual and emotional responses to a situation or setting have instinctive cores.

In the specific case of this piece of property, I am making the clear, intentional, explicit, and deliberate decision not to have my activated turf instincts skew my behavior — but I am definitely tempted to act in some ways that would feel right to me and that would look petty and invasive to the other people who are relevant to that situation.

At one level, for me individually, being both petty and mildly (and at least symbolically damaging) to the other party would actually feel right. I have gotten some emotional satisfaction by playing out a couple of petty scenarios in my own mind and enjoying how those scenarios felt when I imagined doing them.

My point here in using that example is not to point out, affirm, or for some readers confirm that I am a petty person — but to point out that what keeps me from actually being petty in that situation and in that setting is my understanding that my very basic packages of turf instincts are triggering those emotions and that the situation and the circumstance realities are not sufficiently important for me to actually respond in any of the negative ways that those instincts are directing me to follow.

But I feel the power of those instincts even in that inconsequential setting and situation.

In all of the settings in the world where group turf instincts are being activated and people are engaged in behaviors to protect, defend, or regain their

turf, the power of those instincts to set priorities, trigger emotions, and structure our thought processes is huge. People swept up in turf protection instincts will kill other people without hesitation and will hate anyone who threatens their own turf or group turf.

We Each Can Choose How to Respond Where Instincts Are Activated

We are all subject to having basic sets of territorial and hierarchal instincts activated in our lives that can lead us to negative, petty, destructive, and intentionally damaging behaviors — when we understand which of those instincts is being triggered in our own lives, we each get to make better choices about the behaviors and the values that will result from those instinct activations.

Those instincts have great power to shape our thought processes, emotions, and behaviors. They create their own set of values and behavioral expectations.

If we understand that whole process clearly — and if we diagnose accurately when each part of that process is relevant to our own lives — we have the chance to make decisions to act in intentionally enlightened ways that can minimize their negative impacts on our personal behavior.

We each need to decide what our core values and behaviors are and should be. We each need to understand when our instincts or our cultures steer us to behaviors that are not aligned with those core values.

We do have some power over our lives if we take that approach.

We do not need to simply do what our cultures or our instincts direct us to do.

We can each make choices — and we need to make those choices in enlightened ways if we want to guide our lives to the enlightened future we all want to share.

To succeed in that process, we should intentionally build cultures with enlightened values and behavioral expectations and put those cultures in place so that we feel right doing enlightened things. We need to be angry when we act in

unenlightened ways because those unenlightened behaviors violate the cultures we have carefully put in place in each relevant setting.

That particular strategy is an intentional and strategic use of our instincts and our cultures — and it is clearly the right thing to do if we want those behaviors to be embedded in our lives in meaningful ways.