Dr. Srini Pillay, Best-Selling Author, Discusses the Epidemic of “Performative” Care

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BOSTON (PRWEB) May 10, 2019 -- Although caring is fundamental to human society and how people live with their loved ones, Srini Pillay and Bob Gower have noticed a disturbing, predatory trend that they believe is destroying the authenticity of society. They call the trend “performative care” or pseudo-care. It’s described as the situation when a person demonstrates care for secondary personal gain—a kind of pathological altruism.

“Though leaders and businesses who practice performative care will frequently talk about ‘empathy’ or ‘making the world a better place’ which are excellent values—when authentic,” explains Pillay, “but they become performative when they are used primarily to garner approval or to sell an idea.”

Srini Pillay, M.D. is the founder and CEO of NeuroBusiness Group, voted one of the Top 20 movers and shakers in leadership development in the world by Training Industry. He has worked with leaders internationally in many Fortune 500 companies, and is currently an invited member of The Consortium for Advanced Adult Learning and Development (CAALD) at McKinsey &Co. and The Tranformational Leadership Council (TLC). Meanwhile, Bob Gower is the co-founder of Ethical Ventures, a consulting firm that helps organizations eliminate waste and align behind coherent and unified strategies so they can do more with less.

The two agree that in order to identify performative caring, people should listen for an earnestness that is intended to attract people, but actually grates against them. A common sign is someone who has adopted some facet of caring like “empathy” or “empowerment” as part of their core brand identity and presents this with an air of persuasion.

“You will hear it on stage, or see it on social media where it often acts as a mask for anger or selfishness. Usually these folks are trying to sell a product or run for office,” continues Pillay, “and often, the call for greater caring is accompanied by other inauthentic self-descriptions like ‘I just want to get real’, when the person is doing anything but getting real.”

The Motivation for performative care? The usual hope is that the person will be showered with admiration, attention or money. Pillay and Gower suspect that underneath this façade is a high-functioning sociopath or narcissist. They often target people who are confused, burned out, depressed, lonely or angry. They will talk endlessly about how much they care about their customer or audience while repeatedly re-centering the conversation on themselves.

Studies show that “altruism” is often motivated by the social rewards and that empathy, rather than being purely about compassion, is also partly about feeling closer to another group so people can predict their attitudes and behaviors. In order to appeal to their target audience, these people will often blame leaders or take the side of marginalized groups. Beneath the mask of love and caring is a conflict of interest that surprisingly often goes unnoticed.

“Good social skills such as empathy do not guarantee that the carer actually understands the point of view of
the other,” warns Pillay, “in the brain, these are two separate neural systems. Performative carers are often so engaged in their own social rewards that they ignore the fact that they are infantilizing and disempowering the disenfranchised other.”

In order to help identify performative carers, Pillay and Gower have put together a list of criteria that they hope will be helpful:

- Public exhortation to care accompanied by some potential form of secondary gain
- Often accompanied by 2 or more of the following phrases (or similar phrases):
  “We need to get real” “Let’s face it” “How much longer are we going to take this?” “Does anyone else feel this way?” “We need to make these changes”

- Demonstrable financial or social gain from making a statement about caring
- Clear angry and irritable layer under the layer of caring
- Connects care with ROI or business impact
- Repeatedly tries to convince people about why caring is important

If a person meets any of these criteria, Pillay and Gower states that they may be a performative carer. Although each of these criteria aren’t necessarily problematic individually—they become so when they are part of a pattern of demonstrating care only when it benefits the carer. “We tend to think of being caring like being cool or confident,” elaborates Gower, “if you have to say you are, you probably aren’t.”

When people think they’ve spotted a performative carer, they should hold onto their wallet, delay their vote, and walk away. It’s better to be compassionate to yourself than walk into a trap that will rip your authenticity to shreds and weaken any genuine attempt you make to improve your life.

“We invite you to add to these criteria and to please say that the emperor has no clothes the next time you encounter performative caring,” concludes Pilay, “be on high alert the next time someone tries to sell you empathy, inclusion, or a form of justice. Performative caring is a real threat that we need to identify to stop this viral phenomenon in its tracks.”

Srini Pillay’s background includes being a Harvard-trained psychiatrist, brain researcher, certified master executive coach, technology entrepreneur and musician. He is regarded as a pioneer in the field of transformational neurocoaching and has been extensively featured in the media including CNN, Fox, The New York Times, The Boston Globe, Forbes and Fortune. He is an award-winning author of multiple books and an in-demand keynote speaker. His most recent book is “Tinker Dabble Doodle Try: Unlock the Power of the Unfocused Mind”.

Bob Gower has advised senior leaders at many companies—including GE, Ford, Chanel, and Spotify—in creating more effective organizations. He is a recognized authority on agile development, lean theory, and responsive organizational design. He holds an MBA in Sustainable Management, is a Certified Positive Psychology Practitioner, and is a frequent keynote speaker on leadership and building great organizations.
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