Coaching Colleagues Out of Shadow Thinking

Based on the Actualized Leader Framework, this guide is designed to help you coach colleagues out of their Shadows — fear-based thinking that leads to counterproductive behaviors such as perfectionism, negativity, impatience, or personalization of others' behaviors. Each of the three sections below covers one Shadow pattern: how to recognize it, how to coach through it, and how to avoid triggering it in the first place.

Summary Table

Leadership Style	Strengths	Shadow Behaviors	Self-Actualized
Achiever **Motive: Achievement** **Fear: Failure** **Antidote: Abundance**	Organized Detail-oriented Structured Thorough Analytical	Micromanager Tedious and cautious Perfectionist Critical Narrow-minded	Detailed, yet conceptual Organized, yet flexible
Affirmer **Motive: Affiliation** **Fear: Rejection** **Antidote: Connection**	Friendly Helpful Trusting of others and trustworthy Humble Altruistic	Avoids conflict and confrontation Indecisive Devalues own needs and wants Sensitive and emotional	Friendly, yet courageous Empathetic, yet candid
Asserter **Motive: Power** **Fear: Betrayal** **Antidote: Assurance**	Confident Decisive Competitive Courageous Strategic	Controlling Arrogant Impatient Condescending Manipulative	Confident, yet humble Competitive, yet caring

Achiever — Fear of Failure (Micromanager)

Motive: Achievement — A Job Well Done • Fear: Failure • Antidote: Tuning into Abundance

Triggers: Prospect of Losing, Imperfection, Ambiguity

1. Is Your Colleague in the Shadow?

At Your Best, Empowered	Shadow: At Your Worst, Disempowered, Irrational	
Detailed	Rigid	Narrow-minded
Organized	Cautious	Inflexible
Structured	Tedious	Obsessive
Thorough	Stubborn	Argumentative
Serious	Critical	Pessimistic

2. Ask Yourself

- Which behaviors in the table above are you seeing? How are they manifesting?
- How is your colleague stressing? Which situations are triggers?
- How is “scarcity thinking” showing up in thinking and fears?
- Is your colleague withdrawn?
- Does your colleague take on too much or fail to ask for help?

3. How to Coach: Your Mindset

- Stay out of the Shadow; be ready to deal with your own triggers.
- Instill confidence that the job will be done properly.
- Be prepared to ignore your colleague's defensiveness or potshots. It's the shadow, not personal.
- Be curious — it's the antidote to defensiveness.

4. Suggested Reframing Questions

Ambiguity and Change	Too Many Demands, Too Little Time
1. Let's take a step back, what else could it be?	1. What's most important/urgent here?
2. How can we break this down into steps?	2. Let's put all of this on a calendar.
3. What worries you most? How can we deal with that?	3. If you couldn't fail, how would you organize your work?
4. What do you need to know now to proceed?	4. What would help you feel in control?
5. What can you do?	5. What do you need to focus on now?
6. What would help you feel in control?	6. What can you delegate?
7. What is the problem we need to solve now?	7. What do you need to reground yourself?
8. What can be put off?	8. Who can you ask for help?
9. How realistic is the worst-case scenario?	9. How can I support you?
10. What do you need to reground yourself?	10. What do you need in terms of support?
11. What is going well?	11. What can wait until later?
12. How can I support you?	12. Who can you ask for help?
13. What do you need in terms of support?	13. What needs to be an “A” level of effort?
14. Who can you ask for help?	14. What can be a “B” or “C” level of effort?

5. How to Avoid Triggering the Achiever Shadow

1. Clarify timeframes, work product, and priorities.
2. Establish regular check-ins.
3. Communicate changes as soon as possible and reprioritize.

4. Refocus on the goal when addressing changes.
5. Recognize that changes disrupt their process; let them process and reorient.
6. Use coaching as needed.

6. Final Thoughts

Start noticing colleagues' Shadow Behaviors and help them by (i) reframing what's happened and that it's not a catastrophe and (ii) focusing on solving the problem. Achievers can be coached out of the Shadow by tuning into abundance (core trigger is scarcity) and being reminded that a single mistake can be fixed. It's not a catastrophe.

Affirmer — Fear of Rejection (Needy and Conflict Avoidant)

Motive: Affiliation • Fear: Rejection • Antidote: Connection

Triggers: Prospect of Conflict, Hurting Other's Feelings, Making Other Angry

1. Is Your Colleague in the Shadow?

At Your Best, Empowered	Shadow: At Your Worst, Disempowered, Irrational	
Friendly	Sensitive	Dependent
Generous	Insecure	Possessive
Loyal	Indecisive	Anxious
Empathetic	Complacent	Jealous
Helpful	Accommodating	Naive

2. Ask Yourself

- Which behaviors in the table above are you seeing? How are they manifesting?
- How is your colleague stressing? Which situations are triggers?
- How is “over-personalization” showing up in thinking and fears?
- Is your colleague withdrawn or nervous? Are they not asking the tough questions or for what they need?
- Does your colleague take on too much, or seem frustrated but holding back?

3. How to Coach: Your Mindset

- Stay out of the Shadow; be ready to deal with your own triggers.
- Be confident and compassionate.
- Be sure to articulate that you care about your colleague as a person and value them and their work.
- Be prepared to ignore your colleague's defensiveness or potshots. It's the shadow, not personal.
- Be curious — it's the antidote to defensiveness.

4. Suggested Reframing Questions

Deal with Indecision	Encourage Candor
1. Let's take a step back, what is most important here?	1. What are your views?
2. What worries you most? How can we deal with that?	2. This is important; I want to hear concerns so we can move on.
3. What else do you need to know, if anything, to proceed?	3. Tell me more.
4. What is the downside of not moving forward?	4. What could go wrong here?
5. If you knew nobody would be upset, what would you do?	5. I'd like to hear a contradictory perspective — bring it on!
6. If you couldn't fail, what would you do?	6. Let's make the most of different problem-solving styles; share what comes to mind.
7. What could you say to diffuse the upset?	7. You can't hurt my feelings; what are you thinking?
8. What worries you most about this decision?	8. What can I do to (better) support you?
9. What would you tell a friend who had to make the same decision?	9. What do I do well as a manager? What are the opportunities to improve? I am game to learn!
10. How can you put your guilt aside?	10. If I were the perfect manager, what else would I be doing?
11. How can you deal with your own upset or disappointment?	11. What is going well?
12. How can you help others accept your decision?	12. What do you need in terms of support?

5. How to Avoid Triggering Your Colleagues' Affirmer Shadow

1. Be friendly and polite.
2. Establish regular check-ins.
3. Communicate often.
4. Care about them as a person.
5. Express appreciation.
6. Use coaching as needed.

6. Final Thoughts

Notice Shadow Behaviors and support your colleagues in making decisions and being candid. Be sure to reconnect with them when possible. Gossip, triangulation, and persistent and unresolved problems are a sign Affirmers are avoiding addressing issues that make them uncomfortable and that the Affirmer Shadow is present.

Asserter — Fear of Betrayal (Bullying and Controlling)

Motive: Power/Control — Driving Results • Fear: Betrayal • Antidote: Providing Assurance that the Work Will Be Done

Triggers: Vulnerability, Asking Forgiveness, "I don't know"

1. Is Your Colleague in the Shadow?

At Your Best, Empowered	Shadow: At Your Worst, Disempowered, Irrational	
Confident	Arrogant	Autocratic
Decisive	Impatient	Manipulative
Competitive	Condescending	Rude
Candid	Blunt	Intolerant
Courageous	Critical	Belligerent

2. Ask Yourself

- Which behaviors in the table above are you seeing? How are they manifesting?
- How is your colleague stressing? Which situations are triggers?
- How is "betrayal thinking," loss of control, or vulnerability showing up?
- Is your colleague withdrawn or exhibiting uncharacteristic behaviors?
- Does your colleague try to force results or distrust others to get "it" done?

3. How to Coach: Your Mindset

- Stay out of your Shadows, especially Fear of Rejection. Be ready.
- Instill confidence that, as a team, you will prevail.
- Be prepared to ignore your colleague's defensiveness or potshots. It's the shadow, not personal.
- Be curious — it's the antidote to defensiveness.

4. Suggested Reframing Questions

Pushing for Results, Not Pushing People	Manipulative Behavior
1. Don't shy away from discomfort; look in the eye.	1. Don't shy away from discomfort; look in the eye.
2. Let's focus on resolving this.	2. Do not react to or address the use of potshots as unproductive. It's an avoidance technique.
3. Be calm, it's not healthy or productive for either of us to be upset.	3. No Affirmer Shadow, anger, or weakness.
4. What worries you most? How can we deal with that?	4. Don't be afraid to disagree by being factual.
5. What do you need to proceed?	5. Accept lack of friendliness as an outcome.

6. What can you do?	6. Let's focus on the problem.
7. What would help you feel in control?	7. What do you need to proceed?
8. What is the problem we need to solve?	8. Let's figure out how to move forward.
9. What do you need to reground yourself?	9. What would help you feel in control?
10. What is going well?	10. What is the problem we need to solve now?
11. How can I support you?	11. What do you need to reground yourself?
12. What do you need in terms of support?	12. What is going well?
13. Who can you ask for help?	13. How can I support you?

5. How to Set Boundaries with Asserter Shadow Behavior

1. Remember to focus on who you are being — confidence is critical.
2. Correct misrepresentations of fact but don't nitpick.
3. If the behavior goes too far, call it out for what it is.
4. Take a break from the conversation if necessary.
5. Refocus on results, making it clear that the colleague has a choice to move forward productively.
6. Recognize that changes make them feel vulnerable and out of control, which can be triggering.
7. Use coaching as needed.

6. Final Thoughts

Start noticing Shadow Behaviors and support your colleagues in (i) reframing what's happened, and (ii) focusing on solving the problem. Asserters can be coaxed out of their Shadow with assurance that the work will get done on time.