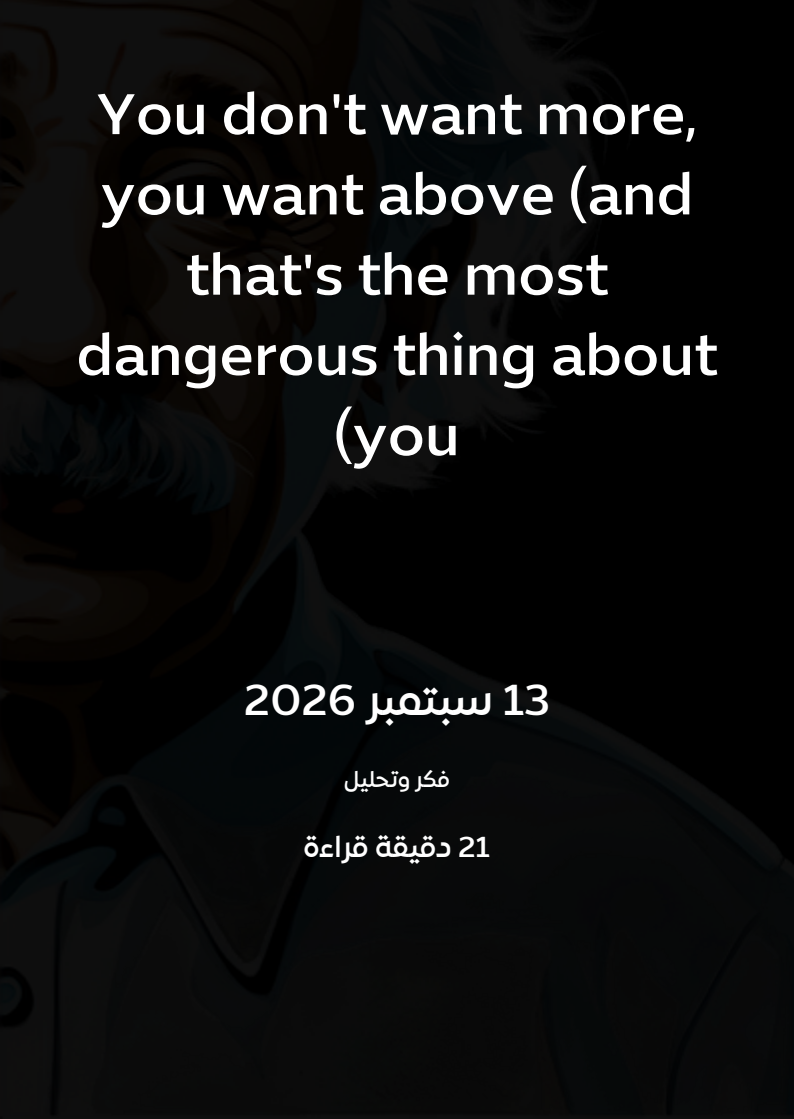


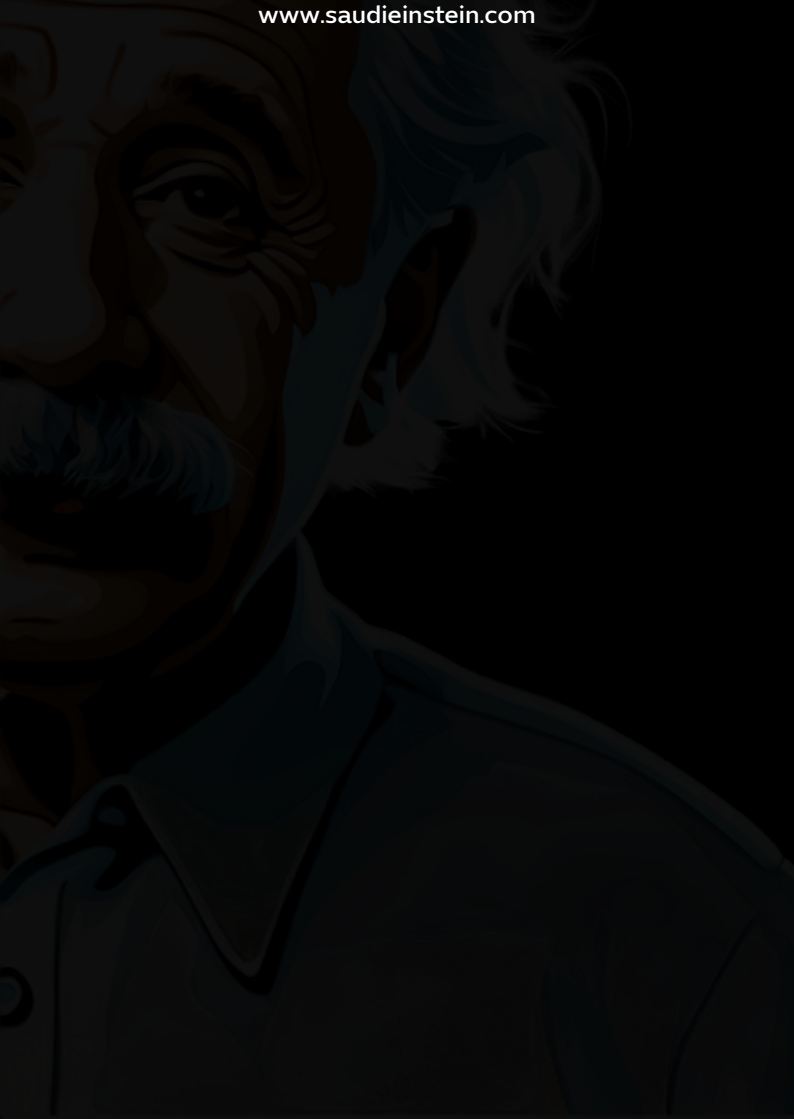


You don't want more,
you want above (and
that's the most
dangerous thing about
(you

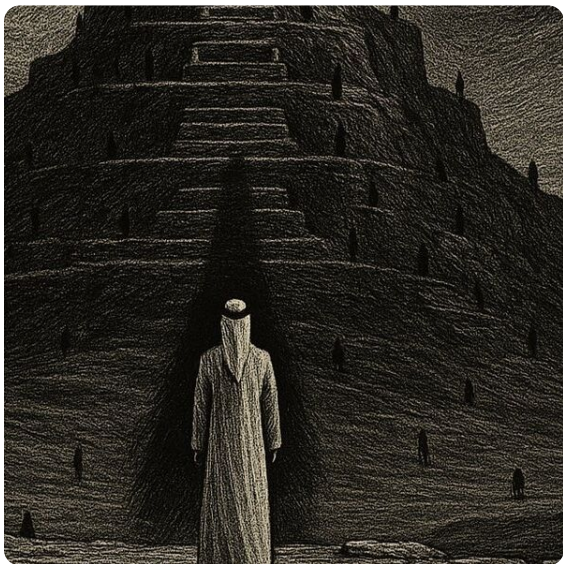
13 سبتمبر 2026

فكر وتحليل

21 دقيقة قراءة



You don't want more, you want
above (and that's the most
(dangerous thing about you



what psychopaths in the C-suite taught
me about my own ambition

.You don't want more

.You want above

Most people will read that and think it
doesn't apply to them (it's always the
other guy, the boss, the ex, the founder
who won't stop posting). Stay with me
for 3 minutes and see if it survives
contact with your own life. It didn't

.survive contact with mine

A few years ago I turned down a
request from someone who worked

.with me

It was a small thing. A schedule change,
maybe a day off. The details are gone,
.which is the point

.I said no

There was a reason ready. A decent one.
And for about 3 days the reason felt like
.the whole story

Then I was on a walk and the real thing
surfaced, the way it always does when
.you stop looking at it directly

.I said no because I could

The decision was mine. Someone had to
wait on it. And some small, quiet part of
me enjoyed that more than it enjoyed

.being right

.I didn't like finding that. I still don't

Most people, when they find something
like that, look away fast and go back to
the flattering version. I get it. But the
ugly stuff is usually where the useful

.information is

So I went looking for what that feeling

.actually was

And the place I found the clearest

.answer was the last place you'd expect

.Research on psychopaths

I – I was reading about them and kept

seeing me

Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the .dictatorship

George Orwell, 1984 –

.Here's the setup

Now, for most of a century, psychopathy research was about what's missing. No empathy. No fear. No guilt. No attachment. That's useful if you're explaining why someone hurt a

stranger. It's useless if you're explaining why someone spent 15 years climbing to VP and then quietly gutted 3 departments.

.A missing brake doesn't move a car

.You still need an engine

You see, a group of researchers finally asked the engine question: forget what these people lack, what do they want? They gave a few thousand people standard values questionnaires (the kind psychologists have used for decades) and looked at who scored high on psychopathic traits and what those

.people said mattered to them
They wanted power. Strongly. They
wanted pleasure. They wanted money
.(and stuff (shocking, I know
.They did not want achievement
Read that again, because in most
people those two travel together. The
person who wants to run the thing
usually also wants to be good* at the
thing. The title and the skill are one
.ambition
In psychopathy, that link snaps. Power
.without competence
And then the finding that made me put

.the paper down

They weren't primarily interested in

.having a lot

They were interested in having more

.than you

Given the choice between earning a good salary while everyone around them earned a bit less, or earning a better salary while everyone around them earned more, they took the first option. Less money, higher position. Same pattern for education. Same pattern for vacation time. The absolute amount was negotiable. The gap was

.not

.Greed wants more

.This wants above

In other words, they'd rather be a big
fish in a small pond than a slightly
.bigger fish in the ocean

And the second I read that, I was back
.on that walk

Because "I said no because I could" isn't
a want for more. Nothing came to me
from saying no. No money, no time, no
praise. The only thing I got was the gap.

.Me deciding, them waiting

I don't think I'm a psychopath.

Statistically, about 1 in 100 people
reading this might be, and they've
probably already closed the tab,
because none of this is uncomfortable
.to them

But the wiring is the same wiring. It's
.just louder in them

II – Three engines, and the one that runs
alone

Nearly all men can stand
adversity, but if you want to
test a man's character, give
.him power

attributed to Abraham Lincoln (he –
probably never said it; the internet did,
(and it's still true

Here's a useful way to look at ambition:
3 motives. Psychologists have circled
these since the 1980s and I've never
.found a cleaner cut

Affiliation – You want to belong. The .1
team, the family, the guild. Doing things
.with people is the reward

Achievement – You want to get .2
better. There's a version of you that can
do this well, and closing that gap is the
.point

Domination – You want to be above. .3
Status, hierarchy, being the one who
decides. The gap between you and the
.next person is the reward
All 3 are in you. They're in everyone.
Most people have never once asked
.which one is actually driving
They're older than you, too. Chimps run
dominance hierarchies. Wolves do. Your
nervous system was tuning rank before
language existed, which is why losing an
argument on the internet to a stranger
you'll never meet can ruin a whole
afternoon. Nothing was lost. The rank

system doesn't know that. Dominance motivation isn't a defect. Every social animal on earth runs it, and without it nobody would ever organize anything.

.Somebody has to decide

".The question is never "do you have it

.The question is what is it mixed with
Because here's what the research on the so-called dark personalities showed when you line them up. Narcissists want to be above you too, but they also want to be admired for being good at something, and they want you around to do the admiring. That's a leash. Thin,

but a leash. If they abuse you, they lose

.their audience

In psychopathy, dominance shows up

.alone

No achievement to make them want to

.actually be competent

No affiliation to make them care

.whether you're still standing afterward

.Just above

More with nothing to want it for. Above

.with nobody to be above with

That's the whole mechanism, and once

you see it you can't unsee it. That's why

the same personality that can't hold a

job in one version becomes a senior executive in another. The prison version has the dominance drive plus impulsivity, chaos, no long game. The corporate version has the same drive plus self-control, charm, and the patience to play a 10-year game. The naive picture of a psychopath is the twitchy one. The twitchy one gets caught. The one who costs an organization millions is calm, bold, likeable in interviews, and completely .uninterested in you as a person

Of course they rise. Positions of power

are the one environment where "above"
.gets fed all day, legally, with a salary
But I promised you this letter isn't about
.them

It's about what happens to a normal
person when the third engine gets
.quietly louder than the other two

III – Your company is a PvP server and
you think you're playing co-op

Tactics flow from a superior
.position

Bobby Fischer –
Now, let me give you the frame that

made this click for me, and then I'll put it
.down

.Think about why people play games
Some players are there for the dungeon.
Beat it, max the skill tree, see the
ending. If they replay, it's to do it better.
Speedrunners are the purest form (I'm
looking at you, the guy who's beaten
the same game 400 times). The
opponent is the game and the previous
.version of you

.That's achievement
Some players are there for the raid.
They show up Tuesday night because

the guild needs a healer and those are
their friends. They'd quit the game if the
.guild dissolved

.That's affiliation

.And some players are there to grief
They don't care about the dungeon.
They don't care about the guild. They
care that you're at 10% health and
they're at 100%, and the gap is the
entire game. A griefer will happily take a
worse build if it lets him camp your
spawn point. Less absolute power. More
.relative power

.Now here's the part that matters

.A smart griever doesn't stay a griever

.He joins the guild

He learns the vocabulary. He shows up on time. He's a great recruit for 6 months, because charm is cheap when you don't feel anything about the person you're charming. And once he has the officer role, the server is PvP for everyone except him

The lesson: ***A hierarchy doesn't just reward people who want the top. It attracts the people for whom the top is the only thing worth wanting***

Alright, you get it. Metaphor's done its

.job. Back to you

IV – How "more" quietly turns into
"above" in a normal life

.You were not born wanting above
But look at where you've spent your
time. Most people spend the first 25
years of their life inside ranking
machines and then wonder why they
.can't stop comparing
School ranked you. Not "did you learn
this," but "where did you land relative to
30 other kids." Religion, for a lot of
people, ranked you too (holier than,
more devout than, the family that sits in

the front row). The gym ranks you by the number on the bar next to you, not by the number you lifted last month. Work ranks you. Every performance review is a position, not a measurement. And then we built a machine whose entire product is your relative position, delivered to your pocket every 30 seconds, with a little number on it. (AI is about to make this worse, not better. When anyone can produce competent work in 10 minutes, competence stops being a differentiator, and the only thing
(left to compete on is position

Spend 15 years inside systems like that
and you don't have to be wired for
.domination

.You'll get trained* into it

It happens in tiny substitutions you
:never notice

You start wanting the promotion, and
somewhere along the way you stop
wanting to be good at the job the
.promotion is for

You start wanting your business to
grow, and somewhere along the way
growth stops meaning "help more
people" and starts meaning "bigger than

".his

You start wanting to be respected, and
somewhere along the way respect
stops meaning "they learned from me"
and starts meaning "they need my
".approval

You start wanting a good relationship,
and somewhere along the way "good"
stops meaning "we're both better for it"
and starts meaning "I'm the one who
".gets to be right

Same words. Different engine. And I
want to say it again because it's the
whole letter: more is about the amount;

above is about the gap. More can be satisfied. Above can't, because someone can always close the gap by doing well, and then you have to hurt .them or move the target

And the tell is always the same: it doesn't feel like ambition changed. It feels like ambition, the whole way down. Nobody wakes up and says "today I'd like to want the wrong thing." You just notice, one day on a walk, that you .enjoyed saying no

With that said, here's the distinction that came out of the same body of research,

and I think it's the most practical idea in
.this letter

There are 2 ways to rise in any human
.group

Prestige is rank people give you
because you're useful and they want to
.learn from you

Dominance is rank you take through
.control and intimidation

Both work. Both produce influence. Only
one requires you to actually be worth
following, and only one survives you
.losing the ability to punish people

If you want a quick read on which one

someone is running, watch what happens when they lose the ability to punish. Prestige stays. Dominance .evaporates in a week

When achievement leaves the building, prestige becomes unavailable. You can't be given rank for skill you didn't build.

.So the only route left is the other one That's the slide. Not from good to evil. From earned to taken, one substitution .at a time

V – How to tell when above has taken over your ambition

Compare yourself to who

you were yesterday, not to
.who someone else is today

Jordan Peterson –

You can't run a clinical checklist on
.yourself, and if you could you'd cheat

Most people never check at all. They
.assume ambition is ambition

But motives leak. Here's what I've
started watching for in me. Run these on
yourself, not on your boss. The version
of this list that's about your boss is a
.different, worse letter

The relative test. When someone near (1
you wins, what happens in the first 3

seconds, before you get your face under control? Achievement is mildly interested. Affiliation is glad. Above goes quiet, and within a week there's a small correction: a joke at their expense, a "concern," a reframing of their win as luck. You don't need more. You need the .gap restored

The number or the rank. Picture the (2 thing you're working toward. Now picture getting it while 3 people you know get a bigger version. Does it still feel like winning? If the answer is a flat no (be honest, nobody's grading this),

you never wanted the number. You wanted the rank, and the number was .the excuse

Build or be needed. Do you want (3 influence so you can make something, or so that people have to come through you? These feel identical from the inside. From the outside, one produces work and the other produces .bottlenecks

Can you be passed. Is there anyone (4 you love enough that you'd be genuinely happy to be overtaken by them? Not "fine with it." Happy. If you

have to think about it, the engine is
.louder than you thought

Can you put it down. Is there a (5
position of control in your life right now
that you don't need, that you're keeping
anyway? A role, a permission, a "run it
by me first"? Try giving one away this
month. Watch what your body does.

.Hell, watch what your excuses do
Now, if you got 3 or more, don't panic,
and don't start diagnosing everyone
around you either. That's exactly the
move a dominance-driven mind wants
to make. "The problem is them" is the

.gap restored one more time

.Do this instead

Put achievement back in front, on purpose. Pick 1 skill in your actual craft and set a standard for it that has nothing to do with anyone else. A page count. A shipping cadence. A conversation you can hold in a language you couldn't 6 months ago. Achievement's definition is that the opponent is you. Give yourself an .opponent that is you

Take the prestige route explicitly. If you want influence, and you do, get it the

way it can be given: be so useful that people hand it to you. Teach what you know in public. Make the person next to you better and let them take the credit. This will feel like losing if above is steering. That feeling is the diagnostic, .not the verdict

Make staying the metric. The people with dominance running alone have one hole you can see from orbit: nobody stays. So count who has worked with you twice. Who would again. Build that number the way other people build .followers

Change the environment before it finishes its work. If you're inside a system where the only visible reward is relative rank, you will drift toward wanting it no matter how many journals you fill. I left the 9-5 for a lot of reasons, and one of the honest ones is that I didn't like who the ladder was turning me into. Sometimes the strategic move is a new team. Sometimes it's a new .game

VI – The person who should lead is usually the one who has to be talked into it

Power tends to corrupt, and
absolute power corrupts
.absolutely

Lord Acton –

.Let's zoom out

Here's the thing about "above" when it
takes over. It doesn't announce itself. It
borrows the language of the other two
engines. It calls itself standards. It calls
itself leadership. It calls itself "just being
".competitive

The research on psychopaths is useful
not because it lets you spot them. Most
people read it that way, and it's the

.least useful way to read it
It's useful because it shows you what
one motive looks like when it runs
completely alone, with nothing to dilute
it, so you can recognize the same
motive in yourself at 5% instead of
.100%

Power is a resource. Somebody in every
room is going to hold it. And the person
most hungry to hold it is often the last
person who should, because the hunger
itself is a sign that the other two
.engines went quiet

Which means the people who should

lead usually have to be talked into it.
They wanted to be good at the thing.
They wanted the people around them to
.be okay. The position was a side effect
Be intense enough about your craft that
.influence finds you
Be unbothered enough about rank that
.you could give it back tomorrow
Most people will use this letter to
.diagnose their boss
.Don't. That's the gap talking
Use it to catch the moment your own
ambition stops asking how good can I
become and starts asking how many

people can I get above. Then put
achievement back in the driver's seat
.and get to work