

“Mother” inspiration from the animal kingdom...

I really love having mother as my second most accessed archetype, but noticed that’s not a universal sentiment in our lovely Gentle Ambition group. I wanted to do something in support of everyone who sees their mother archetype as a bit wet and useless...

I started looking into matriarchal societies in the animal kingdom in my lunch break and found that there are lots to choose from – encouraging!

Here are some fauna-based examples of how the “mother” energy can be something to be proud of:

The orca:



- Travels everywhere with her own family unit, and the family unit(s) of other strong matriarchs. These guys can swim a long way, and they do it alongside equally strong pods, led by a Mother orca. Long-term teamwork rules!
- How this applies to work:
 - The mother supports the newbies and keeps them safe while they develop and explore
 - The mother leads the team on exciting (and necessary) journeys
 - Journeys are undertaken not as team in isolation, but alongside other strong teams – everyone benefits from working together; more team members = a greater number of strengths to tap into

The elephant:



- Elephants have complex, deep relationships with one another, designed to last a lifetime. • The key member of the elephant family is the matriarch (mother)! She is always the oldest (ergo the wisest, most experienced, least flappable...?) member of the family. How much do we undervalue age in our human world? Serious mistake that...

- Her herd can contain 8-100 elephants, so she's equally comfy leading tiny teams right through to humungous ones – I'm guessing the older she gets, the bigger her team becomes. • How this applies at work:
 - The mother is not always working under the radar, but out in front, leading some pretty hefty groups. She inspires trust and respect in her team mates and mentees. ○ Age is not a barrier for these ladies – they keep right on going until the end – every moment of life is transferrable experience. This is a mother with serious longevity. ○ These guys also undertake really long journeys together, and the mother of the herd gets her team through danger, potential starvation and epic thirst, births, deaths, and other key milestones – she even allows a bit of personal ritual within all the hard work. She never leaves anyone behind, unless that is what is necessary and right for the whole team.
 - The deep relationships fostered by this mother help her teammates to find meaning and purpose, which sustains them and drives them forward when the going gets tough.

The bonobo:



- Kinda the antidote to the chimpanzee, these guys live in groups led by females – yep, the mother is in charge.
- They are super peaceful and prefer to settle disputes and differences using sex – the ultimate relaxant!
- How this applies at work:
 - Obviously, settling differences via sex is out, but the mother bonobo is on to something – it’s possible to disagree without getting shouty, aggressive, or (as per a chimpanzee) all-out scary. Instead of baring her teeth, the bonobo mother goes: “let’s chill and talk it through”. Not always possible, but if there is time to park an important emotional discussion, there’s always lunch...? And sometimes, colleagues do need a hug or some kind words, actually. This is the bonobo mother’s strength; she’ll know when it’s appropriate to offer that kind of gentle solace, or not.

DISCLAIMER: bonobos also eat their own poo – maybe not such a useful mothering skill, although analogous to owning up to mistakes and digesting them properly perhaps?

The meerkat:



- Operating underground, we might not notice how cool the mothers of meerkat families are, but they are super cool! Their teams are called “mobs” for a start – for their mother leader, think Polly from Peaky Blinders. No-one messes with her mob!
- The mother leader’s key tasks are:
 - Find new burrows for the mob, when they need to move on (she is excellent at scoping out territory and seeing potential, in terms of where to locate her team)
 - Handling arguments between her mob and other meerkat mobs
- How this applies at work:
 - The mother can also be viewed as strong, independent, and pretty fearless – she’s a pioneer even. Her colleagues can see her ability to be agile – to strategise and innovate - as well as being a place of safety.
 - Diplomacy, people! The mother excels in this too. This mother acknowledges that disputes are a necessary part of life and work, but she does not let them halt progress. Work it out together, find common ground, create boundaries, and keep going – that’s the meerkat mother process.

Final thought:

I think mother often overlaps with the other lovely female archetypes that Manuela and Dovile are introducing us to:

The orca: overlap with Sorceress

The elephant: overlap with Queen

The bonobo: overlap with Lover

The meerkat: overlap with Warrior