

Reducing Conflict 15 Circling the Narcissist

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



The narcissist is a type of personality that is particularly challenging in organizations. The word Narcissist comes from Greek Mythology. A young boy named Narcissus fell in love with his own image while viewing his reflection in a pool of water.

In modern times, we see Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is characterized by an individual who has greatly exaggerated feelings of self-importance and a need for admiration. The narcissistic person has fallen in love with him or herself and has a diminished ability to empathize with the feelings of others. For the remainder of this article I will use the male pronoun for simplicity, but understand that the tendency to be a narcissist is gender neutral.

Experts estimate that roughly 5% of the population is susceptible to narcissism. It is usually caused by a combination of factors during a child's formative years. For example, childhood trauma, early poor relationships, genetics, and temperament can all enhance one's tendency toward narcissism

Impact on an Organization

In any kind of organizational structure, the narcissist poses a huge blockage to a culture of respect and trust. This is especially true since narcissists tend to seek out positions of power where they can wield their superiority over others daily.

If you are in the unfortunate position to work for a narcissist, you are in for a very difficult ride. It is nearly impossible to cure a narcissist of the tendency to brag about how wonderful he is. Anyone who challenges his superiority will be squashed like a bug.

Keep in mind that a true narcissist does not recognize he has a problem at all. He just likes to see himself in the mirror a lot. His feelings of superiority drive other people to distraction.

Dealing with a Narcissist

To cure an individual of narcissistic tendencies is a long and difficult path. Usually some professional help is the best approach if you work with (or for) a narcissist. Getting help for the person is a bit tricky. You cannot arrange for it yourself, as that

would backfire. Sometimes you can get the assistance of Human Resources. Another possibility is to enlist another manager at the same or higher level.

The difficult part is to get the person to truly want to change. If the desire is not there, then no amount of professional help is going to make a difference. To be helpful, try to indicate that there is a happier existence available long term if the person is willing to get some help.

Medication such as antidepressants or mood stabilizers can be used to treat a person who has narcissistic tendencies, but these must be prescribed by a physician as part of a treatment plan.

Another approach that can have at least some impact is to have a series of lunch and learn sessions where the entire team studies various challenging personality types. Having a public discussion of his “problem” with peers or subordinates can have a little impact in a few cases, but it is dangerous territory. A better approach will have the group study various personality disorders. Sometimes the narcissistic person will see himself in the descriptions and seek help on his own.

By no means is it a good strategy for a single individual to try to influence a narcissist to change. The ability to make a difference in this way is very remote.

Best advice

Recognize that the person has a legitimate mental disorder that he does not appreciate but does not know how to manage. Be sensitive and do not push any treatment if the person resists. The road to recovery can be long and arduous, but it is worth it for the brave people who will accept treatment.

Free Video

Here is a 3-minute video that contains more information on how to deal with a narcissist.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzHNG-N1CGM>

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Reference: Helpguide.org. Narcissistic Personality Disorder

(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-disorders/narcissistic-personality-disorder.htm>)

