The downfall of a prominent CEO offers a cautionary tale about the need for self-awareness and continual self-improvement.

Jeff Kindler took the helm as CEO of Pfizer in July 2006 and was forced to resign a little over four years later. One reason for his fall: Kindler, as a leader, had a combative style, yet agonized over every decision and second-guessed everyone else’s.

He had a background as a confrontational trial lawyer, which may explain why he grilled people over small details, looking for flaws in their logic.

Even when he bored in for answers, says one of Pfizer’s executive team members, Kindler’s “prosecutor mindset” impaired his “ability to listen ... If he did wait for the answer, he didn’t always hear it.”

He could also be painfully hands-on.

For example, when promoted to vice chairman in 2005, he gained oversight of the communications department. After several phone calls about an upcoming press release, Kindler walked over to the media team, sat down at the keyboard and started typing. “I’ve got to do this myself,” he told a startled team.

As one long-time Pfizer lawyer said, “Jeff seemed to believe he was the only smart guy in the room.”

When Kindler took the CEO job in 2006, the company’s drug pipeline had nearly dried up. Pfizer had pinned hopes on two new drugs but both fell through. Now Kindler started making massive cuts, while still toying with alternative strategies. He spent a year going back and forth over the decision; he couldn’t make up his mind.

“Jeff was really afraid of making a mistake,” says one person who worked on the deal. “Everything had to be analyzed and re-analyzed. You’d close a meeting and he’d say, ‘OK, here’s what we’re going to do.’ You’d sharpen your swords. And the next morning, it’d be off.”

In the end, for all his strengths, he wasn’t capable of leading with confidence and allowing his team to fully use their talents.

— Adapted from “Inside Pfizer’s palace coup,” Peter Elkind and Jennifer Reingold, Fortune.