

I wrote *The Art of the Deal* with Trump. He's still a scared child

Tony Schwartz

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Trump is angrier and more self-absorbed than when I first knew him. We must not let his culture of fear stop us speaking out

- Tony Schwartz wrote *The Art of the Deal* with Donald Trump in 1987



Illustration: Bill Bragg

“I alone can do it.” These five extraordinary words kept coming back to me as I reflected on Donald Trump’s first year as president of the US. He made this claim during his speech accepting the Republican nomination in July 2016. At the time, it struck me simply as a delusional expression of his grandiosity. Looking back, I also hear the plaintive wail of a desperate child who believes he is alone in the world with no one to care for him. “I alone can do it” is Trump’s survival response to: “I must do it all alone.”

There are two Trumps. The one he presents to the world is all bluster, bullying and certainty. The other, which I have long felt haunts his inner world, is the frightened child of a relentlessly critical and bullying father and a distant and disengaged mother who couldn’t or wouldn’t protect him.

“That’s why I’m so screwed up, because I had a father who pushed me so hard,” Trump acknowledged in 2007, in a brief and rare moment of self-awareness.

Trump’s temperament and his habits have hardened with age. He was always cartoonish, but compared with the man for whom I wrote *The Art of the Deal* 30 years ago, he is significantly angrier today: more reactive, deceitful, distracted, vindictive, impulsive and, above all, self-absorbed – assuming the last is possible.

This is the narrative I've been advancing for the past 18 months. With the recent publication of [Michael Wolff's Fire and Fury](#), it turns out that even those closest to Trump recognise his utter lack of fitness to be president, even if they are too cowed and cowardly to do anything about it.

Fear is the hidden through-line in Trump's life – fear of weakness, of inadequacy, of failure, of criticism and of insignificance. He has spent his life trying to outrun these fears by “winning” – as he puts it – and by redefining reality whenever the facts don't serve the narrative he seeks to create. It hasn't worked, but not for lack of effort.

In his first year in office, Trump has lambasted any facts he dislikes as “fake news”, while making nearly [2,000 false or misleading claims of his own](#) – more than five a day. In a single half-hour interview with the New York Times in late December, he [made 24 such claims](#). This is the very definition of gaslighting – lying until you get people to doubt their own reality – and it is both frightening and disturbing. Because the office Trump now occupies makes him the most powerful man on Earth, his fears, and the way he manages them, have necessarily become ours.

The Trumpian world view is narrow, dark and deficit-driven

We fear Trump because he is impulsive, irrational and self-serving, but above all because he seems unconstrained by even the faintest hint of conscience. Trump feels no more shame over his most destructive behaviours than a male lion does killing the cubs of his predecessor when he takes over a pride.

Trump has made fear the dominant emotion of our times. This, I believe, is his primary impact on the body politic after a year in office. He began his campaign by describing [immigrant Mexicans as rapists](#), [Muslims as terrorists](#), and more recently all black and brown people, and [entire countries](#), as inferior. Trump skilfully exploited the fears of supporters who felt powerless and disenfranchised by presenting himself as their angry champion, even though the policies he has since pursued are likely to make their lives worse.

About the only thing Trump truly has in common with his base is that he feels every bit as aggrieved as they do, despite his endless privilege. No amount of money, fame or power has been enough to win him the respect he so insatiably craves. His anger over this perceived injustice is visceral and authentic. Trump's unwinding of government programmes such as Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act will fuel yet more fear among the millions of people who will lose their health care in the year ahead. The tax plan Trump pushed through most benefits him, his family and his fellow billionaires and provides the least relief to those who need it most. In both cases, the victims of these policies will include millions of his supporters who may find someone else to blame, but whose suffering will inexorably increase.



'Trump's actions over the past year have already prompted an extraordinary wave of new activism among young people in their 20s and 30s.' Photograph: Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images

The fearful divide Trump has exacerbated is not simply between his supporters and his detractors, the rich and the poor, or Democrats and Republicans, but between the best and the worst in each of us.

In the face of fear, it is a physiological fact that our most primitive and selfish instincts emerge. Control of our behaviour shifts from the prefrontal cortex to the emotionally driven amygdala – sometimes referred to as “[fear central](#)”. As we move into fight-or-flight mode, we become more self-centred, and our vision narrows to the perceived threat, which in the modern world is less to our survival than to our sense of value and worthiness. We lose the capacity for empathy, rationality, proportionality and attention to the longer-term consequences of our actions.

This is the reactive state Trump has tapped into with his followers and which he has prompted in his opponents. It serves none of us well. Think for a moment about the immense difference between how you feel and behave at your best and your worst. It is when we feel safest and most secure that we think most clearly and expansively. It's also when we are most inclined to look beyond our self-interest, and to act with compassion, generosity, consideration and forgiveness.

I have never observed any of these qualities in Trump. Over the past year I have frequently been asked whether he has any redeeming qualities. I've thought about this as objectively as I can, and the only one I've come up with is his relentless drive. But because Trump uses this quality solely in the service of his self-aggrandisement and domination, it scarcely qualifies as a virtue.

So what does resistance to Trump look like? This is a question that has preoccupied me and millions of other Americans this past year. If fear gets sufficiently intense, or persists for long enough, we eventually move into “freeze” – meaning numbness and submission. This is my own greatest fear. As Trump violates one norm after another

day after day, the risk is that we lose our sense of outrage and our motivation to speak out.

The challenge we face is to resist our own fear without sacrificing our outrage. That requires widening our perspective beyond Trump's, and beyond Trump himself. The future is ours to shape, not his. Dispiriting as I found it to write *The Art of the Deal* with a man I progressively came to view as a black hole, the experience prompted me to redirect my life in almost complete opposition to the values and world view that he represents. My own path over the past two decades – prompted in reaction to my experience with him – has been to help business leaders become more wholly human, and to humanise workplaces.

Trump's actions over the past year have already prompted an extraordinary wave of new activism among people in their 20s and 30s, who are now the biggest segment of the US electorate, and represent the next generation of leaders. The [19 women](#) who stepped forward to accuse Trump of sexual assault have helped to galvanise a rapidly growing, worldwide movement to empower women and to call out sexual abuse in the workplace. Thanks in large part to Trump, hundreds of new female candidates are now running for political office.

Trump himself has become the embodiment of the limits of traditional masculinity. "We raise boys," [writes the author Terrence Real](#), "to live in a world in which they are either winners or losers, grandiose or shame-filled, ... perpetrators or victims. Society shows little mercy for men if they fail in the performance of their role. But the price of that performance is an inward sickness."

Trump represents an extreme version of a sickness from which most men suffer, to some extent. The most powerful stand we can take in opposition to Trump's values and behaviour is to pursue a higher purpose every day, seek more common ground amid our differences, and find better ways to take care of others and add value wherever we can. As he looks backward, we must look forward.

The Trumpian worldview is narrow, dark and deficit-driven. Each of us shares some of those instincts: the fear of inadequacy is uniquely and universally human. But we are also capable of so much more. My hope and belief is that Trump will no longer be president by this year's end. My personal commitment is to pay much less attention to him, and more to making a difference to others affected by his policies. Whatever happens, may the worst of Trump inspire the best in us.

We, together, can do it.

- Tony Schwartz is the chief executive of [The Energy Project](#). In addition to *The Art of the Deal*, his bestselling books include *The Way We're Working Isn't Working* and *The Power of Full Engagement*

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