

"Brilliant . . ." —RANDI KREGER, bestselling author of *STOP WALKING ON EGGSHELLS*

Identifying and Dealing with  
Narcissists, Sociopaths, and Other  
High-Conflict Personalities

5 TYPES  
*of* PEOPLE  
WHO CAN  
RUIN  
[Ketabton.com](http://Ketabton.com)  
YOUR LIFE

BILL EDDY, LCSW, Esq.

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR  
*5 Types of People Who Can Ruin Your Life*

“[This] brilliant book on high-conflict personalities saves us from trusting the wrong people and making the worst relationship mistakes at work, at home, and in our lives. You need this information today!”

—RANDI KREGER, bestselling author of *Stop Walking on Eggshells* and *The Essential Family Guide to Borderline Personality Disorder*

“*5 Types of People Who Can Ruin Your Life* is a must read for the average person dealing with a high-conflict individual at home or at work. It is also essential reading for counselors, lawyers, judges, mediators, physicians, and virtually all other helping professionals.”

—NANCY VAN DYKEN, author of *Everyday Narcissism*

“Essential. Entertaining. Easy. If you’ve ever been the deer in the searchlight, frozen by excessive language or wildly inappropriate actions, this book is your lifesaver. Just one high-conflict person in your life can steal your peace of mind for years. With memorable acronyms, readable prose, and clear examples, you can know exactly what to do to get back to safety. I may lend my copy, I may buy ten copies for people I love, but I will not give my copy away. I’m keeping it as my get-out-of-trouble-free guide.”

—ANNE KATHARINE, author of *Boundaries in an Overconnected World*

“Must. Read. The beauty of this much-needed book by Bill Eddy lies in its elegant simplicity, its specific and straightforward approach to understanding, identifying, and defusing high-conflict behavior. Bill’s anecdotes, sample statements, and easy-to-remember techniques show readers how to protect themselves, set boundaries, and communicate limits—all with compassion and respect.”

—KIMBERLEE ROTH, coauthor of *Surviving a Borderline Parent: How to Heal Childhood Wounds and Build Trust, Boundaries, and Self-Esteem*

“Bill Eddy translates for everyone the wisdom he’s shared with lawyers, therapists, judges, human resource directors and other professionals about how to deal with highly challenging personalities we encounter in our daily lives. By providing us with proven techniques for handling people with these psychological disorders, Bill helps save us from months and years of frustration, heartache and agony.”

—DENNIS L. SHARP, Esq., LL.M., mediator, Sharp Resolutions

“What a terrific resource and reference book. This self-help manual will assist readers in dealing with destructive personalities in a positive way. This is a must read for everyone, and particularly for those in professions dealing with high-conflict personalities on a regular basis. What I love about it is that it is simple, clear, and easy to remember—really a step-by-step guide in how to deal with destructive personalities in order to avoid causing them more distress and how to escape becoming their victim.”

—SUSAN P. FINLAY, Judge of the Superior Court, ret., San Diego, California

“Like so many of Bill Eddy’s past books, so useful, practical, and easy to read, this book will change your life. Having a personal relationship with a high-conflict person, who can be a serial relationship killer, is a scenario destined to ruin your life. This book is a comprehensive ‘how to’ protect yourself by understanding how high-conflict persons act and behave and how to disengage in ways designed to protect those persons who have been targeted.”

—SHELDON E. FINMAN, Esq., family law attorney

“We have all encountered high-conflict personalities—in our personal lives, at work, and in our neighborhoods. *5 Types of People Who Can Ruin Your Life* provides the reader with both a blueprint and the necessary tools to successfully survive these challenging people. We can’t change their personalities, but with this book we can learn how to effectively manage them.”

—DENNIS DOYLE, PhD, retired Superintendent of Schools

“Bill Eddy has written an excellent commonsense guidebook that provides behavioral maps of what is going on and what can be done about it. The heart of *5 Types of People Who Can Ruin Your Life* is the gift of a better future that it offers all of us who struggle with high-conflict personalities.”

—JOHN DENNIS

# 5 TYPES *of* PEOPLE WHO CAN RUIN YOUR LIFE

Identifying and Dealing with  
Narcissists, Sociopaths, and  
Other High-Conflict Personalities

**BILL EDDY, LCSW, Esq.**

*Lawyer, therapist, mediator, lead author of Splitting,  
and internationally recognized expert on  
high-conflict personalities*

A TARCHERPERIGEE BOOK



An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC

# 375 Hudson Street

New York, New York 10014

Copyright © 2018 by Bill Eddy

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture.

Thank you

for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

Tarcher and Perigee are registered trademarks, and the colophon is a trademark of Penguin Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Eddy, William A., author.

Title: 5 types of people who can ruin your life : identifying and dealing with narcissists, sociopaths, and other high-conflict personalities / Bill Eddy.

Other titles: Five types of people who can ruin your life

Description: New York : TarcherPerigee, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017044386 (print) | LCCN 2017051140 (ebook) | ISBN 9781524705091 (ebook) | ISBN 9780143131366 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Interpersonal conflict. | Personality disorders. | Conflict management.

Classification: LCC BF637.I48 (ebook) | LCC BF637.I48 E328 2018 (print) | DDC 158.2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017044386>

While the author has made every effort to provide accurate telephone numbers, Internet addresses, and other contact information at the time of publication, neither the publisher nor the author assumes any responsibility for errors or for changes that occur after publication. Further, the publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party Web sites or their content.

Some names and identifying characteristics have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Cover design: Nellys Liang

Version\_1

*Dedicated to my many clients who have struggled with family members, coworkers, and others with high-conflict personalities; and to those individuals who realized they had these problems and sought help*

# Contents

---

[\*Advance Praise for 5 Types of People Who Can Ruin Your Life\*](#)

[\*Title Page\*](#)

[\*Copyright\*](#)

[\*Dedication\*](#)

[Chapter 1: Why You Need This Knowledge Now](#)

[Chapter 2: Warning Signs and the 90 Percent Rule](#)

[Chapter 3: Don't Become a Target of Blame](#)

[Chapter 4: The \*I'm Superior, You're Nothing\* Type](#)

[Chapter 5: The \*Love You, Hate You\* Type](#)

[Chapter 6: The \*Cruel, Con Artist\* Type](#)

[Chapter 7: The \*Highly Suspicious\* Type](#)

[Chapter 8: The \*Dramatic, Accusatory\* Type](#)

[Chapter 9: Dealing with Negative Advocates \(Who May Also Attack You\)](#)

[Chapter 10: Getting Help from Others \(Who May Not Understand\)](#)

[Chapter 11: The HCP Theory](#)

[Chapter 12: Self-Awareness](#)

[\*Appendix\*](#)

[\*Acknowledgments\*](#)

[\*Notes\*](#)

[\*About the Author\*](#)

## Chapter 1

---

### Why You Need This Knowledge Now

JEN ALWAYS LOVED television—the behind-the-scenes part. From an early age, she wanted to work for a major TV station.

During college, she interned at a big-city station. After her internship, she asked to sit in on the taping of one of the station's most popular local shows, in hopes of talking someone into giving her a job. After recording the program, Jason, the host, noticed Jen and asked her to stay afterward to discuss the show.

Jason was very charming, and the two had a great discussion about current trends and whether there was a future in television. He seemed impressed by her knowledge of the industry, and Jen was hopeful that he might help her get a job. At the end of the talk, he told her how good she looked and gave her an intense hug. Later that day, he texted her that it would be nice to get together after work for a drink.

Jen was uncertain whether she should go. Jason's flirtatiousness unsettled her. But after some thought, she sent him a text telling him that a friendly meet-up would be okay. She mentioned that she hoped he might help her get a job, too.

Jason texted back, saying he wasn't interested in a personal friendship, and he certainly didn't want to be used as a way to get a job.

Jen was surprised that he would so readily criticize her and cancel his invitation. She shook her head, laughed in disgust, and mostly forgot about the interaction.

Then, three years later, Jen learned that Jason had been fired from the station—and arrested for sexually assaulting six different women who had worked with him there.





TOM FELL HEAD over heels for Kara. She was the life of the party and had a special knack for drawing him out of his shell. After a passionate courtship, they became engaged and married at her insistence—all within two months! Tom was so happy.

But three years into the marriage, Kara kicked Tom out of their house and served him with a restraining order, based entirely on false allegations against him. The nightmare that followed included seven years of court battles over his contact with their daughter.

Tom was shocked at how Kara repeatedly lied to everyone about him, by how persuasive she was, and by how readily almost everyone believed her.



WHEN PAUL WAS nineteen, he held up a convenience store and ran off with \$350. Police arrested him three days later. After being convicted of armed robbery, he spent several years in jail but turned his life around, earning his GED and tutoring some of the other inmates.

When he got out, he joined a church, whose members welcomed him. He did many good deeds for his fellow church members.

However, it wasn't long before he started telling members that he needed donations for a faraway cousin whose house had been destroyed in a fire. He shared pictures of the burning home with everyone he approached for a donation.

Soon the congregation became intensely split between those who believed Paul and defended him, and those who thought he had returned to his former ways and was conning them all. A few members yelled at one another at a meeting, and some threatened to quit the church if he was told to leave—which he eventually was.

A journalist eventually discovered that the dramatic pictures of the house fire were completely unrelated to Paul or anyone he knew. Some members refused to believe it and left the church. It was a long time before the congregation healed.



JOE WAS EXCITED about his new employee, Monica. She seemed extremely sharp with numbers and had a fantastic résumé. They also shared the same ethnic

heritage. In some ways, she seemed almost too good to be true.

Within a year, she made numerous complaints about harassment by coworkers, clients following her, suspicious emails, and claims that Joe was out to ruin her career. None of them checked out.

Reluctantly, Joe fired her. Then she sued the company, specifically saying that Joe discriminated against her. She lost, but Joe developed stomach problems from the stress of the suit and had to take time off from work. He decided that he could no longer be a manager, and returned to doing the individual client work he had done previously—and for less pay. He also started taking antidepressants, at the recommendation of his doctor.



AMY'S MOTHER'S EYES were filled with fury. She pointed at Amy and shouted, "You murdered your father! The world doesn't realize it, but I do." She broke into sobs but didn't lower her voice. "All he wanted was for you to go into the family business. But you—you *selfish child*—you broke his heart by building your own stupid career instead. You *knew* he couldn't go on without you."

It was the day after her father's funeral. Amy had flown back home a week before, as soon as she had learned of her dad's heart attack. But she got to the hospital a few hours too late. He had passed away with his wife beside him.

Amy's mother, Nadine, was always so dramatic about everything. Later that day, she burst into tears again. "What am I going to do now?" she sobbed, falling into Amy's arms. "You're going to take care of me, aren't you? Or are you going to abandon me like you did your father?"

## Who Can You Trust Nowadays?

If you think you've never met someone like the people I've described, trust me, you have. You just haven't become the Target of Blame for a high-conflict person yet.

These are all typical stories that show how anyone can be caught by surprise by a high-conflict person in everyday life. Potential dates, employers, employees, members of organizations, and even relatives and friends can turn out to have high-conflict personalities. We will look at these specific examples and many more in this book, in terms of how to identify these personalities as

early as possible, how to avoid them, and how to deal with them if they become a part of your life. And if you realize you have one of these personalities, we will discuss how you can help yourself and avoid ruining your own life.

So can you trust the person you're dating? The new employee at work? The investment adviser? Your uncle, who wants to sell you insurance? The new, handsome minister? The political candidate on TV? You have to decide—often in seconds—based on very little information.

Here's the good news: You can trust 80 to 90 percent of people to be who they say they are; to do what they say they'll do; and to follow most of the social rules that help us live together.

Now, the bad news: There are five types of people who can ruin your life. They can ruin your reputation, your self-esteem, or your career. They can destroy your finances, your physical health, or your sanity. Some of them will kill you, if you give them the opportunity.

These folks make up about 10 percent of humanity—one person in ten. In North America, that's more than thirty-five million people. Eventually it's very likely that one will decide to target you. That's why it's important for you to read this book now.

Each of these people has an extreme version of what we call a *high-conflict personality*. Unlike most of us, who normally try to resolve or defuse conflicts, people with high-conflict personalities (HCPs) respond to conflicts by compulsively *increasing* them. They usually do this by focusing on *Targets of Blame*, whom they mercilessly attack—verbally, emotionally, financially, reputationally, litigiously, and sometimes violently—often for months or years, even if the initial conflict was minor. Their Targets of Blame are usually someone close (a coworker, neighbor, friend, partner, or family member) or someone in a position of authority (boss, department head, police, government agent). Sometimes, though, the Target of Blame can be completely random.

High-conflict personalities have been with us throughout human history—but it's only in recent years that we've begun to understand how they think, how they act, and what motivates them.

Most HCPs have traits of one or more of five personality disorders. These are serious, sometimes dangerous emotional impairments that mental health professionals consider a form of mental illness.

The five types of people who can ruin your life in the order of the real-life examples provided earlier are:

- **Narcissistic HCPs:** They often seem very charming at first but believe they are hugely superior to others. They insult, humiliate, mislead, and lack empathy for their Targets of Blame. They also demand constant undeserved respect and attention from everyone.
- **Borderline HCPs:** They often start out extremely friendly—but they can suddenly and unpredictably shift into being extremely angry. When this shift occurs, they may seek revenge for minor or nonexistent slights. They may launch vicious attacks against their Targets of Blame that involve physical violence, verbal abuse, legal action, or attempts to destroy their Targets' reputations.
- **Antisocial (or Sociopathic) HCPs:** They can be extremely charismatic—but their charm is a cover for their drive to dominate others through lying, stealing, publicly humiliating people, physically injuring them, and—in extreme cases—murdering them. Antisocial HCPs are remorseless and are said to have no conscience.
- **Paranoid HCPs:** They are deeply suspicious and constantly fear betrayal. Because they imagine conspiracies against them, they will launch preemptive attacks against their Targets of Blame, hoping to harm them first.
- **Histrionic HCPs:** They can have very dramatic and exciting personalities. They often tell wild and extreme stories (which are sometimes totally false). Over time, they can be very harmful and emotionally draining to those around them, especially their Targets of Blame.

Not everyone with a personality disorder is a high-conflict person, because not all of them attack Targets of Blame. Many just feel helpless, like a victim in life, and don't blame anyone in particular. Some of them keep to themselves, or keep their behavior within acceptable limits (often with therapy and medication). Others are randomly destructive, such as people who walk down the street smashing car windows.

It's the *combination* of someone having a high-conflict personality (people who have Targets of Blame) *and* a personality disorder (those who never reflect on their own behavior nor try to change it) that creates a human being who can ruin your life. That combination is the subject we'll explore together.

## What Is a Personality Disorder?

Throughout this book, I explain five personality disorders that are often associated with high-conflict personalities. Do all people with personality disorders have a dangerous personality pattern? No. It depends. Personality disorders are a category of mental disorder described in the mental health field's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition*, known as the *DSM-5*.<sup>1</sup> The *DSM-5* lists ten different personality disorders, all of which seem to share three key characteristics.

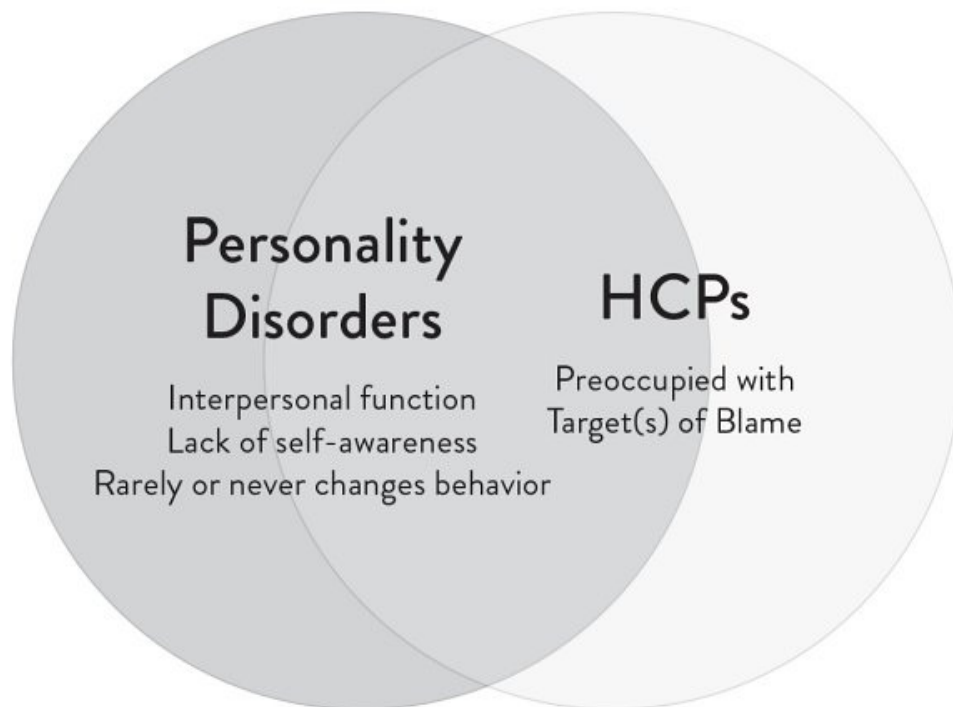
- **Interpersonal dysfunction:** The person causes repeated problems in their relationships, usually by attacking others, withdrawing from others, exacting revenge, or expressing extreme anger.
- **Lack of social self-awareness:** The person is oblivious to how they create many of their own problems with other people. They can't see their part in the problem or how they create most of their own problems.
- **Lack of change:** The person rarely changes what they do, no matter how much trouble it causes others or themselves. They sabotage themselves all the time. They're stuck. Instead, they defend their actions and get angry at those who want them to change. However, on rare occasions some promise change, but they usually can't do it. On even rarer occasions, some who work very hard at it are able to change. But most don't think they have a problem, so they don't try to change themselves. They mistakenly believe that all their problems just happen to them—as if they dropped from the sky—and that there's nothing they can do about it. They chronically feel like a victim in life.<sup>2</sup>

The *DSM-5* suggests that about 15 percent of people meet the criteria for a personality disorder.<sup>3</sup> Most are never diagnosed, but over time the people around them may recognize that they have a problem.

From my work in psychiatric hospitals, outpatient clinics, and my law and mediation practice, I've seen that some people with personality disorders do not have Targets of Blame, so they don't get stuck in intense conflicts with others. They're just stuck feeling helpless. Also, some high-conflict people do not have personality disorders, although they usually have some of those traits. They may be less difficult (not as intensely angry or manipulative) and more willing to let go of their Targets of Blame (after a few days or weeks, rather than months or years).

But the people we're concerned with are the 10 percent—the one person in ten—who has a Target of Blame *and* a personality disorder. These are the people who are so fixated on their Targets that they can't let go, can't stop themselves, can't change and therefore can ruin lives—including yours.

The overlap between personality disorders and HCPs looks like this:



If and when you do encounter someone who falls in that overlapping area, you need to be able to recognize them, avoid them, and, if necessary, deal with them. If you do avoid or effectively deal with them, you will save yourself a huge amount of trouble and heartache. You may even save your reputation, your sanity, or your life.

## But Why Should You Trust Me?

I've always liked helping people resolve their conflicts. I'm a psychotherapist, but I'm also a lawyer, a mediator, and the cofounder and president of High Conflict Institute (HCI) in San Diego. I've been studying high-conflict personalities from many perspectives for the past thirty years. I see a bigger

picture than most people, who are used to just one personal or occupational point of view.

Because of this larger perspective, I have seen the increasingly predictable patterns of behavior of high-conflict people and how they treat their Targets of Blame; patterns that few others have recognized up to now. With this knowledge and my High Conflict Institute, I have developed a team of trainers who regularly teach the principles of this book—and much more regarding high-conflict personalities—to professionals and others throughout the world.

Now I've written this book for *anyone* who wants to protect their life, health, sanity, finances, reputation, and family from the five types of people who can ruin their lives.

In the next several chapters, we'll learn about how to identify the very common patterns of high-conflict personalities (they're surprisingly predictable), what some of the warning signs are for spotting them early on, how to avoid them, and how to deal with them if you choose to.

Let's get started.

## Chapter 2

---

### Warning Signs and the 90 Percent Rule

PEOPLE WITH HIGH-CONFLICT personalities are surprisingly predictable, once you know the warning signs. Since they can become so dangerous, this basic knowledge is becoming more and more essential for everyone, and it's not complicated. It's all about recognizing patterns.

HCPs have a narrower pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving than most people. This means that HCPs act the same way, over and over again, in many different situations with many different people.<sup>1</sup> This high-conflict pattern makes their behavior more predictable than that of the average person, and makes it easier to identify someone as a possible HCP.

One of the most important and easiest things to recognize about high-conflict personalities is that they do not work to reduce or resolve conflicts, although they will often tell others that they do. High-conflict people have a pattern of behavior that *increases* conflict rather than manages or resolves it, revealing warning signs that you can look out for. Sometimes this involves a sudden intense escalation of the conflict (screaming, running away, violence, etc.); sometimes it involves dragging out a conflict over months and years, while pulling many other people into it.

It's essential to understand that, with high-conflict people, the issue that seems to be the cause of a conflict is *not* the actual cause. The issue is not the issue. *With HCPs, their high-conflict pattern of behavior is the real issue.*

Let's look more closely at the four primary characteristics of high-conflict behavior patterns:

- Lots of all-or-nothing thinking
- Intense or unmanaged emotions
- Extreme behavior or threats



- A preoccupation with blaming others—their *Targets of Blame*

**Lots of all-or-nothing thinking:** HCPs tend to see conflicts in terms of one simple solution (i.e., everyone doing exactly what the HCP wants). They don't—and perhaps can't—analyze the situation, hear different points of view, and consider several possible solutions. Compromise and flexibility seem impossible for them. HCPs often feel that they could not survive if things did not go exactly their way, and they predict extreme outcomes—death, disaster, destruction, etc.—if others do not handle things or respond in the ways that they want. If a friend disagrees with an HCP on a minor issue, the HCP may end the friendship on the spot, in a classic all-or-nothing response.

**Intense or unmanaged emotions:** HCPs tend to become very emotional about their points of view. They often catch everyone else by surprise with their sudden and intense fear, sadness, yelling, or disrespect. Their responses can be way out of proportion to whatever is happening or being discussed, and they often seem unable to control their own emotions. Later, they may regret their outburst—or, sometimes, defend it as totally appropriate, and demand that you feel the same way.

Some HCPs are distracted over and over again by their emotional reactions to others but don't necessarily show it. Instead, they become preoccupied with defending their past actions and criticizing those of others. They may look very rational when they do so, but the subject matter will be all about the past and focus on how unfairly others have treated them and how they are a victim in life. They may do this endlessly with anyone who will listen, rather than focusing on the present and the future.

**Extreme behavior or threats:** HCPs frequently engage in extreme negative behavior. This might include shoving or hitting someone; spreading rumors and outright lies about them; trying to have obsessive contact with them and tracking their every move; or refusing to have any contact with them at all, even though the person may be depending on the HCP for a response. Many of these extreme behaviors are caused by their losing control over their emotions, such as suddenly throwing things, or saying abusive words to the people they care about the most. Other behaviors are driven by an intense desire to control or dominate people close to them, such as hiding personal items, keeping others from leaving a conversation, threatening extreme action if they don't agree, or physically abusing them.

There are also some HCPs who use emotional manipulation to hurt others but can appear very emotionally in control while they do it. Their behavior can trigger anger, fear, distress, and confusion, in ways that are not obvious. They may seem very calm and collected. But their emotional manipulations push people away and don't get the HCPs what they really want in the long run. They often seem clueless about how their behavior has a devastating and exhausting emotional impact on others.

**A preoccupation with blaming others:** The single most common—and most obvious—HCP trait is how frequently and intensely they blame other people, especially people close to them and people who seem to be in positions of authority over them. The HCP attacks, blames, and finds fault with everything their Target of Blame does. At the same time, HCPs see themselves as blameless and free of all responsibility for the problem. If you have been an HCP's Target of Blame, you already know what I'm talking about.

HCPs tend to angrily blame people—both strangers and folks they know—on the Internet, because when they're online, they feel a sense of distance, safety, and power. HCPs routinely blame strangers, because it's easy.

If someone you know frequently demonstrates one or more of the aforementioned danger signs, be careful. And if all four factors appear regularly in the person's life, they are very likely an HCP. (For a list of 40 Predictable Behaviors of HCPs, see Appendix, p. 187.)

Perhaps you already know someone with HCP traits. If so, here is the most important thing you need to know: *Never tell someone they are a high-conflict person, or that they have a personality disorder, no matter how obvious this may seem.* They will see this as a life-threatening attack—and a valid reason to make you their central Target of Blame, perhaps for years to come. From their viewpoint, it will be as if you'd said, "Please do everything you can to ruin my life."

For the same reason, never use your belief that someone is an HCP as a weapon against them. (See the next chapter for more tactics to avoid becoming an HCP's Target of Blame.)

What are the danger signs that someone is a high-conflict personality, as opposed to an ordinary jerk—or someone who's had a very bad week? Examine their words, their actions, and your own emotional responses to what they do.

**Listen to Their Words for Threatening or Extreme Language**

## Listen to Their Words for Threatening or Extreme Language

Written and spoken words can give you some clues. Let's look at the following real-life message, written to a lawyer on the opposing side before a mediation session to resolve a business dispute.

*I am going after you with every fiber in my being and I won't rest until I see you behind bars for conspiracy to defraud.*<sup>2</sup>

This might seem like a fairly simple and brief sentence. But it's pretty extreme. If that were the only extreme thing the person said to the other person's lawyer, perhaps in a moment of high emotion, it *might* be worth ignoring. But here's what happened in real life: The man repeatedly swore at and threatened the lawyer weeks before the mediation. He also had a history of suing people. This suggests a pattern of high-conflict behavior.

Notice, too, that this one sentence reveals all four key HCP traits: all-or-nothing thinking (“*with every fiber in my being*”), intense or unmanaged emotions (“*I won't rest*”), extreme behavior or threats (“*until I see you behind bars*”), and a preoccupation with blaming others (“*I'm going after you*”).

A week after writing the statement, the man attended a business mediation session at the office of a lawyer-mediator. Also in attendance were the CEO of the company with whom the man had the dispute, and the CEO's lawyer, to whom he had written the message. Right after the mediation session ended, he shot and killed both the lawyer and the CEO!

## Check Your Own Emotions for Intense Reactions

When you hear someone make extreme statements, you may feel uncomfortable, threatened, or disgusted. Pay close attention to those emotions.

In his excellent book *The Gift of Fear*,<sup>3</sup> Gavin de Becker explains that our emotions often give us clear warning signs before our thinking brain does. He provides several examples of people avoiding life-threatening situations because they felt fear and acted on it to protect themselves.

Don't discount a sudden emotional impulse to run, or fight, or freeze in someone's presence, especially when it doesn't match what your thinking brain is telling you. While you don't necessarily want to jump into action whenever you feel afraid, do pay attention to that feeling, and who might be causing it. Carefully evaluate whether you are in actual danger. Could you be picking up on

something that's about to happen? Could you be sensing that the person in your presence is an HCP? Observe that person carefully over time, watching and listening for evidence of the four key HCP traits.

Here's a common experience with an HCP: You listen to a person tell you how awful someone (i.e., their Target of Blame) is, and then *you* start to have similar negative feelings of your own toward their Target of Blame. Watch for this in yourself: intense negative emotions about other people—either from someone who is expressing those emotions in your presence, or your own feelings in response to what the person said *or how they said it*. This may be a sign that you're dealing with a high-conflict personality.

## Look for a History of High-Conflict Behavior

Patterns of behavior show up over time. If you observe a person for weeks or months and watch for the four HCP characteristics, you will be able to make an informed judgment about them.

If they are in fact an HCP, their current and past behavior will be a very strong predictor of their future behavior, because HCPs repeat the same pattern of behavior over and over, never learning and never changing, as I'll explain in more detail throughout this book. (Remember the 40 Predictable Behaviors of HCPs in the Appendix.)

Knowledge of someone's past can also tell you a lot—if you know where to look. Google them, of course. Casually ask multiple people (not just one or two) who know the person what they think about him or her. See if any concerning patterns emerge. Look at court records, which are usually public, because HCPs have more encounters with the law than average people, either as plaintiffs accusing others of bad behavior or as defendants who may have harmed other people.

Many high-conflict people can hide their patterns of negative behavior from someone for several months to a year, but rarely for longer. Eventually their pattern of high-conflict behavior returns and reveals itself in their interactions. (This is why I strongly advise everyone who is in a new romantic relationship to wait *at least* a year before marrying someone, moving in with them, or having a child with them.)

Remember Tom and Kara? They got married after dating for just two months, at Kara's insistence. At first Tom was hesitant, but Kara complained that he was afraid to commit. A month later, Kara was pregnant. When little Laura was born,

Tom and Kara had known each other just under a year.

Having a child didn't bring them closer together. It turned out that Kara wasn't that interested in being a mother. She returned to her habit of blaming and complaining. She claimed that staying home all day with an infant made her miserable and gave her the right to be irritable.

Were there warning signs for Tom? Yes. The speed of pushing for a commitment, especially overriding Tom's discomfort, stands out. Marriage should be a mutual event from the start. She also had a preoccupation with blaming others—a strong warning sign of a high-conflict personality. These patterns don't change just because people get married. In fact, they often get worse once a commitment has been made.

## The 90 Percent Rule

But is there a way to spot a potential HCP quickly, from a single incident? Often there is.

Many high-conflict people do things that 90 percent of people would *never* do. For example:

- Hitting a random stranger, just because they feel tired or stressed.
- Humiliating a friend in public because the person didn't keep a minor secret.
- Destroying a child's favorite memento because the child broke a rule.
- Walking to the front of the line at an airport ticket counter, demanding to be waited on immediately, and telling the passenger already at the counter, "Trust me, I'm more important than you."
- Giving someone an intense, intimate hug just after meeting them.
- Suddenly yelling at the top of one's lungs at a routine staff meeting.

None of these behaviors is remotely justified. Would 90 percent of people ever do any of these things?

I call this *the 90 Percent Rule*. When you see something extremely negative, ask yourself: Would 90 percent of people ever do this? If the answer is no, you are almost always watching a high-conflict personality in action.

In *The Gift of Fear*, de Becker tells the story of a woman who sought a restraining order against her husband because he had held a gun to her head. She

told a police officer that she would go back to him if he promised never to do it again. The police officer told her that her husband *would* do it again—and that next time he would likely kill her.

How did the policeman know? I think he simply applied the 90 Percent Rule. Ninety percent of people would never hold a gun to their spouse's head, for any reason. There's almost always a high-conflict personality pattern underlying this extreme behavior. Why take the chance?

Here's another real-life example. After getting divorced, a mother of three young kids suddenly disappeared and remained completely out of contact with her children and her ex-husband for more than a year. Then, just as suddenly, she reappeared and resumed regular contact with her kids and her ex. After a time, when things didn't go exactly as she wanted them to, she and her ex went to family court over custody of the kids. A hearing was scheduled—but a few days beforehand, she disappeared again, this time taking the children with her.

Let's apply the 90 Percent Rule here. Ninety percent of divorced parents would *never* suddenly disappear and stay completely out of contact for a year, only to resurface later. There's a pattern underlying—and supporting—this behavior.

## The WEB Method<sup>SM</sup>

So what if you begin to notice a potential high-conflict pattern in someone's behavior? There's an easy way to remember how to evaluate someone for HCP traits—I call it the WEB Method<sup>SM</sup>. Observe the person's words, your own emotions about them, and the person's behavior. Words (W) plus emotions (E) plus behavior (B) = WEB.

### 1. **Words:** Do the person's words fit the high-conflict pattern?

Are they preoccupied with blaming others?

Do they often use all-or-nothing thinking? For example, "My way or the highway!" Or "I hate everyone in that group! Don't you?"

Do they have a hard time communicating their emotions? For example, sending dozens of emotion-driven text messages telling someone how awful they are or pleading with someone to talk to them, when it's clear that isn't going to happen.

Do they often make strong threats?

2. **Emotions:** What do *you* feel around this person? When you're around them, or think about being around them, do you:
  - Feel afraid or anxious?
  - Feel inadequate or humiliated?
  - Feel helpless or hopeless?
  - Feel alone, isolated, or ashamed?
  - Blame yourself a lot for their behavior and statements?
  - Try to talk yourself out of or reduce how you feel?
  - Feel incredibly positive—like the person is too good to be true?
  - Feel swept off your feet—too much?
  - Feel like the absolute center of this person's life—like an obsession?
  - Feel incredibly sorry for them—a helpless victim their entire life?
3. **Behavior:** Has the person behaved in an extreme way?
  - Would 90 percent of people do what the person did?
  - Does the person treat you in an extremely negative way?
  - Have you observed them treating others in an extremely negative way?

Beware of excuses that justify extreme behavior or words because of stress or tiredness or unusual circumstances. Set aside any excuses and apply the 90 Percent Rule.

As you'll discover, this rule is not only surprisingly reliable, it could help you avoid hiring someone; dating someone; marrying someone; or electing someone who could ruin your life.

In the chapters to come, we'll look much more closely at each of the five different high-conflict personalities—and how you can spot them, avoid them, or deal with them—to protect yourself from them.

## Dealing with HCPs

If you have to, or choose to, deal with a high-conflict person, the method I recommend using is an approach I developed called the CARS Methodsm.<sup>4</sup> This has four parts, any or all of which may help manage a high-conflict person:

**Connect** with empathy, attention, and respect  
**Analyze** alternatives or options

**Respond** to misinformation or hostility  
**Set limits** on high-conflict behavior

In later chapters I will briefly explain this method and how to apply it with each of the five types. But first, we'll examine how not to become a Target of Blame if you already have an HCP in your life.



## Chapter 3

---

### Don't Become a Target of Blame

AS EXPLAINED IN the previous chapter, high-conflict people (HCPs) have four primary characteristics:

- Lots of all-or-nothing thinking
- Intense or unmanaged emotions
- Extreme behavior or threats
- A preoccupation with blaming others—their *Targets of Blame*

Could you become an HCP's Target of Blame? If you're not watchful and careful, yes. As I mentioned before, HCPs generally pick on people they are close to or people in authority positions. These close personal or supervisory relationships usually involve the types of people we're inclined to invite into our lives, often without knowing much about them.

Avoiding and deflecting high-conflict behavior is like avoiding illness. You can protect yourself from becoming someone's Target of Blame by vaccinating yourself with knowledge of the personality patterns of high-conflict people. I call this *personality awareness*.

In fact, with personality awareness, which you'll develop as you read this book, you will be more confident in dealing with people, because you will know how to recognize the warning signs of dangerous personality patterns before they do you much harm.

You need to have personality awareness to protect yourself from and deal with potentially high-conflict people on a regular basis without getting hooked by them. I'll show you how to develop this with some simple assessments you can use when new people come into your life and with tools for when you think you may be dealing with an HCP. As members of society, it will help us all if we

can share this knowledge and limit the harm that high-conflict people often do by gaining the trust of those who are uninformed or simply naive.

## Four Things You Need to Know About HCPs

First, people with one of the five personality disorders noted in chapter 1 belong to all economic, social, political, and ethnic groups. You can't tell an HCP by their background.

For example, you can't identify an HCP by their profession or by how much other people trust them. In fact, highly admired leaders and members of the helping professions (teachers, physicians, clergy, therapists, nurses, etc.), may be slightly *more* likely to have personality disorders than people in other lines of work, because of an attraction to the intimate relationships and authority positions in these professions.

Second, studies suggest that the percentage of HCPs is increasing. This means that your risk of being targeted is growing as well.<sup>1</sup>

Third, because people with high-conflict personalities think and act differently from what an ordinary person would do or expect in a conflict, *your methods for managing them must be different from how you would normally resolve conflicts.*

Fourth, HCPs aren't inherently evil. We shouldn't judge them as bad human beings or try to push them out of human society. Many were born with their personality disorders, or developed them because they were seriously abused or indulged in their early lives.

Some high-conflict people, with the right interventions, can be redirected into getting help and leading productive, more satisfying lives. But for the ones who can't be helped, we need to work together to limit their damage.

## Why Now?

Personality awareness has suddenly become so important to avoiding becoming a Target of Blame because of four big, recent changes in our world, which make us more vulnerable and less aware of who we're dealing with:

- **We don't have personal histories with each other:** Today, people have an incredible amount of mobility, so much that we have become a society

of individuals. Yet we need to be around others, so we are constantly inviting new people into our lives: in dating, at school, at work, hiring repair people, joining churches, volunteer groups, investing, sports, you name it. But most of the people you meet don't have a history that you know about. You don't know their reputation, their prior relationships, or anything beyond what they tell you about themselves. Without a history, it's not obvious on the surface who you can really trust and who you can't. You can check someone out online, but you can't always determine what information is accurate and what is false.

- **Families and communities have become weaker:** Communities, neighbors, and extended families used to know each other and watch out for each other. This meant sharing their opinions of strangers or potentially dangerous acquaintances. Plus, everyone knew someone who knew the people you might want to know. Gossip was actually a way that people learned whom to avoid or how to manage them. Extended families and communities were pretty good at screening out (or at least managing) HCPs and protecting others from them. But now, in our society of individuals, you're mostly on your own, so you have to do all the screening yourself.
- **We are all subject to electronic manipulation:** Online, with a little effort, anyone can hide who they are and present themselves as someone completely different. More and more, people are using technology to mislead us about themselves—whether it's with an attractive but phony photograph, an impressive but false résumé, or a sad story that hooks you in but turns out to be a lie.
- **Our entertainment culture misleads us about real-life personalities:** We are constantly being entertained on TV and endless on-demand movies with appealing stories of people who act like jerks (often HCPs) but then turn around. They have new insights and change their behavior. They become wiser and nicer by the end of the show. (Think Disney, or romantic comedies.) But this distorts our real-life perceptions. HCPs rarely have insights and change like this, despite everyone's efforts and naive belief that *they* can change the person.

Combine these four very recent cultural changes with centuries-old human nature, and it's a potentially dangerous mix. Why? Because certain aspects of human nature set us up for easy manipulation and increasing vulnerability to becoming Targets of Blame:

- **We tend to trust people.** Research has demonstrated over and over that we err on the side of trust more often than mistrust. This is especially true when someone tells us that they need our help.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, this healthy trait makes us vulnerable to high-conflict people—who are constantly and emotionally asking for help, often playing the role of a victim.
- **We especially trust people in groups that we identify with.** Lots of brain research shows that, from infancy, we stereotype people based on our own background and culture.<sup>3</sup> We overly trust people who belong to the group we identify with—especially our own ethnic, racial, political, or religious group.<sup>4</sup> Yet we shouldn't trust about 10 percent of them. And we overly mistrust people who belong to different groups than we do—yet we can trust about 90 percent of them.
- **We tend to trust our emotions.** Emotional connection is one of the strongest drives of human beings. We constantly want to be loved, liked, and respected.<sup>5</sup> Yet manipulating our emotions is one of the key techniques of the people who may ruin your life. You will fall in love with them. You will be impressed with their stories. You will be persuaded by their charm and their interest in you.
- **We doubt our own behavior.** Ironically, while we easily trust other people, we're harder on ourselves. When we're in a conflict with someone, our first impulse is to question ourselves. *Did I say something wrong? Did I do something stupid or offensive? What should I do differently next time?* This normal human trait helps us learn, change, and grow. But when dealing with high-conflict people, this trait can lead to trouble—especially when you start to trust one of them more than you trust yourself.

These are all normal human traits. There's nothing wrong with having these responses. In fact, they will work 90 percent of the time. *You just need to learn when to override them.* Otherwise, you risk becoming a Target of Blame. That's what this book is all about: learning to recognize warning signs that most people ignore or don't see—and then overriding your natural responses with actions based on your newfound wisdom about HCPs.

## A Love Story?

Remember the story about Tom and Kara? Let's look at what happened to them.

*Tom fell in love with Kara partly because she was the life of the party. Everyone loved her, so why shouldn't he? Plus, he tended to be shy and quiet, and she brought out his hidden extraverted side. He felt he could be his full, true self around her.*

*At first he was ecstatic. At the age of thirty, he'd finally found someone who really connected with him. Well, actually, she found him. He was at a club when she took over as the karaoke singer. He was spellbound. She came up to him during a break and struck up a conversation.*

*She told him that she, too, was thirty and was looking for someone responsible to settle down and have children with. And Tom was responsible. But it turns out that Kara wasn't very responsible herself.*

*When they did the paperwork to get married, Tom was surprised to see that she was really thirty-five. "What's that about?" he exclaimed. "Don't worry about it," she said. "All women do that, you know. Lie about their age." Oh, Tom thought. What do I know? Anyway, she's terrific!*

*After they were married, Kara was always in conflict with somebody. She spent a lot of time telling Tom how bad her various enemies were. Friends, family members, and people at work all deeply angered her one day—then, the next day, they were her dearest companions. A day later, they were her enemies again. Tom quickly grew frustrated with her complaining, only to see her make up and be buddies with the people she had hated a week earlier and had wanted him to hate, too.*

*Less than six months after they were married, Kara got pregnant. Tom loved becoming a father, and little Laura became the other love of his life. What he didn't love was that soon after Laura was born, Kara started treating him as one of her "bad guys." Within a year, tiny Laura was a villain in her eyes as well. Then, suddenly, Kara would switch to being loving toward both of them again, until Tom thought everything was going to be fine. And then, suddenly, once again, it wasn't.*

*Slowly, Tom realized that his marriage with Kara wasn't going to work. He delayed making a decision for as long as possible. In fact, he made efforts to rein her in and help her become more positive. He suggested they go to marriage counseling. She refused. He suggested they try a temporary separation. She refused.*

*Frustrated, he finally told her that if she didn't do something different, he was going to file divorce papers in a week.*

*A few days later—just before he went to file the divorce papers—he was served with a restraining order that required him to leave the house. Kara had quickly filed divorce papers herself and had obtained a restraining order at a short hearing without Tom present. Kara had told the judge that Tom was terribly dangerous—that he had been repeatedly abusive and had threatened her life. Based on her reports, the judge agreed that Tom needed to be evicted from his own home.*

## What Happened?

Tom fell in love with Kara, but people fall in love all the time. What went wrong?

Kara had grown up in another state—Tom had met her parents, who gave him a little bit of her history, but they didn't tell him about her wild and dangerous life as a young adult, which she spent hanging out with a group of friends who were into drugs, joyriding stolen cars, and even disappearing from home from time to time. Her parents never mentioned this, or perhaps they didn't know about it or were in denial. So Tom didn't learn much about her personal past before their marriage.

When Tom and Kara began dating, no one Tom knew also knew Kara. At the club, the bartender said that she was popular and that Tom was a lucky guy to catch someone with such a great voice. But that's all the bartender knew—or, at least, all that he would say. So there was also no community or extended family that Tom could ask about her.

Kara's Internet profiles had lots of great photos with friends Tom hadn't met and never had a chance to meet. Eventually, Tom began to wonder if they were even real.

On the other hand, Kara quickly learned everything about him. After they had known each other only a month, she asked him for his computer passwords, so she could use his laptop while hers was being repaired—or so she said. Later, Tom realized that she had combed through his computer. But she wouldn't let him have access to anything on hers.

Tom realized that he had missed some possible warning signs early on: That she wanted to know everything about him but shared almost nothing about herself (all-or-nothing thinking). That she could impulsively switch friends and enemies just like that (unmanaged emotions). That she was always intensely

blaming somebody for something (preoccupation with blaming others). And from the start, she seemed too good to be true.

Did Tom's natural instincts mislead him? Absolutely. Kara was attractive by anyone's standards. She knew a lot of the songs that he had learned growing up, which he found particularly appealing. She was part of his culture and fit well into his cultural stereotypes of what a cool, popular woman would look like and act like. He had no reason to mistrust her. Plus, he was in love, and thought that he had found someone who accepted him for who he was.

Too bad he didn't know who *she* was—or how it would be revealed. But he did have pattern information from the start: She tended toward all-or-nothing statements about people. Her intense love-hate emotions shifted surprisingly easily, compared to most people. Her preoccupation with blaming others seemed to be a curiosity at first, but then it became a little annoying. While he thought she loved him and would never treat him this way, if he had developed personality awareness he would have realized that he would eventually become her next Target of Blame. With this knowledge, he could have gotten out after the first month or so, and certainly before marrying her.

## Some Words of Compassion

Before we plunge into the specific patterns and warning signs, I want to bring a little compassion into the picture. No one volunteers to have a personality disorder or to have a high-conflict personality. These occur because of a mixture of genetics and the environment that people grew up in. Some high-conflict personalities were formed after experiencing extreme abuse in childhood. Others came about because of bad genetic luck, despite having a fine upbringing. Most are a result of some combination of both.

Regardless of the cause, having a personality disorder and/or high-conflict personality makes the HCP's own life miserable—their ability to be self-aware and change has been lost because of genetics and/or childhood environment, so they really cannot help themselves. They don't understand that they can improve their own lives by focusing on changing themselves instead of blaming others for their conflicts and emotions.

Remember what I said in chapter 2: Don't confront them with your belief that they have a personality disorder and/or high-conflict personality. Instead, have compassion for them as you steer clear or deal with them with the tools you'll learn in the following chapters.

## Chapter 4

---

### The *I'm Superior, You're Nothing* Type

DO YOU KNOW someone who thinks they're better than everyone else and seems bent on proving it—over and over again, and always at other people's expense? Maybe you were charmed by them at first but now find them acting superior to you or entitled to special treatment. Perhaps you feel they've sabotaged you or blamed you for something in their quest to get ahead or gain prestige and attention. These are all hallmarks of a narcissistic HCP.

Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is the most common of the five high-conflict personality disorders. According to a 2008 report of a National Institutes of Health study, more than 6 percent of the general population has the disorder.<sup>1</sup> That's more than twenty-two million people in North America. From my thirty years of professional experience with hundreds of high-conflict cases, and feedback from thousands of professionals at our seminars, I estimate that about half of those with this disorder are narcissistic HCPs who focus on Targets of Blame. Add to this the fact that the NIH study found that 37 percent of those with narcissistic personality disorder also have borderline personality disorder,<sup>2</sup> which will be discussed in the next chapter, and about 12 percent of narcissists also have antisocial personality disorder,<sup>3</sup> which is explained in chapter 6. These combinations tend to increase their high-conflict behavior.

This study found that 62 percent of those with narcissistic personality disorder are men, and 38 percent are women.<sup>4</sup> So there is a gender difference, but not an absolute difference.

As with the other high-conflict personalities, there is a wide range of narcissistic behavior, from mild to severe. Many low-conflict narcissists will not try to ruin your life but may just be difficult to be around because they are so self-absorbed or arrogant. The high-conflict narcissists, however, will go for



your jugular and justify the harm they do with their own self-importance. Yet they may also be entirely oblivious to their harmful effect on you.

## Narcissism 101

According to the *DSM-5*, in order for someone to have a personality disorder they must have “significant social impairment and/or internal distress.”<sup>5</sup> They have a *narcissistic* personality disorder if they have five or more of nine specific traits. Three key characteristics of narcissists are particularly present in those who are high-conflict:

1. Sees self as very superior to everyone else, especially those around them.
2. Feels entitled to special treatment so that the rules don't apply to them.
3. Lacks empathy, so can be very insulting and demeaning to others, often in public.

You can see how it would be difficult to be in a close relationship with someone who has these traits, because they are always trying to push themselves up by putting others down—an endless high-conflict situation.

Narcissistic HCPs don't have authentic relationships; they use relationships for their own gain. They are very good at seduction: of romantic partners, of professional colleagues, of business investors, and of the general public during political or promotional campaigns. It is only much later that people wake up to the HCP's lack of real skills, their unwillingness to work hard (especially on their relationships), their tendency to blame others for everything, and the ease with which they will leave you behind when a better opportunity seems at hand.

Because of their sense of superiority and entitlement, Narcissistic HCPs feel justified and righteous in ruining your business, your marriage, your career, and your life—as long as it helps them look great or avoid blame. Meanwhile, they may say or imply that there is something wrong with you for being upset about their destructive actions.

Narcissists generally act the way they do without conscious intent. They can't help themselves; it's who they are. Narcissistic personality disorder usually starts early in life, and often (but not always) arises out of abusive experiences or an overindulged childhood.

It's also important to understand that a narcissist's manipulation is never about you. You're just an easy or available Target. In fact, many narcissists don't really notice your existence—even if you live together, work together, or are neighbors or friends—because they are so self-absorbed. They have treated many people equally badly before, and they will treat dozens (or, more likely, hundreds) more exactly the same way. And when a bigger, better, more important, or more convenient Target comes along, the narcissist may suddenly ignore you and chase after him or her.

It's also important to distinguish people with narcissistic personality disorder from successful people whose achievements and talents are generally recognized by others. It is the *overinflated* sense of one's achievements and talents, and the resistance to changing their own behavior, that identify the person with NPD, and that often lead them to harm the people around them. In psychology, this is often referred to as *pathological narcissism* or, in its most destructive form, *malignant narcissism*.

We need to contrast this with many successful people—politicians, businesspeople, artists, doctors, lawyers, musicians, chefs, writers, etc.—who have *some* traits of narcissism. This is often called *healthy narcissism*, because it helps the people who have these traits to believe in themselves, even when others put up barriers or try to push them away. In small doses, this form of narcissism can be helpful and healthy.

Remember, though, that a trait common to *all* personality disorders, according to the *DSM-5*, is that the person has a significant and enduring pattern of distress or impairment. When people show enough signs of these negative behavior patterns, they don't have healthy narcissism.

## Two Flavors of Narcissistic HCPs

Many psychologists separate those who aren't healthy narcissists into two categories: *vulnerable narcissists* and *grandiose narcissists*. This distinction refers to how the HCP responds when one of their weaknesses is exposed (for example, when somebody catches them in an outright lie). This is what mental health professionals call a *narcissistic injury*. A vulnerable narcissist will probably become angry immediately, and may attack the person who exposed their weakness, either verbally or physically. In contrast, a grandiose narcissist may not appear to get upset at all but may get even with the person later—by

spreading rumors, sabotaging their work or reputation, suing them, destroying their property, or otherwise harming them.

This is why it's vitally important to avoid publicly humiliating a narcissist—even if they have publicly humiliated you. Even though they may not respond immediately, they may orchestrate a very strong, calculated, harmful response against you—their new Target of Blame—later.

Let's look at a few real-life examples of narcissistic HCPs.

## The Athlete

While Lance Armstrong has not had a formal diagnosis, many people in the media suggest that he has a narcissistic personality disorder.<sup>6</sup> One of these people, Joseph Burgo, PhD, a psychotherapist and author of *The Narcissist You Know: Defending Yourself Against Extreme Narcissists in an All-About-Me Age*, wrote in a blog:

*Watching him answer Oprah's questions last night, viewing the clips of his old denials and victory speeches, Armstrong's struggle with narcissistic defenses seemed even more apparent. In particular, it seemed clear that he lives in a world inhabited largely by winners and losers; his entire life has been a massive effort to prove himself a triumphant winner rather than a contemptible loser, a dynamic at the heart of narcissism.*<sup>7</sup>

The day after the Oprah interview, ABC News journalist Elizabeth Vargas explained that Lance Armstrong “admitted ruining the lives of many people who told the truth about his doping.” Vargas interviewed Betsy Andreu—the wife of Frankie Andreu, a former teammate who knew Armstrong well—who said, “What Lance would do is, he would always attack the person and not the message.”<sup>8</sup>

One example of this appears in the documentary film *The Armstrong Lie*. In one scene from February 2009, Armstrong is interviewed—and criticized—on a news program. He does not respond to the content of the criticism but instead says, “You are not worth the chair that you're sitting on with a statement like that.”<sup>9</sup>

In this example, you can see a pattern of Armstrong pushing himself up by putting others down. It's not even subtle. He is totally disparaging of his Targets, publicly claiming they are worth less than a chair. He turned on his interviewer

in an effort to protect his own deceptions about his superior abilities, and threatened their reputation in the process.

## The TV Host

Remember the story of Jen and Jason at the very beginning of this book? It was inspired by a real situation. Did you think that Jason might have narcissistic traits and be an HCP with this description in the first chapter?

*Jason was very charming, and the two had a great discussion about current media trends and whether there was a future in television. He seemed impressed by her knowledge of the industry, and Jen was hopeful that he might help her get a job. At the end of the talk, he told her how good she looked and gave her an intense hug. Later that day, he texted her that it would be nice to get together after work for a drink.*

*Jen was uncertain whether she should go. Jason's flirtatiousness unsettled her. But after some thought, she sent him a text telling him that a friendly meet-up would be okay. She mentioned that she hoped he might help her get a job, too.*

*Jason texted back, saying he wasn't interested in a personal friendship, and he certainly didn't want to be used as a way to get a job.*

Were there warning signs of a narcissistic HCP in this brief interaction? Arrogant? Entitled? Intense emotions? Extreme behavior? Any hints that three years later, she would learn that Jason had been fired from the station—and arrested for sexually assaulting six different women who had worked with him there?

In short, yes, there were warning signs. Ninety percent of people would not have given her an “intense hug” after just meeting her and having a brief conversation. Ninety percent of people would not have requested to get together for a friendly meet-up and then be so offended that Jen raised a request for job-hunting assistance that they'd cancel their meet-up request.

While these may not be obvious warning signs and may be innocent in other cases, they are the kind of hints that should give you pause before proceeding to put your full trust in someone. Fortunately, Jen quickly thought to mention that he might help her get a job. This seems to have “set limits” on him by making

clear her interest was a business connection, not a physical connection. By trusting her instinctual personality awareness, she likely avoided a dangerous situation.

## Terrorist Leaders

Fanatical leaders often have extreme cases of narcissistic personality disorder. In his book *Hunting Terrorists: A Look at the Psychopathology of Terror*, FBI Special Agent Joe Navarro explains why both Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein fit the NPD profile:

*No matter how good things have been . . . the minute something goes wrong their allegiance shifts or they immediately devalue the other person. . . . This ability to switch so suddenly and irrevocably has been noted in many terrorists. . . . When it comes [to] terrorist leaders, narcissism is perhaps one of the most often observed traits.*<sup>10</sup>

This fits with the core characteristic of lack of empathy associated with narcissistic personality disorder. It's all about the leader and the leader's grandiose view of their own power and importance in the world, and in history. The dozens and sometimes thousands of followers who sacrifice and die on their behalf mean little to them. They are often noted for killing off their associates when they feel the slightest bit threatened by their associates' successes and popularity.

This helps explain why followers of fanatical, narcissistic leaders are not usually narcissists themselves. In fact, their own lives are often ruined by following leaders who lack empathy and who don't care about them at all. For example, in public footage of Osama bin Laden, he laughs when he first hears of the success of the attack on the World Trade Center buildings in New York on September 11, 2001. Then he says, with something between dismissal and disdain, that many of the young hijackers didn't even know the full extent of their missions.

## Spotting Narcissistic HCPs

Many narcissists are such self-important blowhards that it's hard to miss their overrated self-assessments. But many more will restrain or hide their self-centered behavior under a charming exterior until you've known them for weeks or months—sometimes up to a year

or months—sometimes up to a year.

High-profile and high-visibility professions—medicine, law, college and university teaching, acting, politics, and so on—are magnets for narcissists because of the prestige. So are other helping professions—nursing, social work, psychology, ministry, etc.—because of the intimate opportunities it offers for manipulating vulnerable clients. If you are involved with hiring someone for a job or currently looking for a new practitioner in one of these professions, take special care to watch for and screen out narcissistic HCPs.

As always, the WEB MethodSM you learned in chapter 2 will be a very useful identification tool. You'll recall that WEB stands for a person's words (W), your own emotions (E), and the person's behavior (B).

**Words:** In addition to the four high-conflict characteristics (all-or-nothing thinking; unmanaged emotions; extreme behavior or threats; preoccupation with blaming others), listen for words that show unhealthy narcissism: arrogance, lack of empathy, or disdain for others; words that belittle, demean, or insult others; comments that split humanity into winners and losers; words that reflect their own superiority and a sense of entitlement to extra services and benefits they haven't earned.

**Emotions:** Recall what Gavin de Becker said in his book *The Gift of Fear*: Our gut feelings are often the first to tell us there is a problem with someone's behavior. Pay attention to your own gut when you're in someone's presence, or when you think about them. Are you afraid? Do you feel unable to breathe around them? (Narcissists are known for "sucking up all the oxygen in a room.") When you're with them, do you doubt your own intelligence, confidence, competence, or value as a person? Do you feel helpless or hopeless after being around them?

Also ask yourself: *Am I in awe of this person beyond reason? Do I feel swept away by them? Do I feel that they're my personal hero? Do I feel that they are a superior person?*

Last, ask yourself: *Are others around me concerned that I've gone off the deep end in my admiration for this person? Do I get upset when others criticize the person, or feel a need to justify or explain what they say or do? Do I feel embarrassed when I say positive things about the person?*

**Behavior:** Does the person act aggressively toward others, then justify their actions by claiming their superiority ("*Don't you know who I am?*")? Do they feel entitled to ignore the normal rules? Do they publicly—and often viciously—insult people? Do they not care (or notice) how others feel? Do they show a lack of empathy for others?

You can also use the 90 Percent Rule to identify a high-conflict narcissist. For example, think back over some of the examples in this chapter. Would 90 percent of the people you know:

- When presented with some honest criticism, respond by saying, “You’re not worth the chair you’re sitting on”?
- Laugh when told that thousands of people have died—including some of the people who had just completed an important task for them?
- Deliberately ruin the lives of people who told the truth about them—and then publicly admit to ruining those lives?
- Ask for a get-together just after meeting for the first time, then respond with a savage comment and cancel when asked for a favor in return?

Speak with others who know the person. Tell them you have some doubts and concerns about the person but you’re not sure whether you’re sensing something or imagining it. Most people will give you their honest take.

If someone responds to your inquiry with a rant about how incredible, wonderful, and special the person is—or a lecture about how the whole world is ganging up on that person as a victim—this will tell you a lot. The person you asked about is likely a narcissistic HCP, and the person you’re speaking with has probably fallen under their sway.

## Avoiding Narcissistic HCPs

Use caution and proceed slowly at the start of any new relationship. It’s much easier to avoid a relationship with a high-conflict narcissist—or limit that relationship from the beginning—than it is to back out of it later on. This is good advice in general, but it’s especially important if you observe any of the warning signs described in this chapter. And don’t naively get into a relationship with them because you believe you can change their personality or that you will “set them straight.” Forget about it!

One of the most common early problems for those around a narcissistic HCP is to be overly impressed and then “overflatter” them when they first meet them. But people become resentful toward the HCP later, when they don’t get anything in return for their flattery, and are tempted to blast them with negative feedback. Avoid excessive flattery at the beginning if you think you may be dealing with

an HCP. Tempering that impulse makes it much easier to back off if your suspicions are correct.

Here are some additional tips.

**Ask the person questions:** Asking someone about their life, past, family, work, and interests may yield useful information—including the names of other people they know, whom you can inquire about them. But the person's *reaction* to your questions will also give you a lot of good information. If they are unusually hesitant, self-protective, or angry about being asked appropriate questions, that's a sign to steer clear.

**Accumulate observations over an extended period of time, and/or from multiple viewpoints:** If you are dating, spend a year getting to know the person before making any major commitments, such as getting married or having children. Sometimes living together helps you find out what they're like in more intimate quarters before making a bigger commitment. But sometimes even that can create entanglements if you split up while sharing a lease, or disrupt other roommates and neighbors.

If you are interviewing the person for a job, try to build the longest probationary period possible into any job offer. Involve several people you trust in the hiring process, and get their candid opinions and gut feelings about the applicant after any interview. Likewise, when considering roommates, employers, and other potentially long-term associations, take a cautious approach at the start.

## Dealing with Narcissistic HCPs

If you decide that you're going to deal with a narcissist on an ongoing basis, avoid demonstrating that they're wrong (even if they obviously are), pointing out their lie or deception (even if it's ludicrous and transparent), or responding to them with clever put-downs (even if it's funny, they completely deserve it, or they just cruelly insulted you). Instead, stay calm and nonreactive, and disengage as quickly as possible from the conversation.

Here's how you can use the CARS Method<sup>SM</sup> from chapter 2 to neutralize or manage a conflict with a Narcissistic HCP.

**Connecting:** It helps calm the conflict with most HCPs to first try to connect by using statements that include empathy, attention, and/or respect. Of course, don't try this if the person is violent or in a rage or engaged in some other dangerous behavior—get away and protect yourself!



Here's an example of a statement that shows *connecting with empathy, attention, and respect*—the first part of the CARS Method<sup>SM</sup> described in chapter 2—which we also refer to as an *EAR statement*.

*“I can see this is a frustrating situation. [Empathy] Tell me more—I want to understand what’s happening from your point of view. [Attention] I have a lot of respect for your efforts to resolve this problem. [Respect]”*

When dealing with a narcissistic HCP, it helps to emphasize respect. You may find it helpful to go directly to making statements that include the word *respect*, such as:

*“I respect your commitment to our community.”*

*“I really had a lot of respect for that presentation you did last week. It was excellent.”*

*“I respect your relationship with our son, and I want to help you to spend significant time with him.”*

Of course, your statements must be true and not exaggerations just to please the narcissist. If you're not honest, they will catch you and resent you for it, or they will hold you to it later, especially if you begin trying to back away from them. Many people work too hard to please narcissists when a simple EAR statement would suffice. Briefly mention *empathy* and *attention*, but always emphasize *respect*. Too much emphasis on *empathy* or *attention* may set you up for manipulation by a narcissistic HCP, because they may think that you will do anything to help them feel better. Since they feel chronically anxious and distressed (whenever their self-centered methods and superior attitude backfire on them), they will turn to you as a source of the attention they crave.

**Analyzing:** Talk about options or choices that the person has. You can turn anything into a choice, which makes the person feel more empowered and more respected. For example:

Suppose a narcissistic HCP has just dropped in or called you, demanding attention. You could respond: *“I can help you right now, but only for about five minutes. Next week, if we schedule it, I can spend about an hour with you on this. It’s up to you.”*

This approach helps you turn their demand into a choice, so that you can limit their disruption of your time while they still feel respected and considered.

**Responding:** If the narcissistic HCP is making false statements or expressing hostility toward you, just give a matter-of-fact statement with some accurate information and end the conversation. For example:

*“Oh, you may not be aware—that problem was taken care of yesterday.”*

This is what I call a *BIFF response*: It’s brief (just a sentence or paragraph), informative (just straight information, not defensiveness), friendly (keeps the tone nonadversarial), and firm (meaning it ends the potentially hostile discussion). This approach is particularly helpful with narcissists (as well as the other high-conflict personalities), as it generally makes them feel valued rather than disrespected or insulted by a snarky response. It is especially useful in written responses.

**Setting limits:** If you are already in a relationship with a narcissistic HCP, you *may* be able to manage them by carefully setting limits with them—and repeatedly holding them to those limits.

Since narcissists believe they are superior to others, including you, they may have difficulty taking *no* for an answer, or believing that any rule or boundary applies to them. In fact, they will often blow right past a verbal no. That’s why you can’t just *say* no; you have to back it up with firm boundaries and clear consequences for violating them.

You may need to set limits on the topics you will discuss, the amount of time you will spend together, the tasks you will do or not do for them, and so forth. In practice, we do this with everyone we meet, but people who are not high-conflict types intuitively understand our limits and normally don’t violate them.

Narcissists can be extremely persistent, because they never get tired of trying to get their way in everything. Be prepared for this, and set limits in a matter-of-fact way. Make it clear that the limit isn’t about them; explain how your schedule, your boss, or other external circumstances require you to set this limit, and hold it firmly in place.

As a human being, you have the right to set limits with anyone. But expect the narcissistic HCP to tell you otherwise. They may also give you negative consequences for setting limits with them—and tell you it’s all your fault. (*“I told your assistant I needed to ask you a question, but you were in a stupid meeting, so I told the CEO you thought he was a jerk.”*) Try to anticipate such problems and address them matter-of-factly beforehand. (*“I’m going to be in this meeting, so if you have any questions, send me an email and I’ll get back to you as soon as I can; or leave a message with my assistant.”*)

If you don't set limits, the narcissistic HCP will take over your life—and, eventually, make you a Target of Blame. But if you *do* set limits, they may fire you (if they're your employer); they may refuse to work with you (if they're a business partner or coworker); or they may leave you endless harassing voice mail messages or texts (if you're dating them). This is why it's so important to spot and avoid narcissists in the first place.

If you can't avoid the person, then spend a few moments stroking their ego after they have been upset about something. (*"I appreciate your understanding of my schedule. I have responded as quickly as I could and I know your time is important."*) By quickly responding, you may avoid the person escalating the situation and involving others by complaining about you. You can also ask for respect. (*"I appreciate your respecting my need to concentrate with as few interruptions as possible today."*)

But with narcissistic HCPs, sometimes being fired or otherwise shunned by them is the best scenario. Staying in the relationship, no matter how much you try to manage it and set limits, may ultimately be incredibly draining for you. Often the best thing to do is end the relationship quickly and move on.

But how? And how to do so in a way that puts you at the least risk?

## Breaking Away from a Narcissistic HCP

If you want to limit, reduce, or end your relationship with a high-conflict narcissist, do it very carefully and strategically. Narcissistic HCPs are very sensitive to rejection. They may interpret almost anything you do as insulting or threatening. Here are some useful tips:

- Never tell the narcissist that you're withdrawing because of who they are or what they did—no matter how abusive they may have been. Never say or imply that your withdrawal is their fault (even though it almost certainly is). If you do, you all but guarantee that you will become their new Target of Blame.
- Don't blame or criticize yourself, either (e.g., *"I just can't handle a new relationship right now"*). This will reinforce the HCP's belief—or propensity to believe—that you're inferior and everything is your fault.
- Focus on your differing (or evolving) styles, interests, or goals (e.g., *"I'm not as interested in the fencing club as I used to be,"* or *"I want to spend*

- more time with my family and less with colleagues”*).
- Never make it sound like you are rejecting *them*. Seeking revenge for being rejected is one of the most common traits of many narcissistic HCPs.
  - Most of all, don't make your withdrawal a big deal. Just be matter-of-fact. If a narcissistic HCP senses that you are anxious, or emotionally invested in your explanation, they are more likely to make you a Target of Blame. It's just the way they are.
  - Demonstrate simple respect for them. Use words like *respect* or *talented* or *successful* (e.g., “*Of course, I'll still be rooting for you, and I hope you'll become even more successful than you already are*”).
  - It's possible that the narcissistic HCP will challenge you, demand that you prove your point of view, or tell you that you're wrong to want to withdraw. But you don't have to prove anything or argue your position. Simply say that it's your opinion or perspective (e.g., “*Well, it's how I feel and what I want right now. Of course, I'll still be rooting for you, and I hope you'll become even more successful than you already are*”).
  - Don't be abrupt (e.g., don't break things off in a two-sentence text or email), but don't drag out the process over days or weeks, either. Usually a single conversation lasting a few minutes will work.
  - If things get dicey—or if you feel that they will—consult with a therapist. Give them specifics about the narcissistic HCP in your life and ask for their guidance.

## Some Final Words

Once you realize that someone is a narcissistic HCP, *never*, under any circumstances, criticize them, no matter how awful and abusive they have been. A high-conflict narcissist may respond to even the slightest criticism by making you their intense Target of Blame—perhaps for years. They just can't handle criticism.

I want to acknowledge that being less than direct may feel like you're “sucking it up” or doing all the work in managing the relationship. Think of it as being wise and strategic. Hammering a narcissistic HCP with your negative feedback only feels good for a moment. But you may spend months or years dealing with the fallout from that moment.

Sometimes moderate praise and appreciation can slow an angry narcissist or stop them in their tracks. But be sure to praise them for something they actually

did (“*Wow, did you pick out this furniture yourself—or did you have a decorator?*”). Otherwise, they may become suspicious—and blame and attack you even more virulently.

With the personality awareness tools in this chapter, it will get easier for you to spot narcissistic HCPs early on, and avoid them or manage your contact with them with increasing confidence. If you do let one or more into your life, do so with eyes wide-open to the realities you will face and the work you will need to do to manage their high-conflict tendencies.

## Chapter 5

---

### The *Love You, Hate You* Type

**M**AYBE YOU KNOW someone who's extremely charming, friendly, and reasonable—one minute. Then, the next, they're screaming, and blaming, and attacking you: verbally, financially, publicly, physically, or all of these and more. The speed with which they turn from seeming to love you to hating you is breathtaking. *What did I do?* you may ask yourself. *How can I get out of here?* You may be dealing with a borderline HCP.

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is almost as common as narcissistic personality disorder. A 2008 report of a National Institutes of Health study indicates that nearly 6 percent of the general population has BPD. That's 5.9 percent with borderline<sup>1</sup> compared to 6.2 percent with narcissistic personality disorder—around twenty million people in North America.

From my observations in psychiatric hospitals, outpatient clinics, and legal disputes, I estimate that more than half of those with borderline personality disorder are also HCPs with a Target of Blame. This is because their relationships can become so intensely focused on one person early on, then very intensely focused on that person when the relationship blows up (which they often do after weeks or months, primarily because of this intense focus). This is true whether it's a romantic relationship, family relationship, work relationship, or otherwise.

However, not all people with borderline personality disorder are HCPs. Some just blame the world for their problems, rather than any one individual. They wonder why “things” don't seem to go their way and “people” always seem so undependable and never seem to stick around. Many attempt suicide or succeed at it, and some cut themselves to feel a sense of control over their emotions. But the borderline HCPs have specific Targets of Blame and may fixate on them for

months or years, with emotional harassment, legal claims, or even repeated physical assaults.

The study just described found that 53 percent of those with borderline personality disorder are women, and 47 percent are men.<sup>2</sup> So there is a slight gender difference, but not a significant one. This is a surprise to many mental health professionals familiar with an earlier version of the *DSM* (*DSM-IV*), who were originally taught that borderline was primarily a female disorder. But that is no longer accepted as true, based on this much larger NIH study, which is now included in the *DSM-5*.

Part of the borderline high-conflict personality is preoccupied with revenge and vindication. They often end up in court suing their alleged abusers (really, their Targets of Blame) for “abandoning” them one way or another. While some are actual victims of specific abusive behavior, from which they truly need protection, others have taken a victim-in-life position that allows them (in their own minds) to punish their former lovers, employers, and friends for minor or nonexistent behaviors.

## Borderline 101

According to the *DSM-5*, someone has borderline personality disorder if they have five or more of nine specific personality traits. The following three key characteristics make them very likely to create high-conflict situations or be HCPs:

1. Fear of abandonment; constantly clinging and seeking reassurance.
2. Wide mood swings, with rapid shifts between friendliness and rage.
3. Splitting: Seeing people as all good or all bad.

Fear of abandonment is the most basic underlying trait of this disorder. That’s why borderline personalities cling. They hold on to their partners (they often threaten divorce but rarely mean it), their intimate professionals (such as repeatedly calling their doctors, therapists, ministers, lawyers), close friends (who they may have just met at work or elsewhere), and family members (they never quite let go of their dependency or their resentments) by constantly requesting contact and reassurance. This is why you may see only the friendly side of them for the first few weeks or months. But they never truly absorb a

feeling of being soothed and keep pushing for more, so that they inevitably push away most of the people they were closest to. They may keep their HCP side hidden from you for a time in a close relationship, but usually not longer than nine to twelve months.

If they *feel* you have actually abandoned them—even if you haven't or you just forgot something at the store—they go into a rage. This person may spread rumors about you (sometimes known as “distortion campaigns”), they may physically assault you (in the worst case killing you in a rage, but immediately regretting it), file lawsuits against you (often against their intimate professionals), call the police against you (such as when a partner wants to get divorced) and accuse you of horrible crimes (child sexual abuse, adult sexual abuse, terrorism, etc.), which are not at all true. (Of course these allegations are true in some cases, so an investigation may occur and it's best if you cooperate so you don't make it look like you did something wrong if you didn't.)

Borderline HCPs will try to persuade others to turn against you, and they will. Other friends and associates may just avoid you because they don't want to get involved after seeing how intense the high-conflict person can become.

## Two Flavors of Borderline HCPs

Randi Kreger, author of *The Essential Family Guide to Borderline Personality Disorder*,<sup>3</sup> emphasizes that some of those with borderline personality disorder are “unconventional” while others are “conventional.” Unconventional borderlines may be successful and respected in their work or communities, while having great difficulty in their close relationships. Their mood swings may be kept under wraps for years to the average colleague, neighbor, or professional associate. But the person in a close relationship with an unconventional borderline personality, such as a romantic partner, an immediate underling at work, or a business partner, may see frequent rages over petty issues or allegations of nonexistent offenses.

Since so much of unconventional borderline HCP behavior goes on behind closed doors, I'll use fictional examples in this chapter. Consider Meryl Streep's character in the 2006 movie *The Devil Wears Prada*. As Miranda Priestly, a high-powered fashion magazine editor, she torments her junior personal assistant, Andy (Anne Hathaway). Miranda has constant mood swings, from very charming and mentor-like to extreme anger and criticism toward Andy. She



gives Andy special assignments and opportunities but then makes frequent threats to fire her if she fails at minor tasks. Miranda would easily fit the rapid mood swings of this personality type.

Andy demonstrates common behavior for a Target of Blame, trying hard to please Miranda and getting caught up in her schemes. Miranda frequently “splits” her staff between good employees and bad employees, handing out favors one minute and backstabbing the next. Ultimately, Andy quits her job and the whole fashion industry. She had planned to stay a year but couldn’t wait to get out. While this was a movie, this type of unconventional borderline HCP behavior occurs in every occupation to some extent.

On the other hand, conventional people with borderline personality disorder are generally more obviously dysfunctional because of their disorder, may have difficulty even keeping a job because of their mood swings and splitting, and may have more self-destructive behaviors.

Suicide attempts and actual suicides are more common in this group, as are psychiatric hospitalizations or other mental health treatments. Cutting arms and legs with razor blades, knives, or pens is associated primarily with this disorder. Overall, conventional borderline HCPs are more likely to use threats of suicide to keep family and friends from abandoning their relationship, or they may actually commit suicide.

Because borderline HCPs blame their problems on those close to them, their Targets of Blame are often stuck in a cycle of ambivalence: trying to help the person they used to care for, versus trying to get far, far away from them, as their dysfunctional behavior persists or increases. People in these relationships often seek some kind of counseling to help them cope or break away.

## Spotting Borderline HCPs

Some borderline HCPs are intense from the start: angry, intensely afraid, demanding; totally out of proportion to the situation and to the fact that you just met, whatever the setting. But most borderline HCPs start out extremely friendly, charming, energetic, lovable, and possibly seductive. Sometimes, they are particularly angry at somebody else and have a terrible story of being victimized. They may want your help carrying out revenge or punishment for that other person or draw you in by appearing vulnerable or commiserating with you. They may even get you to take care of them very quickly in the friendship, protecting them from emotional or other alleged abuse from people you haven’t

met (like bosses, former lovers, family members, old friends). The stories of abuse may be true, partially true, or not true at all. Regardless, this doesn't make it appropriate for them to take over your life with their demands for support.

It can be surprising how quickly a borderline HCP wants to get close to you. They lack many ordinary boundaries, even in ordinary friendships or as coworkers. They may want you to take actions against others, although this may make you feel uncomfortable. You may override your initial discomfort because the person seems so wonderful or demands loyalty and you feel guilty if you don't comply or because you get caught up in their tale and feel bad for them. It's this fast intimacy that often gives hints of the intensity that they can bring to a relationship—and to ending a relationship.

This is why it's so important to wait about a year before making a major relationship commitment to someone, such as getting married, becoming business partners, or otherwise making a long-term investment in them. If you suspect someone you're involved with may be a borderline HCP, apply the WEB MethodSM first.

**Words:** As with all the high-conflict personalities, watch for words with an all-or-nothing quality. *“People always abandon me.”* Or: *“People always take advantage of me, but now I'm sticking up for myself and fighting back.”* This is a particularly seductive statement many HCPs make. It reframes their conflicts to draw you over to their side, because you believe they are finally being strong after a lifetime of abuse. Later you'll realize that they have always been strong and possibly abusive, and they just *feel* like a victim in life. Even I have been hooked as a therapist and as a lawyer several times by borderline HCPs making statements like this.

Intense anger or fear regarding other people is another common thread in what borderline HCPs talk about—an example of unmanaged emotions. Be aware that what they say about other people may be the exact same words that they use against you someday. They have a tendency to idealize people—put them up on a pedestal—and then knock them down. If he or she says that they believe you are the best at something, don't reinforce that belief. Instead, emphasize how ordinary you are. Then consider backing off rather than getting closer.

**Emotions:** Borderline HCPs often inspire many intense emotions in the people they focus on. At first, the intensity is very positive. You may feel excited that someone likes you so strongly, without restraint, as a friend, employee, supervisor, neighbor, or romantic partner. It can be an exhilarating

feeling. But remember, just as with narcissistic HCPs, extreme charm, extreme attention, and extreme love and affection can be signs of potential trouble.

How can you tell the difference between love or regular friendship and someone with borderline HCP traits? Take your time. Spend time away from the person occasionally. See what happens when the person is angry with you. It's often not until you have a major conflict that you find out how intensely negative they can be.

In a romantic relationship, wait a year before making any major decisions together. You will usually see the difference between the potential for lasting love and an intense, but temporary borderline infatuation within twelve months.

Also, ask yourself if you are in denial of the negative behaviors you start to see. People often struggle to accept the negative behaviors because of the intense positive emotions an HCP inspires in them—whether it's a romantic partner, employee, boss (like Miranda Priestly), or a friend. This denial is one of the most common barriers to realizing the danger ahead with borderline HCPs. For example, yelling at you, taking your credit card, breaking something important to you, or hitting you may not fit into the wonderful vision you have for becoming close with this person. You need to stop and think to get perspective from time to time in any relationship, but particularly if you suspect you may be involved with a borderline HCP.

Common feelings when involved with borderline HCPs are:

- It's too intense.
- It's going too quickly.
- Feeling disrespected for your boundaries: ordinary ones that most people take for granted, and ones you have openly stated you need.
- Uncomfortable expectations of loyalty, such as: wanting you to always take their side in arguments with other people; requests that you stop seeing friends and family members they don't like; *etc.*

Last, see what other people think. Ask for honest feedback from people you trust: Is my neighbor really being irresponsible or dangerous? Is my new employee possibly taking advantage of me? Is my boss a jerk, or did he or she just have a bad day? Am I being wrong to want to go slow with my new exciting relationship?

**Behavior:** Years ago a friend told me about her second date with a man she liked. They were walking and discussing something. He suddenly reacted

negatively to something she said and lightly slapped her on the butt. She was surprised and said to him, “What was that about?” He said it was nothing. He otherwise seemed like a nice guy. He was very interested in her and they had a lot in common. But it bothered her that he had done that. It felt like a boundary violation. She didn’t know what else to say.

I told her that I agreed that it was a boundary violation. I asked her if 90 percent of men she knew would ever do that on a second date and she realized that they wouldn’t—and they hadn’t, in her prior experiences. I again agreed, because even in most domestic violence cases I have dealt with there were a few weeks or months before negative physical contact (assaultive behavior) started occurring. When contact like my friend experienced does occur—it’s an early warning sign. If 90 percent of men wouldn’t do that negative behavior, slight as it was, it might be an early warning sign of high-conflict behavior to come. There might be a pattern of physical abuse lying under the surface, which justifies and allows that type of behavior to happen so casually. After all, he quickly said it was nothing, rather than saying it was accidental or apologizing and feeling awkward that it happened. The fact that he wasn’t awkward about it at all suggested that this type of behavior was commonplace for him. Not a good sign. She stopped going out with him on her own volition.

I might add that what he said is a common dynamic with HCPs of all types: They engage in an aggressive act, then deny it was an aggressive act. That’s a danger sign right there.

## Tom and Kara

Earlier in this book we looked at Tom’s situation with Kara. Let’s look more closely, paying attention to our personality awareness skills.

### *WORDS? EMOTIONS? BEHAVIOR?*

*When they did the paperwork to get married, Tom was surprised to see that she was really thirty-five. “What’s that about?” he exclaimed. “Don’t worry about it,” she said. “All women do that, you know. Lie about their age.” Oh, Tom thought. What do I know? Anyway, she’s terrific!*

**Words:** Do these words concern you? If she would lie about her age after they decided to make the commitment of getting married, what else would she lie about? And she didn’t tell him—he discovered it!

Maybe this doesn't seem like a big deal, but combined with her pressure to get married so quickly, we're starting to see some warning signs of a high-conflict pattern. Without personality awareness skills, most people wouldn't see a *pattern*. They just see incidents in isolation. But using the WEB MethodSM, you know to look for the pattern and how. And you know one of the patterns is words that show a negative extreme behavior—something that 90 percent of people would never do—such as lying about her age when making the potentially lifetime commitment of marriage.

*After they were married, Kara was always in conflict with somebody. She spent a lot of time telling Tom how bad her various enemies were. Friends, family members, and people at work all deeply angered her one day—then, the next day, they were her dearest companions. A day later, they were her enemies again. Tom quickly grew frustrated with her complaining, only to see her make up and be buddies with the people she had hated a week earlier and had wanted him to hate, too.*

**Emotions:** Tom felt extremely positive about Kara at first, which blinded him to the increasingly strong warning signs that showed up after they married. Her frequent mood swings triggered increasingly upset emotions in Tom. He found himself swinging from feeling bad for her to feeling angry with her, to feeling helpless about her. If he had waited a year, his frustration with her mood swings and complaints about her many conflicts and complaints might have warned him to watch out.

*Tom fell head over heels for Kara. She was the life of the party and had a special knack for drawing him out of his shell. After a passionate courtship, they became engaged and married at her insistence—all within two months.*

**Behavior:** Does the pressure to get married within two months jump out at you? That's concerning behavior, because it doesn't leave enough time to *really* get to know each other's personality or personal history. That's risky behavior, although it's not uncommon. There are many stories of people who married quickly and went on to have successful thirty-, forty-, fifty-year, lifelong marriages. But then again, there may have been fewer personality disorders and high-conflict personalities thirty, forty, and fifty years ago, as suggested by the large NIH study that showed fewer such disorders in older age groups.

**Conclusion:** If Tom had developed personality awareness skills, he would have recognized Kara's mood swings and classic splitting pattern of a borderline personality—seeing some people as all bad and others as all good. By a year

after they met, there were plenty of warning signs of Kara being a borderline HCP. But by then Tom was already married, with a child.

## Avoiding Borderline HCPs

Since borderline HCPs often show their intensity fairly quickly, many people can tell right away to avoid getting too close to that person. Regardless, it helps to start all close relationships with some caution these days. Don't let yourself be pressured into doing things that don't feel comfortable. And don't try to calm their anxiety or intensity by "overcaring" for them: making promises to be their closest friend or saying that you will solve all their problems for them. (People often say that to borderline HCPs to calm them down, then they abandon them when they burn out.) Here's an example of how this kind of pressure might come up at work.

**George's story:** George had worked at his job for several years by the time Michael was hired. George was welcoming to him and they had lunch together on his first day. Michael suggested that they get together to see a ball game over the weekend. When the weekend came, Michael said they should get together for dinner before the game.

George enjoyed the dinner and the game, but felt that Michael was a little intense, sharing highly personal details about his two marriages and divorces, and continuing conflicts over his kids. When Michael suggested they do this again the next weekend, George felt somewhat uncomfortable but agreed, as he didn't want to hurt Michael's feelings. After the next weekend's dinner and game, George felt somewhat exhausted hearing about Michael's personal conflicts. So when Michael suggested they repeat the outing again the following weekend, George said he felt "uncomfortable spending so much time together" and suggested that they "take a break" for a few weekends. Michael seemed quite disappointed but didn't say much after that.

At work the following week, Michael was openly hostile toward George. Then one of George's coworkers came to George and said that he had just received a strange email from Michael. It was sent to everyone on the team, except George, and said what a jerk he was. It contained some blatant false statements and exaggerations about things they had discussed the prior weekends.

George chose to ignore this, until his supervisor called both Michael and George into his office. Michael blamed George, then George tried to defend

himself. The supervisor said he wanted any emails or public discussion of their “friendship” to cease in the office. George felt totally humiliated by what Michael had said. He felt that he had been dragged down to Michael’s level.

What could happen next depends on the office situation. In some cases, the potentially borderline HCP in Michael’s position just quits. In others, there is a slow simmer in the office, while everyone walks on eggshells. Sometimes, the person in George’s position reaches out for support from the coworkers he is closest to and starts to feel better regardless of Michael’s bad vibes. Sometimes, the manager talks with each one and figures out that Michael single-handedly created the problems, realizes that his behavior is a warning sign of more to come, and decides to terminate him during his probationary period.

**Analysis:** Sometimes, only one person is the problem. This is often true with any HCPs, including borderline HCPs. But many people don’t know the patterns of behavior to look out for and avoid. George, if he knew about borderline HCPs, could have avoided escalating the situation with Michael as soon as he felt uncomfortable about getting together again for the second weekend.

If he knew about borderline HCPs, he would have also avoided making his no so personal (“*uncomfortable spending so much time together*”). Instead, he could have said he was busy or had things he had to take care of the following weekend, which is usually true for most people nowadays. Whatever he said, avoiding making it personal is very important with borderline HCPs, who already take things personally that aren’t.

This example can apply in any situation, such as with a neighbor, friend, dating situation, *etc.* I’m not suggesting that you should be dishonest about not getting together again so soon, but shift the focus from a problem with the HCP to a natural obstacle of your own. Borderline HCPs (and most HCPs) become defensive when they are openly rejected. It’s better to back off slowly or to avoid getting involved with them too quickly in the first place. Pushing boundaries is a very common experience with borderline HCPs, so be prepared to disengage quickly but carefully if that seems to be happening from the start.

## Dealing with Borderline HCPs

If you are going to be in a continuous relationship with a borderline HCP, such as with a family member, you will need to put a lot of energy into connecting with him or her, and setting limits in ways that don’t make you a Target of Blame. We’ll return to the CARS Method<sup>SM</sup> to help you get started.

**Connecting:** Show empathy through your body language and by saying words that show you can understand their frustrations and hope that things work out for them. Since they often are talking about their conflicts with others and want you to agree with them, you can just matter-of-factly say: “That sounds so frustrating. Remember to choose your battles. Hopefully, it will get better with time.” That helps you avoid getting involved in their battles without agreeing or disagreeing with them.

**Analyzing:** You can help them look at the choices they need to make, and educate them about the consequences of their various options. (*“I know you’re frustrated right now and want to confront that person. But let’s look at the options you have and the possible benefits of each. You could accidentally make the situation worse with a confrontation. Sometimes it’s better just letting it go and telling yourself it doesn’t matter what that person thinks about you.”*)

**Responding:** Briefly and simply respond to any misinformation or hostility as soon as possible with accurate information, such as with a BIFF response. This can help a lot if emails are flying around in an office. For example, suppose you got an angry email like this:

*From Meg: Maria and Angela: You’re both delusional if you think the team is going to tolerate your delay in getting your report to us. If you make our project late we will never speak to you again and will do everything in our power to get you fired.*

*From Maria: Hi, Meg: We got your email and we share your concern about our team’s project deadline. Don’t worry, even though our part is delayed, it will be done by Friday—well before the overall project is due. We think it’s going to turn out very well.*

You can hear the difference in tone of these two emails. Meg may have a reputation for being hostile, so her email tone is just a way of life for her. This is common for borderline HCPs, with their underlying fear of abandonment (seriously overreacting to a delay in receiving a report they are relying on) and all-or-nothing thinking (*“never speak to you again,” “get you fired”*). Yes, a delay is a problem in workgroups. But these are extreme responses that 90 percent of people wouldn’t give.

**Setting limits:** With borderline HCPs, it helps to be clear about their expectations of your relationship, whether you are working together, dealing



with a family member, in a romantic relationship or otherwise. Setting clear boundaries is very important when it comes to things like: when you are generally available to talk and when you are not; what tasks you will or won't do for them; and what role you will or won't take in their conflicts with other people (of which there are usually many).

Being consistent is also important. Follow through if you say you will do something. And stick with a no answer, if you have given it before, rather than bending under pressure (which only invites more pressure in the future).

Stay calm and moderate in your contact with the person. Don't appear too close or too distant. Don't escalate your emotions as high as theirs when they are sad, afraid, or angry, even when their emotions are directed at you.

Communicate in a way that you would like them to mirror, rather than mirroring their emotional roller coasters. Remember that fear of abandonment generally lies under most of their emotions and behavior, so avoid threatening language that suggests that you are about to abandon them or language they might interpret as a threat to leave, such as: *"You're being stupid about this."* Or: *"If you keep this up, I'm not going to work with you anymore."* While these comments might seem understandable or minor in dealing with 90 percent of people, a borderline HCP hears the threat of an intense loss of support (*"you're being stupid"*) or intense rejection (*"not going to work with you"*) in these statements. While you might think that they could easily change their behavior so the person will keep working with them, all they hear is the rejection. If you're going to stop working with a borderline HCP, just do it (see next paragraph)—don't threaten to do it.

## Breaking Away from Borderline HCPs

If you do decide to end a relationship with a borderline HCP, it helps to do it in steps, if possible, to avoid triggering their fear of abandonment all at once. It's generally better to phase out the relationship or friendship, rather than slamming the door shut, so that the person can emotionally adjust. And do it with empathy, attention, and respect in the process: *"I'm going to be leaving this position or relationship. I know it may seem sudden, but I've been thinking about this for a while. I can discuss it with you and answer any questions about this, but I won't be changing my decision."* Or you can say that you're busy and won't be available for a while. Then you can slowly reduce your involvement with them, so it isn't one big jolt.

On the other hand, make sure that you don't go back and forth, or spend a lot of time justifying your cutting back the relationship. This intensifies the feelings of injury for them and makes it harder to move on from their sense of loss.

Don't be surprised if others encourage you to increase your commitment to the relationship, such as your family members, neighbors, or associates at work, who may just see the HCP's wonderful side and never see their intensity or mood swings—especially the raging side. This can make you feel very alone, especially if you start to see abusive behavior that no one else sees after you become their Target of Blame. Stick with your instincts and trust that most people will come around to your side.

Finally, don't expect the HCP to appreciate you and your past friendship or relationship while you are backing off from them. They may have to experience strong negative feelings toward you in order to move on. You can't (and shouldn't try to) talk them out of their upset feelings—on any subject at any time. Accept that this is how they feel.

However, if it becomes too dangerous to be around the person, or they continue to press the issue, just get out right away! Have a friend, relative, or lawyer be the contact person between you so that you can be safe, without the HCP knowing where you are and having direct contact with you.

## Some Final Words

As with narcissistic HCPs, don't ever tell a borderline HCP you think they are a high-conflict person or have a personality disorder. They will feel abandoned and it will trigger their most intense anger and aggressive (or passive-aggressive) behavior toward you.

Remember, you can easily become a Target of Blame at any time for any HCP, but especially for a borderline HCP. They are particularly focused on intense and unstable relationships, as well as splitting persons into "all-good" or "all-bad" categories. Even if you have a very positive relationship up until you begin to pull away, you can quickly become an all-bad person in their eyes. It's better to avoid this by keeping expectations low and setting limits from the start.

## Chapter 6

---

### The *Cruel, Con Artist* Type

ONE OF THE most charming—and therefore incredibly dangerous—high-conflict personality types is the sociopath. While typically thought of as a criminal personality, the majority of sociopaths are not in prison and you may run into them in everyday life. But their behavior is antisocial—against society’s standards of social behavior and laws—and can be extremely harmful.

The term *sociopath* is commonly associated with antisocial personality disorder, and the two are often considered equivalent terms. Antisocial personality disorder is the term used in the *DSM-5*. In many ways, antisocial HCPs are like three-year-olds. They want what they want and they want it now. If you stand in their way, they will push you aside, or destroy your reputation, or even kill you to get what they want. They lack remorse, and some enjoy hurting people. In this regard, they are different from the other personalities who will ruin your life, but don’t harm you on purpose. Antisocial HCPs are driven by a need for dominance, and may ruin your life just to give themselves a sense of control over someone.

For many decades, mental health researchers have identified antisocial personality disorder as present in about 3 to 4 percent of the population. The large NIH study mentioned in prior chapters determined that 3.6 percent of the population has this disorder.<sup>1</sup> That’s about thirteen million people in North America.

In terms of gender demographics, this personality trends more heavily male: 74 percent according to the large NIH study.<sup>2</sup> However, at 26 percent, antisocial women certainly have the potential to be active con artists, thieves, and murderers in our society as well. I consider most people with antisocial personality disorders to be HCPs, so don’t be fooled, charmed, or seduced too easily by either gender. Targeting people is what antisocial HCPs do. Many can

be very attractive, exciting, and charming. I have seen a lot of people get totally fooled by antisocial HCPs and then kick themselves after they have been conned.

While you may not initially be a target for their blame, they will easily get angry and blame you if you stand in the way of what they want. On the other hand, they might intensely blame you for something as a calculated distraction, drawing your attention to the conflict they've created while they rob you blind or otherwise take advantage of you.

## Antisocial 101

The *DSM-5* lists seven personality traits that are considered in diagnosing antisocial personality disorder. The following key characteristics make them likely to become HCPs:

- Routine violations of social rules, norms, and laws, without remorse.
- Deceitfulness, such as lying and conning others to get what they want.
- Drive to dominate others.

In sum, antisocial HCPs enjoy dominating and controlling others and will resist any situation in which they feel dominated themselves.

This dominating drive seems to be connected to some things that are biologically different in those with antisocial personality disorder. For example, their heart rates tend to slow down when they are in a fight or confrontation.<sup>3</sup> While most people's hearts speed up and beat rapidly in these situations, antisocials seem to enjoy the conflict, perhaps because they sense an opportunity to dominate the situation and the other people involved.

In general, they are more eager to enter a fight and less willing to back down, even when it means they might get hurt. Thus, they are risk-takers and seek excitement when other people may become increasingly cautious. As a result, many antisocial HCPs don't live as long as those who pay more attention to escaping high-risk situations. This may help explain why more than 6 percent of those in the eighteen to twenty-nine age group have this disorder, while only 0.6 percent of those sixty-five and older have it, as indicated in the large NIH study.<sup>4</sup>

As with all the other high-conflict personalities, antisocial HCPs sabotage themselves in their quest for dominance and frequently repeat antisocial,

criminal behavior. Many spend a majority of their lives behind bars, in prison systems that take away their control and dominance.

However, you can encounter many antisocial HCPs in everyday life. There are some antisocial HCPs in most occupations, especially in environments where they have the power to dominate other people. They may not be criminals, but they all engage in “antisocial” behavior, such as constant lying, taking risks (speeding, lying on their taxes, cutting corners on a business), and conning people (marrying several wives at the same time, running Internet scams). Many just haven’t been caught—at least not yet.

Surprisingly, antisocial personality types can be the most charming people in the world. In fact, I now believe this is one of the most common—and earliest—warning signs. They often hook people by telling sad, dramatic stories of how they have been victimized by others or by their life circumstances. They often follow that with a sincere request for a helping hand. While this is typically financial, it may also be giving them an entry into a relationship with someone else, such as in business or in a community or someone they want to date. You may just be a tool to help them get what they want.

An antisocial HCP will talk fast and lie to your face so convincingly that you will second-guess your own instincts. That is why many could be called con artists. They will take you into their confidence so that you trust what they say more than what you think and feel yourself. If you have a lot of self-doubt in general, or are going through a particularly vulnerable period in your life, you need to be especially careful that such people do not take advantage of you.

Because antisocials often lure people in with feigned vulnerability, people become entangled with them before they realize it. But once the antisocial HCP gets what they want, he or she may disappear in search of their next unsuspecting victim.

## Two Flavors of Antisocial HCPs

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, the term *sociopath* is commonly associated with antisocial personality disorder, and the two are often considered equivalent terms. However, those who study this disorder believe that some sociopaths may have empathy or remorse for those inside their own social group, just not toward society at large. Therefore, the prevalence of sociopaths may be larger than those with antisocial personality disorder, who lack empathy and

remorse for anyone.<sup>5</sup> For the general purpose of teaching you to protect yourself, I am treating *sociopath* and *antisocial personality disorder* as equivalent terms in this book.

Another term, *psychopath*, is also commonly used to refer to antisocial behaviors. Psychopathy has its own list of characteristics, but people with this disorder generally fit under the umbrella of antisocial personality disorder as well. However, many mental health professionals and law enforcement professionals consider psychopaths to present the more extreme end of antisocial behavior. This tends to include an extra willingness for (or enjoyment of) hurting people, heightened ability to manipulate people, and no feelings of remorse. Many serial killers are psychopaths, but other psychopaths may not be violent, just extremely manipulative and cruel. Psychopaths are approximately one-quarter of antisocials. This means they are approximately 1 percent of the North American population, which is about 3.6 million people.

For practical purposes, I find it helpful to think of antisocial HCPs in two categories, although these are not official categories, to my knowledge:

- Sociopaths who are *also psychopaths*: Potentially *very cruel* people who will ruin your life for the sheer pleasure of it and will con others to accomplish their cruelty.
- Sociopaths who are *not psychopaths*: Generally *con artists* who want something and don't care if you get hurt if you're in the way. Their cruelty may be secondary.

Essentially, the difference is their motive: Is their purpose to dominate you by hurting you? Or do they just not care if they hurt you on the way to another goal? In general, you don't need to distinguish between these two if your goal is to stay safe. But you should know that both exist, so that hints of either one in someone you meet will raise red flags for you. As a society, we have been made very aware of the cruel types, because they are the stuff of detective novels, TV shows, and dramatic movies. However, you are probably not sufficiently aware of the con artist types and the warning signs that you're dealing with one.

Many sociopaths have very normal lives on the surface, but it's a con. You might not discover their deception for a long time—if ever. You may be business partners with one, be married to one, or have a very pleasant neighbor who is one.

Let's look at the dynamics of two very different, well-known cases that both

show sociopathic or antisocial HCP characteristics.

## Ted Bundy

Bundy was a serial killer in the 1970s and 1980s. Altogether, he killed at least thirty-six young women and girls, according to FBI estimates, or 136, according to his boasts. Each of the women wore her hair in a similar way, and all were nice people who were willing to help a stranger in distress. Bundy used a con artist method to trick his victims that worked over and over again: He would put his arm or leg in a cast and carry some books across a university campus (he had been a law student). Then he would approach a young woman sitting alone, spill his books near her, and ask for help carrying them to his car. Once she was leaning into the open car door, he would shove her in and drive off. For his murders, which included girls as young as twelve years old, Bundy was executed in 1989.<sup>6</sup>

His con was very clever. It played on exactly the kind of normal human response we've discussed throughout this book. We generally trust strangers, especially strangers in need who look like us or look unthreatening to us. I might also mention that antisocials can con you very quickly, like stealing your wallet while they get you to look away at something.

Like Bundy's victims, you usually don't have time to think about the possibility that a situation like this might be a con because of the apparent urgency and innocence of the situation. And we don't generally have gut feelings that warn us of danger when there is a stranger in need in a very brief encounter.

In fact, Ann Rule, who accidentally met Bundy when they both worked on a crisis hotline, said of him years later: "Ted, I believe, was a sadistic sociopath who took pleasure from another human's pain and the control he had over his victims . . ." Her book, *The Stranger Beside Me*, became a bestseller because of her personal knowledge of him as well as her thorough reporting. Few probably knew him as well as she did. Yet she never felt threatened by him during their several years of friendship until she found out he was a serial killer.

Bundy had a very chaotic early childhood. He was considered an "illegitimate" child, with an unidentified father. His first three months were spent at a home for unwed mothers, while his mother went home to her parents to decide what to do with him. When she did bring him home, he lived with her

and her parents, which included his grandfather who apparently had a volatile temper and terrorized his family, as well as being sadistic with animals.

Given this background, it's hard to say whether he was more likely genetically antisocial, already wired to engage in extreme psychopathic behavior, or whether his early childhood taught him to lack a conscience and be drawn to a life of violence. A psychopathic personality may exist genetically from birth, but how it becomes expressed in childhood and adolescent development is often influenced by environment. Even though psychopaths are only about 1 percent of the population, they can do widespread harm, particularly if their worst tendencies are reinforced from a young age.

## Bernie Madoff

Bernie Madoff ran a stock investment company for about thirty years, until 2008, when he told his family and company that it was all a fraud. A Ponzi scheme. He had taken billions of dollars from people under the guise of investing it in the stock market and instead spent the money on a lavish lifestyle. His wife, his grown children (who worked at the company), his brother, and numerous friends were part of the business and benefitted greatly from his wealth. He was conning everyone he knew, as well as Wall Street, the nation, and all his investors. These included charities, several pension funds, and private individuals who lost their life savings in the aftermath.<sup>7</sup>

Is he a psychopath like Ted Bundy? Probably not. After he was arrested, he said that he had tried to stop himself many times (if you believe him), but ultimately he just kept going with his scheme. There was no evidence that he intended to be cruel. But the effect of his actions was in fact terribly cruel.

But was he a sociopath? Many people say he was. Madoff seems like an example of a sociopath who was *not a psychopath*. Unlike Bundy, he seems like the type of person who didn't really want to hurt anyone and who may have even felt some remorse, but just couldn't stop his antisocial behavior. Two years after his disclosure and arrest, one of his sons committed suicide.<sup>8</sup> Then, his wife cut him off and apparently hasn't spoken to him ever since.<sup>9</sup>

One question people often ask about this case is whether his family members knew that it was a Ponzi scheme. Were they in on it with him? They have strongly denied it, and I think it's possible that they did not know. As discussed earlier in this chapter, sociopaths have dishonest relationships to get what they



want. If Madoff had a narrow, repeating pattern of conning people, it is very possible that he was conning everyone around him, including family members.

Of course, there were select employees who did know about the scheme, because Madoff had to have help to carry it off. They may have also had antisocial personalities themselves, and there are many criminal schemes that involve several sociopaths working together (as demonstrated in many fact-based heist movies and TV shows). But there are also some people who are very codependent and want to please and be close to a dynamic and charming sociopath, even if it means engaging in high-risk illegal behavior. Both possibilities are common when there is an antisocial person promoting a large con. Of course, money, power, and promises of trips to exotic places may be motivations as well. But often they aren't as important as the excitement of being around an extremely powerful sociopathic personality on a regular basis.

I have seen smaller versions of this story play out when helping women get divorced from antisocial men. They never had a clue until some hidden life behavior was exposed or fishy finances came out during the divorce. These are marriages of several years, including ones with husbands who were pretending to go to work every day while actually they were running a con or stealing from their wives' family businesses. These con artists play everyone in their lives and will continue to do so, even though it often catches up with them, as it did for Bernie Madoff.

## Spotting Antisocial HCPs

Antisocial HCPs exist in every occupation, community, and culture, but they are especially attracted to professions where they are able to dominate and manipulate others, such as politics, policing, law, sales, and business. Many of them work for themselves, which allows them to get away with more antisocial behavior.

However, there are few obvious signs, as antisocial HCPs invest a lot of energy in selecting their Targets and disguising their intentions. They prey on the innocent and vulnerable in particular—people who are inclined to be helpful and trusting. Therefore, rather than just looking for warning signs of bad behavior, it helps to look for warning signs of excessively good behavior (it'll seem too good to be true) and signs of someone needing help who could be manipulating you, like Ted Bundy did. Watch out for people who want you to be excessively helpful to them, without you knowing them well or at all.

Of course, none of this means that you shouldn't help a stranger in need but rather that you should be alert to the possibility of a con or becoming isolated and vulnerable to someone when you are helping them. It feels terrible to suggest that you should be wary in general, but nowadays such alertness may protect you from becoming someone's Target. Before you agree to help a stranger in a way that puts you in a vulnerable position, apply the WEB Methodsm.

**Words:** For starters, never believe anyone 100 percent. Check things out first, especially things they say that sound strange or extreme. Avoid believing people who say "trust me" a lot.

Be wary of seductive words, which tell you how wonderful you are or how wonderful they are. One person I've worked with started dating a man who presented himself as the best-ever father, best-ever friend to those in need, and so forth, so much so that she started calling him "Mr. Wonderful." Of course, he turned out to be highly manipulative, dishonest, and headed for financial ruin. Mr. Wonderful has become a warning sign: too good to be true.

Be wary of victim stories. Many ordinary people are true victims and appropriately need help. But one of the most effective manipulations by antisocial HCPs is the con that they have been victims of something big or small (like Bundy's broken leg) and need your help urgently. Watch out for words of desperation that play too strongly on your heartstrings. (*"You're the only one who truly understands me—you've got to help me."* *"I'm in such danger that you've got to help me, and you can't tell anyone where you're going."*) Check things out before you commit your resources or put yourself at risk to help someone else.

Beware of words that are extremely negative about you. Harsh, cruel words are designed to get you to do some task for the person, out of guilt or shame. (*"If you were smarter, you could deal with this."* *"What are you so afraid of?"* *"You'll never amount to anything."* *"No one else will ever want you."*)

Beware of inconsistent stories. Antisocial HCPs routinely lie—so routinely that you might miss the inconsistencies or doubt yourself. It is not unusual for them to totally contradict themselves from one day to the next, or in the middle of telling a story that is totally made up. You might catch them in a contradiction and confront them, only to hear a reasonable-sounding explanation in response. When they hear this, most people assume they're simply misremembering or misheard. This is how they con you, by getting you to doubt yourself and to believe their version of events over your own.

Beware of stories about top secret activities. Antisocials often tell others that they work for the FBI, CIA, NSA, or other powerful government agencies. They say they are (or have been) involved in powerful high-level projects that require them to disappear from your life for periods of time that they won't be able to talk about with you.

This may be when they're engaged in a criminal activity, or spending time with their other family that you don't know about. Being so secretive gives them complete freedom in their lives, while keeping their partners or associates strung along and still filling their needs financially, professionally, sexually, or otherwise. And telling you they're working for the most powerful agencies keeps those around them from asking any questions while at the same time sounding very impressive.

**Emotions:** More than anything else, pay attention to your gut feelings. This doesn't mean that they are always correct, but check them out. Here are some common emotions you may feel with antisocial HCPs:

- I feel extremely excited with this new person in my life, because he/she has said we are going to be super-wealthy, travel to exotic places, meet high-level people, *etc.*
- I feel scared, but there's no reason for it, so I must be overreacting.
- I feel stupid and ashamed of myself for doubting this person.
- I feel isolated with the information he/she gave me. It's very powerful, but I'm not allowed to talk to anyone about it.
- I'm feeling isolated from my friends, family, and usual support systems; but he/she said it would only be temporary.
- I feel suspicious of this person's excuses for repeated absences.
- I feel like he/she is a predator and I am the prey, but I don't know why.

As with the other personalities, watch out for extremes of emotion. Most healthy people trigger positive emotions, but not unusual or frequent extremes. These may be warning signs. Always check what you're feeling with someone else who can give you some perspective.

**Behavior:** Antisocial HCPs will likely have a long history of extreme behavior. If you are having gut feelings of doubt about the person, google them or look for them in their local court records. Many of them have a criminal history they haven't revealed to you. Even if they don't, they may have a history of civil legal disputes.

Most people will do everything they can to avoid going to court, but antisocials often enjoy bringing court actions on others because the process itself gives them a chance to make their victims feel dominated. It's also a setting where they can publicly blame their Targets for anything. On the other hand, they often get sued because of their financial irresponsibility, their reckless behavior, their threatening remarks, their occasional violence, and their violation of promises and contracts.

Ninety percent of people don't have a history of the kinds of dominating and deceitful behavior that an antisocial HCP will have. It is such a large part of their personalities and lives that you may be able to find something even with some light research. For example, many antisocials have a history of unpaid parking tickets and traffic tickets. As I have seen in several legal cases, they seem to enjoy breaking rules that they can get away with. It's not that these tickets are inconsequential—it's that they can sneak by without getting caught (or so they think). It's the excitement of the risk-taking that attracts them to this type of on-the-edge behavior. It's such a minor legal violation that they think they can escape consequences. That's exactly the kind of sloppy thinking that creates a track record you may be able to find.

Is the person asking you to put yourself—or your money or reputation or something else—in a dangerous position by joining them in a scheme, whether it's a business deal, long romantic trip, or otherwise?

Does the person accept you saying no to any of their requests or demands?

Do they want you to go out on a limb for them, even though you hardly know them, lending them money, making calls for them, doing errands for them? Ninety percent of people would respect your desire to set boundaries and take time getting to know someone before extending your generosity.

Beware of being told to cut off your friends and family, for any reason. This is another warning sign. Don't allow your life to revolve around just one person. Ninety percent of people would want you to have friends and to spend time with family members.

At work, be suspicious of repeatedly unexplained absences or unrealistic excuses for failing to show up and complete tasks. Notice if inventory is disappearing. Have systems in place so that an antisocial HCP can't get away with having secrets or stealing money, resources, or organizational information. Take some time before giving sensitive information or sensitive access to new employees, since it can take up to a year for their high-conflict behavior to reveal itself.

## Avoiding Antisocial HCPs

Antisocials in particular are master manipulators, so be prepared and confident in saying no to those who make you feel uncomfortable in the ways previously detailed, and especially if they seem to be promising you the world.

Watch out for being “overly helpful.” Don’t allow yourself to get tricked into doing tasks, lending money, giving up personal information, and doing other things for someone you do not know very well. In fact, get comfortable with setting reasonable boundaries, even with people you have known a long time—you may not know their full story. If your gut feeling is that something doesn’t feel right with someone, always check it out.

Of course, I’m not trying to make you feel paranoid about everyone around you. Antisocial HCPs are slightly less than 4 percent of the general population. That’s about one out of every twenty-five people. But then again, you probably know a lot more than twenty-five people.

## The Reformed Prisoner

Remember the story from the beginning of this book about the reformed prisoner? Let’s look more closely in terms of your personality awareness skills.

### *WORDS? EMOTIONS? BEHAVIOR?*

*A journalist eventually discovered that the dramatic pictures of the house fire were completely unrelated to Paul or anyone he knew. Some members refused to believe it and left the church. It was a long time before the congregation healed.*

**Words:** We don’t know what words were used when Paul asked for money. Apparently he persuaded half the congregation to believe him, but not the other half. Often, the supporters of an HCP are *emotionally* persuaded, while the critics are *logically* skeptical.

*When Paul was nineteen, he held up a convenience store and ran off with \$350. Police arrested him three days later. After being convicted of armed robbery, he spent several years in jail but turned his life around, earning his GED and tutoring some of the other inmates.*

*When he got out, he joined a church, whose members welcomed him. He did many good deeds for his fellow church members.*

**Behavior:** Paul had held up a store with a gun when he was nineteen. Someone could have gotten killed. Would 90 percent of people ever do that? What if they were pressured to do it? Young and immature? No! Ninety percent of people never engage in such high-risk behavior. True, he was young and possibly could have changed since then. But this was extremely antisocial behavior, so the risk of an antisocial personality pattern is already high.

*However, it wasn't long before he started telling members that he needed donations for a faraway cousin whose house had been destroyed in a fire. He shared pictures of the burning home with everyone he approached for a donation.*

*Soon the congregation became intensely split between those who believed Paul and defended him, and those who thought he had returned to his former ways and was conning them all. A few members yelled at one another at a meeting, and some threatened to quit the church if he was told to leave—which he eventually was.*

**Emotions:** My guess is that many of the church members felt uncomfortable when Paul asked them to donate to him for rebuilding his relative's house. After all, his criminal history was shared when he joined the church.

Also, the church members angrily “split” over this issue. When you see such intense emotional splitting happening in an organization, it is often a sign that there's a high-conflict person in the mix. Emotions are contagious, and high-conflict emotions are highly contagious.

**Conclusion:** With strong personality awareness skills, you would probably be on guard already because of Paul's background of extreme behavior. Most organizations would probably not want to take the risks involved and would not invite him into their lives.

But some organizations, like churches, have a mission to welcome those with undesirable histories. Some employers specifically hire former prisoners, but they have specific rules and procedures to head off possible problems before they start.

Let's look at some of these general principles for managing an antisocial HCP and how the church might have used them to more successfully deal with Paul.

## Dealing with Antisocial HCPs

As with the other personalities, when you realize you are dealing with an antisocial HCP, use the four principles of the CARS MethodSM.

First, **connect** with empathy, attention, and respect. But don't put a lot of energy into the empathy and attention parts with antisocials. They will try to use your empathy and attention to manipulate you into doing things for them. Instead, emphasize respect: for something positive that they have done; your desire to treat them with respect; your expectation that they will treat you with respect. But don't overdo this, either, because they will feel tempted to find a way to manipulate and challenge you. Just be matter-of-fact in your statements of respect and move on to analyzing the choices they need to make now.

With Paul, the church leaders and members could welcome him but avoid overempathizing with his unfortunate past and instead focus on respecting his efforts to improve himself. Too much empathy with an antisocial's problems can feed their manipulative tendencies. Pay more attention to their positive actions instead.

**Analyzing** options should be emphasized. Tell the person that they have a choice and emphasize that it's up to them to decide which one to make, even when the options don't seem great. *"You may not realize it, but if you do that you'll probably go to jail. Of course, it's your choice. It's up to you."*

With Paul, the church leaders could have told him that his membership was conditional for the first year so that he should choose to avoid doing anything that would raise suspicions of a relapse into antisocial behavior. This might include not telling dramatic "war stories" about prison life; not asking members for favors, for money, etc.; and checking in with a specific mentor at the church once a week. If he failed to fulfill any of these requirements, he would be asked to leave the congregation: *"It's up to you."* Of course, you might wonder if he would just wait out the year and then engage in antisocial behavior. Generally, antisocials are too impatient to wait that long and will move on to another group if they want to run a con.

**Respond** to misinformation and manipulation briefly and with accurate information. In fact, you should expect lies and manipulation and prepare some responses in advance if you can anticipate what the person might say. But don't

waste time trying to bring the antisocial HCP around to your side. Antisocial HCPs are much better at conning others and adept at not being persuaded themselves. Be on guard for endless excuses, charming statements, and helpless victim statements.

With Paul, he might have said that asking members for donations was not a problem, because the money was for his faraway cousin. But a church leader should give him a BIFF response. Assuming they set up the checkin system described, it could be something like this: *“I can see how you might look at it that way, but it fits into the category of avoiding all things that even look suspicious. So don’t do that. We want to help you succeed here.”* Brief, informative, friendly, firm.

Lastly, **setting limits** is usually the most important part with antisocial HCPs. Be prepared and be firm when bringing these up, as they will try to talk you out of any limits you try to impose and shift the focus onto other people’s behavior—including your own. (Remember that all HCPs do this, as they are preoccupied with blaming others. But antisocial HCPs do it with far more intensity and extreme lies, because of their lack of remorse.)

Be fairly brief. For example: *“If you don’t follow through, then I will have to [fire, divorce, sue, etc.] you. I hope that won’t be necessary. It’s up to you.”* And leave it at that. Remember to use policies and procedures as the basis for your limit setting, so it doesn’t feel personal or up for negotiation with you. *“It’s just rules we all have to follow.”*

Usually antisocial HCPs have negative advocates (family, friends, and professionals) who will defend them and try to make it seem that you are treating them unfairly or that *you* are acting badly and saying terribly inappropriate things about a “wonderful” person. So don’t go it alone when setting limits—employ outside rules, superiors, and trusted friends to support your stance.

This may be the hardest personality to enforce boundaries with, and people often need professional help in setting limits with antisocial HCPs. Consult with a lawyer or expert on the issues you are facing. Since much of their behavior is often on the edge of illegal, find out what your legal options are as an employer, partner, neighbor, and so forth. The police or another authority figure may need to be involved.

In terms of setting limits with Paul, the church leaders should have made their expectations and boundaries clear from the start, including what the consequences were for Paul if he violated them. We have already seen what that could look like under “analyzing” and “responding.” Paul should also be told



about the positive and negative consequences of following or violating these boundaries and expectations, and the church community should be told who to contact if they have any concerns. Then the church and members of the congregation need to be ready to follow through.

If the church employed a CARS approach from the start, Paul might have been able to succeed, and the congregation would not have become split.

## Breaking Away from Antisocial HCPs

After reading this chapter, you may be convinced that you should break away from an antisocial HCP rather than try to keep dealing with one. I would agree with you, but you need to do it carefully. Antisocial HCPs don't like to be dominated or humiliated by anyone, and they often interpret rejection this way. They have the potential to be very dangerous if they lash out in response to your rejection.

Depending on your situation, you may want to ease them out of your life step-by-step (such as in a friend or family relationship), or do it suddenly with strong backup (such as when firing an employee or quitting a job). What's important is to follow through and stand your ground. If you waver, an antisocial HCP might easily talk you out of it and then punish you for your attempt to break away later.

Some suggestions to consider before getting out of the relationship, depending on your situation:

- Prepare yourself with information to support your position, get consultation and support from friends or a therapist.
- Practice what you'll say, and build your confidence so you can follow through.
- Have a safety plan, whether it is for physical safety, emotional safety, and/or to preserve your reputation.
- Consider having someone else's assistance in easing you out of the relationship (such as a counselor) or helping you suddenly end it (such as a security guard).
- Realize that there are no words you can say to make the person feel okay. Do what you need to do, keeping your safety plan in mind.

- Anticipate how the person will respond. What's the worst thing they have done in the past? This may be their pattern under stress. Hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

## Some Final Words

There is a wide range of antisocial HCPs, but remember that conning is always a part of their tactics, with some also being extremely cruel. They can be some of the most charming, attractive, and intelligent people you will ever know. What sets them apart from other people, including most other people with high-conflict personalities, is their willingness for (and potential enjoyment of) ruining someone else's life. You will be conned. We have all been conned. Unless you're prepared with a strong method of managing them, it's best to spot them quickly and do your best to avoid them and protect yourself from their manipulations in the first place.

## Chapter 7

---

### The *Highly Suspicious* Type

THIS TYPE OF HIGH-CONFLICT personality is also known as a paranoid personality. You might think that people with paranoid traits would avoid conflicts and avoid other people, but a small percentage are also HCPs. The underlying fears for paranoid HCPs are betrayal, deception, or conspiracies against them by those around them or authority figures—they harm others because they think that others (their Targets of Blame) are trying to harm them.

The major NIH study on personality disorders found that about 4.4 percent of the United States population has this disorder—about 16 million people in North America.<sup>1</sup> While this is higher than the percentage of those with antisocial personality disorder (3.6 percent), I believe that a lot fewer of those with paranoid personality disorder are also high-conflict people. Most appear less confident about engaging those around them, though a minority will do so.

The majority of those with this personality disorder are women (57 percent according to the large NIH study), but men with paranoid personality disorder (43 percent) may be more likely to have Targets of Blame, based on my experience and the far larger number of men with this disorder showing up in court of appeals cases nationwide. Their Targets of Blame are generally large institutions, such as their employers, government agencies, or the police. However, they often target the individuals they deal with in these large institutions very personally.

This personality type is inclined to verbally attack first. They may spread rumors, sue their employers for “ruining” their careers, or accuse government agencies of ruining their lives. Yes, they ruin other people’s lives because they are suspicious that others are ruining theirs. Of course, their suspicions are usually wrong, and other people suffer because of it. You can’t talk a paranoid

HCP out of their suspicions. If you try, you will become one of the people they fear because you don't agree with them.

## Paranoid Personality 101

While most people with paranoid personality disorder may be highly suspicious of those around them, they won't bother you. It's the people with paranoid personality disorder who are also HCPs who may ruin your life, because they attach their fears to a Target of Blame.

In addition to the four primary characteristics of being a high-conflict person, paranoid HCPs have up to seven traits of a paranoid personality disorder, as listed in the *DSM-5*. The key characteristics I believe lead some of them to be paranoid HCPs are:

- Suspicion that others are out to harm him or her, when they are not.
- Bearing grudges for minor or nonexistent reasons.
- Fear that others (individually or as a group) are conspiring against them or criticizing their reputation, and overreacting with anger or a counterattack.

Highly suspicious HCPs expect conspiracies everywhere. They fear that the people at work are whispering about them, trying to block their careers, or otherwise plotting to harm them. They fear their neighbors, the neighbors' children, or the police, or that powerful government agencies will intrude into their lives. If you are in a romantic relationship, they may suspect that you are having affairs, hiding money, or lying to them about something. Many paranoid HCPs feel much more comfortable targeting people on the Internet, where they can be anonymous. They'll also often involve other people or the legal system in their conflicts as a powerful way to "fight back" against their Targets of Blame.

In fact, you may first recognize a paranoid person when they try to recruit you as their negative advocate to help them in their battle against someone else or a group they believe is conspiring against them. At some point, you may realize that there is no conspiracy against the paranoid person and you may stop helping them. At this point, they believe that you have turned against them and you become part of their conspiracy theory—as well as their next Target of Blame.

Sometimes it helps to be a little paranoid, which can make you more cautious and possibly avoid getting into troublesome situations, including with HCPs. It's when paranoia becomes an ongoing dysfunctional pattern of behavior that it can become part of a personality disorder. The irony of this disorder is that you can't tell someone they are being unnecessarily paranoid, or they will think that you are part of the problem—one of the people they can't trust.

## Two Flavors of Paranoid HCPs

There seem to be two general types of people with paranoid personality disorder:

1. Those with only paranoid personality disorder.
2. Those with paranoid personality disorder and another mental disorder that includes paranoid thinking.

Paranoia (excessive fear or suspicion) is associated with several mental health problems besides paranoid personality disorder. It can present in depression or bipolar disorder, when the person is already interpreting things much more negatively than they actually are. For most people with depression, this paranoia is a passing phase and tends to lift when their depression lifts. For those with bipolar disorder, these negative thoughts may be turned around with medication.

More extreme paranoia can be part of schizophrenia, which causes the person to be totally out of touch with reality, hearing voices (auditory hallucinations) or seeing people who aren't really there (delusions). Of course, people with schizophrenia are also helped by modern medications so that many of them can live mostly normal lives.

My experience and observations are that people with only these other mental health problems (depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, etc.) generally do not focus on Targets of Blame. Instead, they become upset with themselves more than anyone else. However, if they fall into the second category and also have paranoid personality disorder, they are more likely to target the people around them, which could be anyone, as the following examples will show. Their personality disorders amplify their paranoid thoughts, which grow into real-life conflicts with those around them.

Let's look at two examples of paranoid personality disorder. These cases aren't so clear-cut, and different mental health professionals came to different

conclusions about the diagnosis in the first place. But both cases exhibit extreme paranoid thinking.

## The Neighbor

This comes directly from a court case from many years ago. This case illustrates how a paranoid HCP might imagine that he is in danger but then actually becomes dangerous himself:

*[Albert] Lassiter served as a deputy marshal in the USMS [United States Marshals Service] from 1970 until his termination in 1992 on the grounds that he was medically unfit to perform his duties. In his final, written performance appraisal, Lassiter's supervisors rated him as either excellent or outstanding in the discharge of his duties.*

*The sequence of events that eventually led to Lassiter's termination began in late 1990. Lassiter began to suspect that his elderly neighbor, her grandson, and other, unidentified individuals were conspiring to burglarize his home. Lassiter based his suspicion on a number of occurrences, including, for example, his observation of various trucks and cars slowing down as they passed his house[,] and his receipt of hang-up phone calls that Lassiter traced to relatives of his neighbor through his caller-identification system.*

*Lassiter contacted several officers of the Chesterfield County Police Department (CCPD) and expressed his concerns. In one conversation, a CCPD officer warned Lassiter that he could not shoot the burglars; Lassiter responded that if he could not, the CCPD should "have a homicide unit standing by." After an investigation into Lassiter's concerns, the CCPD concluded that no nefarious plot existed.*

*Lassiter remained convinced that he was the target of a putative conspiracy. To foil the alleged burglary ring, Lassiter pretended that he was away for the Christmas holidays. When he returned from work, Lassiter parked his car away from his home and entered his house through the side door. To simulate his absence, Lassiter did not turn on any lights, answer the phone, pick up his mail, wash dishes, cook food in the oven, or flush the toilets. In preparation for the intruders, Lassiter wore his firearm in its holster, donned a bulletproof vest, placed duct tape on all the*

numbers on his phone except nine and one so he could call the police in the dark if required, and remained in contact with the CCPD on another phone. Lassiter notified the police dispatchers that he would be armed with a double-barrel shotgun and a .45 caliber automatic pistol, and warned them that the only way the burglars would remove his United States Marshal's arm band would be if he were dead.

To ensure he would be alert when the burglars made their move, Lassiter slept by day and remained awake all night. On the afternoon of December 23, Lassiter refused to answer his door when a CCPD officer arrived to investigate a neighbor's complaint that Lassiter was armed and threatening to kill people. Later, in the early-morning hours of December 24, the CCPD responded to another telephone call from Lassiter. When the officers arrived, they found Lassiter armed with an automatic weapon, two magazine rounds, a night-vision scope, and his bulletproof vest. After observing the unwashed dishes, the unflushed toilets, and the firearms, the officers became concerned that Lassiter was heavily armed and acting in an increasingly agitated manner. The officers departed but returned after obtaining a Temporary Detention Order directing that Lassiter be committed to Charter Westbrook Hospital for psychiatric evaluation. During his approximately three-week commitment, Lassiter continued to believe the conspiracy existed and "cheeked" some of the medication provided to him because he did not trust the hospital personnel assigned to care for him. Eventually, Lassiter concluded that in addition to his neighbors, the doctors, staff, and his roommate at the hospital, members of the CCPD, and his pharmacist were all involved in the conspiracy against him.

Two weeks after his discharge from Charter Westbrook, the USMS arranged to have Dr. Thomas Mathews examine Lassiter. Dr. Mathews diagnosed Lassiter as suffering from delusional (paranoid) disorder and opined that while Lassiter was not precluded from general employment with the USMS, he should be deprived of his weapon and relieved of any duties that would necessitate his carrying a weapon. After officials from the USMS explained to Dr. Mathews that it would be impossible to serve as a deputy marshal without carrying a gun, Dr. Mathews recommended that Lassiter be declared medically unfit for duty.

After receiving the results of Dr. Mathews's examination, Lassiter enlisted the services of three other psychiatrists to evaluate his condition.

*First, Dr. Melvin Stern diagnosed Lassiter as suffering from paranoid personality disorder, but opined that Lassiter was not presently dangerous and “recommended that he be allowed to return to work[,] including having the right to bear arms in the same capacity of Deputy US Marshal that he had prior to his being hospitalized.” Second, Dr. Juliann Hanback also opined that Lassiter had paranoid personality disorder, but recommended that Lassiter obtain psychiatric treatment or regular psychiatric assessments before regaining the right to own and carry firearms. Third, Dr. Paul Travis recommended that Lassiter be evaluated by a specialist in paranoid disorders.*

*After careful consideration of the reports of the examining psychiatrists and review of the events of late 1990, officials at the USMS decided to relieve Lassiter of his duties as a deputy marshal in May 1992. In an effort to accommodate Lassiter, the USMS attempted to place Lassiter in an administrative position in which he would not have to carry a firearm. However, because the search for a vacant position within Lassiter’s commuting area was fruitless, the USMS terminated Lassiter’s employment.<sup>2</sup>*

Lassiter’s case is one in which an HCP may have just had a paranoid personality disorder, but possibly another mental health problem as well: delusional (paranoid) disorder. This is less severe than schizophrenia, but can seriously influence someone’s thinking. This means that Lassiter could have appeared normal for months or years before the incident at his home. He had a long history of fairly stable employment, which is much less likely when someone also has a psychotic disorder like schizophrenia (hearing voices and/or having delusions). In other words, if you just met or worked with Lassiter, you might not even know that he had any personality problem.

But would you want Lassiter to be carrying a firearm? You can tell from this case that the experts often disagree about how serious a paranoid condition is. Two of the experts evaluated him as having a paranoid personality disorder, but one said it’s okay for him to carry a weapon because he’s “not presently dangerous.” The problem is that personality disorders are long-term, narrow patterns of behavior, so that over time the extreme behavior will repeat itself, even if there is a calm period in between extreme episodes.

For practical purposes, it’s safer to assume that the extreme behavior will repeat itself in the future, unless the person undergoes an extreme amount of



counseling to change this way of thinking, feeling, and behavior. Remember, medications don't cure personality disorders, although they can help manage other problems (such as depression or anxiety) for someone who has one.

If you are aware of someone who seems to have active Targets of Blame (such as someone convinced that an elderly neighbor and her family is planning to burglarize his house), that would be a person to avoid.

One of the striking things about examples like this is how the personality problem created new problems for the person—in this case, being fired. You can see that Lassiter only harmed himself by believing his negative thoughts. Because of his personality disorder, he was incapable of the self-awareness necessary to recognize that he created these problems, not his Targets of Blame.

You can also see in this example how dangerous a person can become when he has irrational fears that other people are out to get him. Imagine if his neighbor stopped by to borrow a cup of sugar or a wrench.

Of course, this is an extreme example. But with approximately sixteen million people with this personality disorder in North America, there may be people overreacting to their paranoid beliefs in a neighborhood near you. I'm not trying to make you paranoid yourself; I just want you to be aware and informed of the patterns enough to avoid or deal with them carefully.

## The Coworker

Remember the example of Joe and Monica earlier in this book. There were less severe signs of paranoia than in the Lassiter case, but enough to cause significant trouble for those involved.

*One day, after Monica had been working for Joe for about two months, she complained to him that one of the other team members was harassing her. He was making comments about how she dressed and sexually suggestive remarks to her. Joe called the team member, Charles, into his office and asked what was going on.*

*“Nothing's going on!” Charles said angrily. “I barely ever talk to her! She always seems so suspicious, I actually try to avoid her. You've known me for three years. Those kinds of comments and suggestive remarks are not coming from me. Half our team is women. You'd think if I was into that*

kind of behavior, someone else would have complained by now! I don't know why, but I think she wants to get someone into trouble.”

That made sense to Joe, but just to be safe, he told Charles to be careful not to inadvertently say something troublesome to her in the future. He didn't hear any complaints from Monica for several weeks and things seemed to calm down.

Then, several months later, Monica saw a job posting in the lunchroom and decided to apply. She asked Joe to be a reference and he agreed, although he said he'd be sorry to see her leave his department so soon, as she was good at her job.

But Monica didn't get the new position, and angrily confronted Joe: “How dare you block my career and stab me in the back!” When he asked what was going on, she said she knew that he purposefully sabotaged her application to keep her in his department.

“I did no such thing!” he responded. “People move on from job to job in this company and I have accepted that for years. I was just giving you a compliment that I would be sorry to see you go. That's all I said. Then, I recommended you to the next department. I think they just hired someone with more experience. I'm not interested in standing in anyone's way if they prefer to work in another department. It happens all the time.”

“You know,” Monica replied. “Part of why I don't want to be in your department anymore is because I keep getting these strange emails that I think are coming from other people in our unit. They seem to know too much about me to be coming from strangers. I think you need to do something about that.”

“Can you show me an example?” Joe said.

“I can show you several,” Monica replied. They walked to her desk. The emails she showed him seemed like the kind of spam and junk mail that everyone gets, and he told her that. But Monica insisted that someone was targeting her.

“Who do you think it is, then?” Joe asked.

“I think it's the group that has a late lunch together in the lunchroom. Whenever they see me, they start whispering. I'm sure they're whispering about me.”

“That's pretty far-fetched,” Joe said. “You need to drop it.”

Before the end of her first year, Monica complained about a coworker hiding her purse, which she finally found in a corner near the copy

*machine. Then she claimed a client followed her into the parking garage at the end of work one day. Joe knew the client well and seriously doubted he was purposefully following her.*

*Reluctantly, Joe decided that Monica needed to go. So he fired her. He told her she was disrupting the teamwork in his department.*

*Monica sued the company, specifically saying that Joe discriminated against her and that several of her coworkers harassed her. She lost her case, but Joe developed stomach problems from the stress of the legal process and had to take time off from work. He truly felt kicked in the stomach after all he had done to help her succeed on his team.*

*Plus, several of the other employees had left before Monica was fired—some because of her. Joe no longer had the team that he had enjoyed working with. Even though Monica claimed that Joe stabbed her in the back, he was the one who felt betrayed. He decided that he could no longer be a manager and returned to doing the individual client work he had done before becoming a manager—and for lower pay. He also started taking antidepressants, at the recommendation of his doctor.*

Is Monica an HCP? It certainly appears that Monica may have paranoid personality disorder. All of her fears could have been true, but seemed extremely unlikely and didn't check out when investigated. She seemed to have a pattern of thinking this way about her coworkers, her boss, and her company. Monica's thinking wasn't the kind of paranoia associated with schizophrenia, much of which is physically impossible (such as hearing voices and/or having delusions). She wasn't depressed or showing signs of bipolar disorder.

She targeted her coworkers, her boss, and her company—and took action against them with many complaints, followed by a lawsuit. All-or-nothing thinking? She seemed to see only one explanation for things: People were out to get her or block her career advancement. Unmanaged emotions? She seemed to let her feelings dominate her thinking, so that when she felt others were harming her, she believed it without question. Extreme behavior? Repeatedly making unfounded accusations about so many other people seems to fit an extreme pattern of behavior. Would 90 percent of people make so many complaints without wondering if their own perceptions were part of the problem? Most people would feel embarrassed and wonder if they were overreacting, find a new job to escape their hostile environment, or keep their fears to themselves to avoid

making things worse in order to remain employed. So is Monica an HCP? Almost certainly yes.

## Spotting Paranoid HCPs

You may not realize someone near you has paranoid personality disorder. Paranoid HCPs often keep their concerns to themselves because they distrust other people in general. Whereas other HCPs often reveal themselves with their own actions, you may become aware of a paranoid person because of a gut feeling, hearing a strange story about them, or noticing several warning signs in their behavior that seem to fit a negative pattern. So what can you look out for, if this disorder is harder to identify? Here our WEB MethodSM:

**Words:** Does the person speak of people you see as neutral as totally untrustworthy? Do they use extreme terms when speaking about many other people's honesty, intentions, or past behavior? (*"You know, you can't trust so-and-so. Why? I just know it."* *"See Peter over there? He wants your job. Watch out for him."*) If your own experience doesn't support these types of comments at all, that's a red flag.

Part of the problem is that a little bit of paranoia can be a healthy thing. It can warn you that someone may truly be dangerous, so you have to be careful not to discount someone's fears too completely or too quickly. Verify the facts of the situation, if you can. Then see if the person is seeing the situation in much more extreme terms than you do.

**Emotions:** How do you feel around the person? Sometimes, we feel uncomfortable around a paranoid HCP because his or her responses feel oversized or inappropriate in situations that seem ordinary. (*"I'm really scared of so-and-so. You can tell he would hurt you if he could."* *"I'm sure Freda is having an affair with the boss. Do you notice how she looks at him? She'll probably get a promotion."*) You also may notice yourself feeling pressure to treat someone or something as threatening, when you think it is not. Remember, this can happen from time to time in any relationship or friendship. So watch out for a *pattern*, rather than the occasional isolated incident.

Does the person seem to have visible signs of fear in situations where no one else does? You might also feel fear around a paranoid personality, because they seem on edge a lot of the time, or want to push you into assisting them in overreacting to someone else. Just as with antisocial HCPs, we might feel fear

around paranoid HCPs because they want us to take extreme actions that don't feel right to us.

**Behavior:** Many paranoid people simply avoid other people or conflict situations. But paranoid HCPs often engage in confrontations with others because they feel threatened or disrespected. A high-conflict highly suspicious personality will have Targets of Blame and sometimes feel desperate to attack them in order to protect themselves.

Has the person engaged in behavior that 90 percent of people would never do, such as accusing a colleague of stealing their pocketbook or poisoning their lunch or sending threatening emails? This can be difficult to measure, because there may be times when there is a true danger that you don't know about at first. The key is to look for patterns and verify the facts for yourself.

The Lassiter case is a good example of how dangerous paranoid thinking can become. Ninety percent of people would never engage in such preparations for war with a neighbor. Once that level of extreme behavior has occurred, it should be clear that there is a risk of it happening again—possibly with dire results next time.

In the workplace, some people have a pattern of odd behavior regarding their fears. When an employee says their purse was stolen, in a situation where it seems very unlikely, that could be a real problem or part of paranoia. But when the person says many things keep happening to him or her that haven't happened to anyone else or that have been disproved, it may be a paranoid pattern that you should cautiously consider to be a warning sign. Otherwise, you might inadvertently become their next Target of Blame.

## Avoiding Paranoid HCPs

Now that you know about this pattern of warning signs—and how difficult it is to spot on the surface—you should have the tools to piece together little bits of information that would show recurring excessive fear or overreactions to normal events.

If you believe that someone has excessive fears or distrust, then keep your distance emotionally. Don't "overly engage" with their stories of danger and subterfuge. You can tell them matter-of-factly that sounds really "unusual" or "frightening" or "that's something to avoid." Don't try to persuade them that they are overreacting or wrong or crazy. This will increase their fears about you—which will increase their focus on you. If you are targeted by someone with

paranoid personality disorder, he or she will begin to distrust you and may feel that they have to harm you in order to protect themselves.

Since some high-conflict people project their paranoid personality disorders onto political, religious, or cultural groups in a rigid “us against them” way of thinking, it is important for members and leaders of these groups to be careful about their statements about those outside their organization. These statements can be misinterpreted and reinforce paranoid thinking, and may be interpreted as a license to harm members of those other groups.

For similar reasons, avoid becoming involved in someone’s scheme to harm someone else who has allegedly harmed them. If they want justice or protection or revenge, encourage them to seek professional support, such as a lawyer, a therapist, or the police. Otherwise, you may end up harming an innocent party who has simply become the paranoid HCP’s Target.

## Dealing with Paranoid HCPs

As with the other high-conflict personalities, approach interactions with paranoid HCPs in terms of the steps of the CARS Method<sup>SM</sup>: connecting, analyzing, responding, and setting limits. Consider how Joe handled Monica with these steps in mind.

**Connecting:** While connecting is usually the first step with other HCPs, those with paranoid personality disorder may feel threatened by your efforts at friendliness. If they have already made up their mind about you, trying to calm them with empathy, attention, and respect may make them more suspicious of you. Test the waters with statements like “*I know this is a stressful time for you,*” but don’t spend too much time trying to connect with someone who doesn’t seem interested in engaging with you.

Whatever you do, don’t try to calm a paranoid personality by challenging their fearful perceptions or reinforce their paranoid perceptions by suggesting their suspicions may be correct. Instead, say, “I’ll never know what happened, since I wasn’t there.” That neither challenges nor confirms their paranoid interpretation of events and therefore keeps the conversation neutral.

In the coworker example, Joe told Monica that he would be sad to see her go if she transferred to another department. But she interpreted it very negatively, as his wanting to block her advancement. In this type of situation, there’s not much more connecting that Joe can do, so it makes sense to move on to analyzing.

**Analyzing:** In general, it may be better to shift the focus to analyzing the paranoid personality's options right away. If you think you're dealing with a paranoid HCP, but you aren't their Target of Blame (yet), you can try to be helpful: *"That sounds really stressful. I wasn't there, so let's look at what your choices are now in this situation."*

In Joe's case, when Monica told him about the emails, her missing purse, and the client following her, he could have said, "That's pretty unusual. There are always several explanations to consider for any event. Someone may have mistaken their purse for yours; you may have left it somewhere else; or cleaning people may have moved it." And leave it at that. That would have been slightly better than saying her beliefs were "far-fetched" and saying to just "drop it," although those might have been okay if their relationship was stronger, such as if they had worked together longer or he was a trusted relative.

From my experience, saying something is "unusual" doesn't sound too threatening to a paranoid person, but it also doesn't reinforce their negative thinking. It may get them thinking about other options for interpreting what is happening—or not. In Monica's situation, it's a signal that Joe is not going to encourage her paranoid thinking.

**Responding to misinformation:** If a person already appears paranoid, avoid putting energy into trying to persuade them not to be fearful—they'll just feel more suspicious of you, since you're challenging their perspective. People have done that to them all their lives, so they are very sensitive to that approach. Instead, briefly offer what you have heard is another perspective on the situation, but don't push it.

What I suggested for Joe works here, too: *"That's pretty unusual. There are always several explanations to consider for any event. We'll just never know."* This is a good BIFF response that makes it easy for Joe to disagree without being defensive or making Monica more defensive.

**Setting limits:** Whether you are seen as a neutral person or as a paranoid HCP's Target of Blame, try to be friendly and focus on setting limits by explaining rules and policies—limits that are external to your relationship. Try not to make it personal: *"I can see you're frustrated, but it's just rules we all have to follow."* *"I understand what you're saying, but we can't pursue this if we can't prove that this is what happened."*

More than anything, avoid directly criticizing a paranoid personality as a way to motivate behavior change. Because they're already suspicious and on the defensive, they won't hear your helpful point. Instead, they only hear that you are challenging them

are challenging them.

Joe set limits with Monica by not reinforcing her paranoia about the emails, purse, or client following her. He also said, “Just drop it.” Depending on his tone of voice, this may have been a good response to her.

He also eventually fired Monica, which may have been appropriate. But I would have recommended against telling Monica that she ruined the team. This may have fed her desire to file a lawsuit. It’s generally better to just say, “Our working styles are different. We wish you well, and hope you find a good fit for achieving your career goals.” This makes the decision sound neutral and positive, and might have made Monica feel less like she was being victimized.

## Breaking Away from Paranoid HCPs

Breaking away from a relationship with a paranoid person must be done very carefully and gently. If possible, do it in steps (unless the situation is immediately dangerous) so as not to trigger a strong backlash. Again, avoid direct criticism as a method of backing off. Don’t blame the person and don’t blame yourself.

Your time commitments may have changed. Other responsibilities have come your way. You’re no longer available when you used to see the person. While these may feel like dishonest excuses, it is realistic that your priorities have changed over time. Brutal honesty may work with 80 percent of people (although the brutal part is usually unnecessary), but it definitely doesn’t work with HCPs.

HCPs (especially paranoid HCPs) treat unfiltered honesty like a declaration of war. It will bring them back into your life in a very intense way, and put you in extreme situations that were avoidable, such as the person stalking you or spreading rumors against you in order to defend themselves. Over and over again, I have been asked to consult on repairing a situation in which a family member, a neighbor, a coworker, or other person has been brutally honest about what is wrong with a paranoid person and it has made the situation much, much worse for everybody. For example, they have refused to talk to their “offending” family members, sabotaged “offending” coworkers, and thrown trash into the “offending” neighbor’s yard. Practicing the steps of the CARS MethodSM is the safest, most low-conflict path to breaking away from a paranoid personality.

## Some Final Words



HCPs with paranoid personality disorder are kind of like quicksand. Many of your instinctive reactions may trigger their mistrust and bring you deeper into their conflicts. By being careful of your words, you may be able to have an arm's-length relationship with a paranoid HCP that doesn't bring you close to their perceived problems, but isn't too threatening to the HCP. There is a wide range of people with paranoid personality traits, and it's certainly possible to have a decent relationship with some of them without too much conflict by following the general principles in this chapter.

## Chapter 8

---

### The *Dramatic, Accusatory* Type

THE FINAL HIGH-CONFLICT personality we'll cover is histrionic personality disorder. This kind of HCP is motivated by a fear of being ignored, which manifests in a drive to be the center of attention—sometimes by making up dramatic stories about their Targets of Blame and telling the world about them.

The major NIH study on personality disorders found that about 1.8 percent of the United States population has this disorder.<sup>1</sup> This is about six million people in North America. While that's a smaller number than each of the other high-conflict personality disorders, there are many people with just some traits of histrionic personality rather than the full disorder, so you may face this personality type more than you'd expect. I believe that many of those with this personality disorder are HCPs, because they are driven to tell others about how bad things are, which usually involves talking about specific Targets of Blame.

Originally, this personality disorder was associated with women. The term histrionic is related to hysteria, which Sigmund Freud identified over one hundred years ago as a female emotional disorder. But that's been discredited, especially by the large NIH study, which found that this disorder is equally present in both men and women. In fact, the study found that those with histrionic personality disorder were 51 percent men and 49 percent women.<sup>2</sup>

Emotions are contagious, and histrionic HCPs have a lot of emotional intensity. This means that a lot of other people will absorb and accept what they are saying based on the histrionic person's emotions, even though there may be no basis whatsoever to what they are saying. Ironically, their emotional intensity eventually pushes people away, so that they exacerbate the problem they are trying to solve: not wanting to feel ignored. In their view, people are constantly "turning against them" by turning away from them.

## Histrionic Personality 101

These HCPs frequently speak in dramatic, all-or-nothing terms. While they are sometimes accurately describing events, many of their stories are gross exaggerations or sometimes not based in fact at all. If you are the Target of Blame for a histrionic HCP, prepare for public accusations, dramatic stories about how awful you are to them, and a lot of people making judgments about you based on false information.

Histrionic HCPs consider their Targets of Blame the reason they are helpless victims, which justifies them in continuing to be helpless and seek others to take care of them and their problems. They can be very persuasive at getting others to help them.

In addition to the four primary characteristics of being a high-conflict person, the *DSM-5* lists up to eight traits of a histrionic personality disorder.<sup>3</sup> The key characteristics I believe lead many to be histrionic HCPs are:

- Drive to be the center of attention.
- Dramatic speech, generally lacking in detail, but with exaggerated emotions.
- Misjudgment of relationships; thinking people care about them more than they do.

You can see how these characteristics may be very helpful for a child who feels neglected unless she causes drama with exaggerated emotions. You can also see that these characteristics may be helpful when someone needs to command the attention of a larger group of people. In a crisis, such a person can quickly grab everyone's attention and focus it on solving a problem together. Some say that many movie stars, rock stars, and other public performers have traits of this personality, though not necessarily the personality disorder. By playing on our emotions, they are skilled at getting and holding our attention.

But when these traits become a dysfunctional pattern, they become so irritating that people pull away. In modern relationships, such behavior can be extremely self-defeating and the cause of lost jobs, lost friendships, and lost marriages. Of course, if the person is a histrionic HCP and you point out how self-defeating their behavior is, they will blame you for causing them harm in such dramatic terms that others will believe them. Often these other people become their “negative advocates”—people who will attack their Targets of

Blame on their behalf. (There will be much more about negative advocates in the next chapter.)

From my experience as a lawyer, I have seen several cases in which such a person has persuaded a judge or jury of someone else's "bad behavior," even though it never occurred at all or was so minor that it should not have become a legal issue. Unfortunately, sometimes the decision makers conclude that someone "would not be that upset" unless someone else had truly harmed them. But, in fact, being "so upset" is routine for those with histrionic personality disorder.

Such cases sometimes make the news when it turns out someone was wrongly convicted or a reputation was wrongly ruined. However, it's important to remember that high-conflict people can also be real victims sometimes. So the best approach is to have no assumptions and look beyond the heightened emotions and analyze what is really happening yourself.

## Two Flavors of Histrionic HCPs

There is a wide range of histrionic HCPs. Some, who are high-functioning, have good jobs. These high-functioning types get paid to be histrionic, such as dramatic actors, celebrities, and others in attention-heavy occupations. On the other hand, there are those who are low-functioning and may be unable to work or even to raise their own children. The following two examples demonstrate a relatively high-functioning histrionic HCP and a very low-functioning histrionic HCP.

### The Histrionic Mother

At the beginning of this book we met Amy and her mother, Nadine.

*Amy's mother's eyes were filled with fury. She pointed at Amy and shouted. "You murdered your father! The world doesn't realize it, but I do." She broke into sobs but didn't lower her voice. "All he wanted was for you to go into the family business. But you—you selfish child—you broke his heart by building your own stupid career instead. You knew he couldn't go on without you."*

*It was the day after her father's funeral. Amy had flown back home a week before, as soon as she had learned of her dad's heart attack. But she got to the hospital a few hours too late. He had passed away with his wife beside him.*

*Amy's mother was always dramatic about everything. Later that day she burst into tears again. "What am I going to do now?" she sobbed, falling into Amy's arms. "You're going to take care of me, aren't you? Or are you going to abandon me like you did your father?"*

*Nadine had always leaned on Amy. It was like Amy was the mother and Nadine the child. Amy pushed aside her own grief (she wished her mother had died, instead of her father), as she realized she was going to have to deal with her mother all alone now.*

*She had been doing some reading about difficult people and concluded that her mother had a histrionic personality disorder. She decided it was time to tell her mother and try to get her some help. She knew she couldn't handle her alone.*

*"Mom, calm down!" Amy yelled back. "I didn't abandon Dad. You have a personality disorder. That's why you think the way you do. You need to get help for yourself. Then I can help you. You're always distorting things. They're not as bad as you think. Now please stop saying I killed Dad. He had a heart attack. This is bad enough without you flipping out again."*

*"How dare you say such things about your mother!" Nadine exclaimed. "You're a horrible daughter. I don't ever want to speak to you again! Get out! Get out of our house right now. You're dead to me now, too. Just leave. Leave now!"*

*She broke into sobs and pulled away from Amy. Amy said: "Don't be ridiculous, Mom."*

*"I mean it," Nadine said. "I really mean it." Then Nadine suddenly grabbed her chest. "Oh no. I think I'm having a heart attack. Call 911 and get an ambulance. I need to get to the hospital. And then leave!"*

*Amy thought that her mother was overreacting, but she didn't want to risk letting her die of a heart attack, too, so she called for an ambulance. And she decided to never say her mother had a personality disorder again.*

Remember: Never, ever tell anyone that you think they have a personality disorder. If the person does, it will increase their defensiveness and bad

behavior, rather than giving them insight into themselves. Even if they don't, the person will likely become defensive and distant out of anger. This is a hard lesson to learn, but it will save you a lot of trouble. Nadine viewed Amy saying she had a personality disorder as criticism. She then had a health crisis—or so she felt. She may bring this incident up again and again when she complains about her ungrateful daughter, or, she may totally block it out but allow it to fuel her resentment toward Amy.

*When they got to the hospital (Amy drove separately), Nadine was wheeled into the emergency department and hooked up to several machines. Quickly it was determined that she was not having a heart attack, although she had been breathing so fast that she passed out in the ambulance.*

Nadine is a typical histrionic HCP. Amy is her frequent Target of Blame, but there are others, including the ambulance drivers and ambulance company. She interprets things in all-or-nothing terms (“*I never want to see you again*”; suddenly has a “heart attack” when she feels overwhelmed emotionally; etc.). She is constantly dramatic, has superficial emotions (they come and go very quickly), and demands attention—one way or another. You may have noticed that she didn't stop talking to Amy at all. Her rejection of Amy was just an impulsive, dramatic statement, not a real position or decision on Nadine's part. Of course, those with this disorder also have real health problems unrelated to their personality disorder, as any other person might, so no assumptions can be made. This is the approach that Amy took, although it turned out (as she suspected) that her mother was not having a heart attack.

*A few hours later, when talking about the ambulance ride, she said to Amy: “I think I was raped while I was unconscious in the ambulance. I had this sensation of being violated. I'm going to talk to a lawyer about suing the ambulance company.”*

I have been told by hospital workers that histrionic personality disorder may be the most common personality disorder that they see, particularly in patients who make a lot of repeat visits. At least one ambulance company I heard of has been sued for a nonexistent rape during an ambulance ride by a patient with a diagnosed histrionic personality disorder. If you're a health care worker, you probably have met such patients already.

## Comments

Do you think Nadine is a histrionic HCP? It certainly seems possible, but it doesn't actually matter. For Amy, it's most helpful to recognize the *possibility* of an HCP to get some help in dealing with her mother. She has already made a mistake by telling Nadine outright that she thinks she has a personality disorder.

If she just tries to stay away from Nadine, Nadine will continue to have dramatic problems to pull her back in. Plus, Nadine is her mother and she wants to help her somehow. It's important to remember that people with personality disorders feel helpless, vulnerable, and victimized in their lives. This is especially true for those with histrionic personality disorder, who overcompensate by telling intensely emotional, dramatic stories about how life has treated them badly. But Amy needs to learn how to help in a reasonable way so that she can have her own life and not become her mother's caretaker. She should start by approaching a hospital social worker, who knows what kinds of resources and daily assistance programs there are for someone like her mother.

## Loss of Parental Rights

Some people may lose their parental rights altogether while their children are still young if their personality disorder is extreme enough. In the following legal case, a histrionic mother lost the right to parent her six children after the court identified her pattern of negative behavior.

The mother was diagnosed by a licensed psychological examiner, Ms. Beasley. She later testified at court that the mother didn't take any of the steps required by the court to correct her bad behavior and thus regain custody of her six children. An excerpt from the court record for a case about her sixth child, Carrington, reads:

*Ms. Beasley concluded, based on the clinical interview and Mother's test results, that Mother has poor insight, poor impulse control, and widely shifting mood swings. Ms. Beasley opined that Mother suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, caused by an abusive relationship and the anxiety and nightmares associated with reliving the trauma. Ms. Beasley also noted Mother's well-documented history of drug abuse and her Axis II diagnosis of histrionic personality disorder. Histrionic personality disorder, Ms. Beasley explained, is characterized by intense unstable relationships, dramatic behavior, and a need to be noticed, which results in exaggeration, attention seeking, rapidly shifting emotions, gullibility, rash decision-making, and suicide attempts. Ms. Beasley explained that, like all personality disorders, histrionic personality disorder is a longstanding and very entrenched personality characteristic "that tends to be very, very, very difficult to treat." Mother's histrionic personality disorder, Ms. Beasley opined, has become a "very ingrained part of who she is and how she operates, and there are no medications for treating personality disorders, although medications might help with bouts of depression."<sup>4</sup>*

This mother had six children. The last was born in 2004. In 2005, the children were removed from her home, primarily because of her severe neglect, physical and sexual abuse of the children, and drug abuse problems. She had visitation rights, but after 2007 she saw the children only if they wanted to see her, and they never did. In order to regain custody of her children, she was required to:

1. *overcome her denial of sex abuse and acknowledge it verbally or in writing to a professional counselor;*
2. *cooperate with her treating professional and the children's treating professionals to ensure appropriate boundaries were implemented and understood[,] and to address the possibility of parental alienation;*
3. *ensure that no inappropriate sexual materials, books, magazines, pictures, or videos were around the children;*
4. *provide clean and clutter-free housing with enough space and furniture for the children;*
5. *provide DCS [the Department of Children Services] with six consecutive months of paid rental and utility receipts as proof of stability; and*
6. *provide proof of legal income sufficient for her family's needs.*

*Mother was expected to satisfy these goals by January 201<sup>5</sup>*

Even though the mother attended drug treatment, her inability to handle her emotions and related behavior did not improve. She would not acknowledge that the children had been physically and sexually abused or that she had neglected them. She could not demonstrate that she had sufficient space and bedding for the children. By 2013, the court held hearings to decide whether to terminate her parental rights. Here's more from the court record:

*Ms. Beasley concluded that very little had changed in Mother's emotions, depression, anger, or method of handling these issues since Ms. Beasley evaluated Mother in 2009. . . .<sup>6</sup>*

*[Mother] has little psychological insight. She is defensive and reluctant to engage in self-exploration. Additionally, she has little motivation to change her behavior since she blames others for the situation in which she finds herself. Long-term commitment to therapy is required before [Mother's] personality would substantially change. However, individuals with her profile often terminate treatment early. At this point in time,*



*[Mother] does not have the physical and emotional well-being to safely care for her six children[,] and past therapy efforts from 2005 to the current time have proven unsuccessful in providing long[-]term improvement in her psychological functioning.*<sup>7</sup>

People with high-conflict personality disorders are doomed to remain stuck in their life situations because they can't look at what *they* could do differently. Unfortunately, the mother is stuck looking at what everyone else could do differently instead, as evidenced in the statement "She is defensive and *reluctant to engage in self-exploration*. . . . she has little motivation to change her behavior since *she blames others* for the situation in which she finds herself."

This may come from growing up in an environment that taught her to think this way, or may have been a biological trait from birth, or both. The record does say that she had post-traumatic stress disorder and was in an abusive relationship. But what is clear is that the mother was given numerous chances over many years to work on herself and failed to do so.

*The Juvenile Court found that DCS had made "not only reasonable efforts, but Herculean efforts," to rectify the situation and had provided or offered services to the children and parents for many years.*<sup>8</sup>

*In his closing argument, Carrington's guardian ad litem described the case as "probably the saddest" with which any of the lawyers involved had ever dealt. Nevertheless, he asked the Juvenile Court to terminate Mother's parental rights, [based on] "the histrionic personality disorder and all the other sad issues that [Mother] has had to deal with in her life."*<sup>9</sup>

## Comments

This is, indeed, a sad case that demonstrates the difficulty of changing or impacting a personality disorder. We don't know the mother's history, but many situations like this extend from one tragic generation to the next. The mother also had a drug abuse problem, which is more common in people with high-conflict personality disorders. HCPs often use drugs to cope with their outsized feelings of distress when their problematic approaches to life and its problems don't really work. Unfortunately, this self-medication only increases the strain on their relationships with their children.

The tragedy here is that these children lacked a stable environment (moving around foster homes) for years and years while their mother remained stuck in her histrionic and blaming behavior. This is not to say that everyone with a personality disorder should lose their parental rights, but rather to emphasize that behavior warranting the removal of children *and* a personality disorder shows that this extreme behavior is unlikely to change. This is why many protective agencies and courts require a significant change in behavior within a year now, rather than within several years (in this case, almost nine years). That way a child may have a chance to be adopted and raised by a healthy family.

## Spotting Histrionic HCPs

Histrionic HCPs are often fairly easy to spot if you know what to look for. They are very dramatic, and are easily mistaken for people who are reacting emotionally to an extremely upsetting situation. But for histrionic HCPs, the drama is often chronic, and a response to their own internal upsets rather than to a real or extreme external event. So find out what's triggering their dramatic response. If their emotions seem out of proportion to the situation, and this happens on a consistent basis, then you may be dealing with a histrionic person. If they are dramatically blaming someone else for the cause of their drama, then you may be dealing with a histrionic HCP. Here's our WEB MethodSM analysis of how you can identify one quickly.

**Words:** Their words are often extreme versions of what other people might say. Histrionic HCPs use a lot of all-or-nothing statements about seemingly ordinary situations. They jump to conclusions that few people would reach, and exaggeration is the name of the game for them.

But don't just pay attention to their words; look for a heightened emotional tone of voice when they speak. There's a dramatic pressure placed upon the listener. (*"You have to understand how awful this is!"*) Sometimes there's a dramatic intimacy to their comments (whispering: *"Did you hear that so-and-so is probably going to be fired for comments they made at last week's meeting? Don't let anybody else know."*) The irony is that this person will actually tell everyone this "secret" in dramatic and conspiratorial terms. If he or she is a histrionic HCP, these statements may be unconsciously—or even consciously—spread around to get a person fired. Their personality makes them feel like a victim so often that they're constantly looking around to see who they think

caused that feeling (which actually arose inside of them), and seeing Targets of Blame everywhere.

**Emotions:** It's common to feel a powerful urge to get out of conversations with histrionic HCPs (and those with histrionic personality disorders in general). Their emotions are so intense that many feel overstimulated and emotionally burnt out by spending time with them. But you will discover that it's hard to escape them and their stories. Since histrionic HCPs desperately want attention, they'll be resistant to letting you finish a conversation and move away from them. If you are a polite person, you will feel very uncomfortable wanting to get away from a person you perceive to be in distress. What you may not realize early on is that a histrionic HCP is constantly in distress, usually related to minor events that 90 percent of people would not be distressed about—or certainly not *this* distressed.

**Behavior:** Their behavior often seems dramatic or theatrical, but not always in ways that immediately appear negative. Remember, this personality type enjoys being the center of attention, so they may be seductive in their physical movements or the way they speak. They've learned how to draw attention to themselves and lure in an audience.

Histrionic HCPs tend to blame their upset emotions on specific people in their lives. They repeatedly try to get their Targets in trouble and often do this by spreading rumors so that they may deny saying something negative: *“I didn't say she was getting fired. I said that I heard other people talking about it. What other people? Oh, I'm not allowed to say.”*

Often such conversations may never have taken place, but the histrionic HCP is comfortable stretching the truth because they operate largely on impressions, rather than facts. They may even convince themselves that such a statement is true.

From my experiences with them, many histrionic HCPs feel like life is treating them as a pincushion, and every little event (or pin, in this analogy) feels like an extreme trauma. So they overreact and feel that they need to tell everyone about it, whereas 90 percent of people would not react very much or at all to the same events. They may seem driven to ruin their associates' reputations because of these overreactions to minor details. Since most events feel more important than they are to this personality, they tend to tell a lot of people about every little thing, which puts them at a higher risk of hurting reputations than some of the other HCPs.

## Avoiding Histrionic HCPs

Since these HCPs are so dramatic, they are often easier to spot early on and therefore easier to avoid than the other HCPs. You just have to recognize that their emotional responses and dramatic statements are extreme compared to the instigating events. So try not to be “overly attentive” to their dramatics. If you become aware of a potential histrionic HCP overreacting to something, then just matter-of-factly say that you find their statements “interesting” the next time it happens, and attempt to change the conversation. If they try to keep you in the discussion, tell them you have something else you need to do and then immediately start moving away from them.

Avoid lingering, which gives them a chance to gear up for another dramatic story or emotional tirade. It requires feeling a little impolite, but it’s important to know that you aren’t helping this person feel better by endlessly listening to their stories. They don’t get relief from telling their story, so they’ll continue to repeat it over and over again in search of that relief—to anyone who will listen. What makes them feel better is focusing on a task they can accomplish, rather than trying unsuccessfully to unload their upset feelings (which keeps them in touch with those unresolved upset feelings). It’s sad to say this, but it’s important for you to know. Whereas most people get things off their chests and move on, all HCPs—but especially histrionic HCPs—don’t have an ordinary way of healing from unhappy events. It’s best to avoid getting too involved with their upset emotions, at the risk of exacerbating their problems.

## Dealing with Histrionic HCPs

If you can’t fully avoid spending time with a histrionic HCP—if you work or live with one, for example—approach your interactions with the CARS MethodSM in mind.

**Connecting:** Listen with empathy, attention, and respect, for an appropriate period of time (often five to ten minutes at most). Let the person know you have empathy for them. “*That sounds difficult.*” Then, if you need to work with them or discuss an issue, you can focus their attention by adding an analyzing step: “*Now, how I can help you today is to talk about the such-and-such issue. Or, do the following task with you.*”

**Analyzing:** Try to offer them a choice, to help steer them away from the drama. If they are being too emotional, give them a choice:

1. A) *“Do you want to do this now?”*
2. B) *“Or should we get together on a different day?”*

This forces them to focus on two choices, neither of which is being highly emotional. You don't need to accept being drawn into their drama. While this may seem impolite, you can say this with empathy and respect, in a matter-of-fact manner. You may need to be assertive in only presenting these two options, and not get stuck continuing to listen to their dramatic statements. If you've given them an analyzing option like those just given and they continue to overreact, it sometimes helps to say, “I can see how upsetting that must have been for you. Now, I need to go. Talk to you later. Goodbye,” and then walk away.

**Responding to hostility or misinformation:** If the person is being hostile toward you, use another choice approach: *“If you choose to keep speaking to me this way, I will have to end the conversation. It's up to you.”* This is especially helpful when you are on the phone. Make that statement, then say: *“I'm hanging up now. When you want to speak more calmly, we can talk again. Goodbye.”* Then hang up; even if they are still talking. While this may feel rude, remember that this was their “choice.” If you wait to end the conversation until they are done talking, be prepared for this to go on for hours.

If the person is giving misinformation, use the BIFF response approach, either in writing or in person. For example, you are told, “You never return my phone calls!” You can respond by saying, “I understand that you might feel frustrated because I can't always call you back right away. Most of the time I do return your phone calls within a few days, at least on the weekend, if I'm very busy during the week. Now, let's talk about next week's plan.” That was brief, informative, friendly, and firm, and quickly moves the HCP on to a new topic (“next week's plan”).

There's no benefit to getting angry or defensive in response to a histrionic HCP's aggression or exaggeration. It often increases their dramatic behavior and statements—toward you and the people you both know.

**Setting limits:** You can do this using the suggestions in the responding section. In addition, emphasize policies, rules, or other good reasons for them to behave appropriately. Remember to focus on what you want the person to do, rather than on what you don't want them to do. You may also need to explain the positive consequences of doing the behavior you are suggesting, and the negative consequences of not doing it. (*“Please just tell me some positive news*

*about so-and-so. Hearing about all their problems just brings me down. I want to hear something uplifting if we're going to talk about him/her. Otherwise, let's talk about something else." "That's too bad you had a problem with the manager. Now, I just want to focus on your proposals for solving the problem in the future.")*

## Breaking Away from Histrionic HCPs

Breaking away from a histrionic HCP may take preparation and persistence. For example, suppose Amy from earlier in this chapter wants to back away somewhat from her mother, Nadine. First, she should speak with a counselor, coach, or consultant to prepare herself and to develop a realistic plan, which may involve several steps over an extended period.

Next, Amy can practice what she is going to say to her mother with the counselor. Amy can play the role of her mother while the counselor plays the role of Amy, saying things that would be helpful for Amy to learn to say. Then they can switch roles and Amy can play herself and practice speaking to her mother, as played by the counselor. This preparation should include guessing what her mother will say and having responses ready for the best and worst scenarios.

Amy should also plan when, where, and with whom the conversation should happen. When a family member or close friend is an HCP, it often helps to have this type of conversation at a counselor's office with the counselor and other positive advocates—which we'll cover in a later chapter—present.

In this case, Amy may also need to develop a caregiving plan for her mother, if she appears unable to live alone in the future. If she is likely to have medical emergencies or to think she is having emergencies, it may be worthwhile to arrange some form of backup system (medical alert, in-home care, or a new living situation) to assist her, so that she does not rely exclusively on Amy for help.

Amy will need to be prepared for her mother to strongly resist her backing off somewhat. She will need to stay calm and persistent as she follows through with her plan. This is easier said than done, but has and can be accomplished with careful preparation and outside support.

## Some Final Words

As I noted, the percentage of histrionic HCPs is small compared to the other types of HCPs. However, it is common for those suffering from the other types of high-conflict personality disorders to present some histrionic characteristics. The principles in this chapter can also apply to some HCPs in each of the other chapters, especially to borderline HCPs. The key safeguard is to be prepared to face someone else's intense emotional drama so that you can stay calm and focused on your own goals if you find yourself in a histrionic conversation.

Keep in mind that histrionic HCPs will often tell many other people that you are ruining their life, especially if they make you a Target of Blame. Be prepared for this and tell those around you that you have a "difficult" relationship with so-and-so (don't say the person has a personality disorder or is an HCP). Encourage others to contact you directly if they ever hear anything about you that concerns them. While it's possible to maintain a relationship with a histrionic HCP, be prepared to remove yourself from their dramas as quickly as you can, lest you be drawn in as well.

## Chapter 9

---

### Dealing with Negative Advocates (Who May Also Attack You)

SOME PEOPLE BECOME emotionally invested in the intense fear, anger, and childlike charm of an HCP, but they usually do not do much individual research into the HCP's situation and adopt the person's opinions and emotions without question—what I call a *negative advocate*.<sup>1</sup> Negative advocates get emotionally hooked into advocating for an HCP's negative comments, emotions, and behavior and try to “protect” the HCP from their “evil” Target(s) of Blame—thereby helping the wrong person in the wrong way. Instead of making things better, this usually makes the situation worse—certainly for the Target of Blame and often for the HCP as well. Negative advocates are often family members, close friends, or professionals (such as counselors, clergy, lawyers, etc.), who think they're just being supportive of the HCP.

In many ways, negative advocates are like enablers or codependents of an alcoholic or drug addict. By siding with the HCP and attempting to help with their perceived struggles, they enable the HCP to remain stuck in his or her dysfunctional behavior, emotions, and thoughts by reinforcing them. This reinforcement of their extreme feelings often encourages the HCP to become more aggressive in their negative behavior, which often ends up hurting the HCP in the long run, as more people become involved and eventually turn against the HCP.

When Targets of Blame are caught by surprise by the intensity of negative advocates, they are often overwhelmed and devastated. I want to help you avoid being surprised and curb this behavior as soon as you spot it.

### Be Prepared

If you are already the Target of Blame for an HCP, you should be prepared to



deal with their negative advocates. Sometimes, the negative advocate will have more energy, behave more negatively, and have more credibility with others than the HCP. There may even be several negative advocates for an HCP.

Sooner or later, these negative advocates will appear in your life and try to persuade you to change your behavior to accommodate the HCP. Or, the negative advocate(s) will also try to ruin your life by spreading rumors, publicly humiliating you, bringing lawsuits against you, interfering with your employment, harming your finances, or even inspiring violence against you. Essentially, the same types of behavior that the HCP may engage in but now supported by more than just one person.

Understanding negative advocates and preparing for their actions and manipulations will save you a lot of grief.

The method for neutralizing negative advocates is basically connecting and responding from the CARS Methodsm. Generally, it's about giving them accurate information, without getting angry or defensive. Instead, give them empathy, attention, and respect. Then, try to inform them about the reality of the situation with BIFF responses. (*"I know you want to be helpful to her, but you may not be aware that the problem she's raising was resolved last month."* *"Ordinarily, what you are proposing would be a good idea. But in this particular case, it will only increase the problem rather than reducing it, for these two reasons . . ."*)

Of course, this often isn't possible, or it may be improper or dangerous to communicate with a particular negative advocate. If you are involved in a legal case with an HCP, make sure to discuss any actions with your lawyer and follow any rules set out by your own legal advocates. Particular negative advocates may be potential witnesses against you, so trying to communicate directly with them may violate the law and harm your case.

## Family Members

The majority of negative advocates seem to be family members trying to help a son or daughter, a parent, or another relative. Family members easily become negative advocates because they're inclined to believe that their HCP relative has been unfairly treated by someone else and that the HCP's problems are as serious as they claim. So they go to bat for that person, whether it's in dealing with their employer, a government agency, or even in a court case.

I have dealt with cases where HCPs brought their children, parents, and/or five or six other relatives to court in support of themselves. Often, when the full details of the case come out, these family members tend to stop coming. But in one case, the negative advocates were so committed to their family member that they kept coming to court. When the HCP was found guilty of making false allegations about someone, six of her family members were present in the courtroom and started shouting at the judge in response to her decision and were ordered to leave. They still believed their family member rather than the evidence.

This demonstrates three important principles about negative advocates.

1. Once many negative advocates commit to support an HCP family member, factual information often has little impact on them because high-conflict emotions are highly contagious and they can become like a mob. However, many negative advocates who are not family members and just recently met the HCP (coworkers, neighbors, etc.) often abandon the HCP once they learn more accurate information.
2. Negative advocates often don't care if they look bad in public, because they have become so committed to fighting for their HCP.
3. In my experience, the majority of negative advocates do not have personality disorders or high-conflict personalities. They're just misled. But some do have personality disorders. Since personality disorders sometimes run in families, this may explain why the aforementioned family mentioned could not restrain themselves from shouting at the judge. They, too, appeared to exhibit unmanaged emotions and extreme behaviors. Most other negative advocates, like coworkers and friends, are not HCPs themselves but emotionally hooked and misinformed by the HCP, and are able to respond reasonably when they learn the truth of a situation.

## Friends, Neighbors, and Coworkers

Many negative advocates who are not family members are people recently recruited by an emotionally intense HCP. If you are the HCP's Target of Blame, such an advocate may confront you and demand that you change your behavior or go away, because they believe that the HCP is a victim who needs protection from you. But more often than with family-related negative advocates, these

advocates may abandon the cause of helping the HCP if you have the opportunity to calmly give them more accurate information about the situation.

In the past, I've consulted with some homeowners' association boards about managing high-conflict behavior in their community meetings. In one case, two or three community members came to support a complaint by another member who appeared to be an HCP. The board had a policy of waiting to respond to complaints until the end of the meeting in order to hear members on all issues first. But in this case, the HCP and their advocates stormed out of the meeting before it ended, so no one was able to resolve the issue with accurate information.

I recommended to the board that they respond to each complaint with any relevant information right after the complaint had been raised by community members. By following this suggestion, they were able to provide enough accurate information that the negative advocates stopped supporting the HCP's complaints at future meetings. Providing negative advocates with accurate information is key, at least for reaching people who aren't totally hooked into supporting the HCP.

Spouses or roommates can also become negative advocates. They may absorb the intense emotions of their HCP or start agreeing with them as a way to calm them down. (Of course, this doesn't work in the long run.) Then, their HCP wants the spouse or roommate to be an advocate in a confrontation with their neighbors.

For example, the HCP drags their advocate over to the neighbor's house to complain about dogs, noise, a blocked driveway, or falling leaves coming over the fence from the neighbor's tree. What could have been a neighborly chat—one neighbor to the other—becomes an "us against them" confrontation between the HCP and their advocate, and the neighbor and their advocate(s). The HCP feels overconfident, quickly escalates into anger, and wants support from their spouse or roommate, who feels pressured to take sides.

So the spouse or roommate supports the HCP (otherwise there will be hell to pay when they get home) by serving as a negative advocate, joining in the negative behavior of blaming, yelling, *etc.* This happens all the time in neighbor disputes, whether in an apartment building, between small houses, and even between large estates in wealthy communities. If you look closely at these conflicts, there's often at least one HCP involved and one negative advocate reinforcing their argument. It's better if a potential negative advocate can say,

“You know, it’s better for you to have a one-on-one friendly talk with the neighbor, rather than to make them feel like they’re being ganged up on.”

No one has to be a negative advocate. But it’s easy to get emotionally hooked. Just being aware of this dynamic can help you resist the urge if an HCP pressures you to join in their battles.

If you’re the person they’re ganging up on, you can say you’ll only discuss an issue one-on-one, or you can say you will also need to have another person present. Just make sure your person doesn’t act like a negative advocate for you (assuming things, dominating the conversation, etc.), which will only make things worse. You also might suggest that you find an agreeable mediator to assist in the discussion.

## Professionals

One of the most surprising—but common—occurrences when dealing with HCPs is the prevalence of professionals who become negative advocates. HCPs often seek out professionals to give them strength in attacking their Targets of Blame.

Lawyers, of course, are frequently consulted for this purpose. Most lawyers are careful not to overreach in their legal roles, and turn down requests by likely HCPs to promote legal claims that have little validity. However, there are always some lawyers who become negative advocates for HCPs, because they’re predisposed to be strong advocates and get emotionally hooked (without even realizing it), sometimes to their own professional detriment. Some may experience public humiliation or court sanctions (fines) for going too far out on a limb for an HCP and violating their ethical standards.

In fact, there are some lawyers who bend the rules too far and attack their HCP’s Targets of Blame inappropriately—and get away with it. Perhaps they also have high-conflict personalities and personality disorders. There are some such people in every profession, and the adversarial process of law certainly attracts its share of HCPs, especially narcissistic HCPs who would like to show off and act superior to everyone else in a legal case. Efforts to rein in HCP lawyers with reprimands and rules have little effect unless there are professional consequences attached, like suspension or disbarment.

If you are the Target of Blame in a legal case, you need to be prepared for the possibility that the HCP’s lawyer is a negative advocate—whether emotionally hooked or an HCP as well. In essence, you need to be as assertive in presenting

accurate information as the HCP and their lawyer are aggressive in presenting emotions and opinions. It helps to have a reasonable lawyer who can argue your case based on facts, rather than blame and bluster. If you're in front of a judge on your own, it helps to stay calm and focus on the judge, not the emotions of the other party or their lawyer, while you calmly explain the facts of the case. For a guide focused on this particular issue, you may find it helpful to reference my book *High-Conflict People in Legal Disputes*.

HCPs also seek out mental health counselors to be their negative advocates. While most counselors set firm boundaries so that they do not become drawn in by a client's emotional intensity, there are some who get hooked and overstep their professional role. As a therapist, I have also seen too many cases of this.

In some cases, they write letters or declarations for the court, taking sides in a family dispute (such as divorce) or in a personal-injury case on behalf of a client. In other cases, a therapist becomes strongly emotionally attached to their clients and believes everything they say (a warning sign of "all-or-nothing thinking" right there).

Many therapists fell into this trap in the 1990s and got into legal trouble when treating adults in therapy who had "recovered" memories of child sexual abuse by a parent. While there are certainly true cases of this abuse, many of these professionals became overinvested as advocates and were believed to be helping their patients "recover" false memories that didn't actually exist.

All professions have some members who are prone to becoming emotionally hooked and getting a situation backward, but ministers, doctors, nurses, teachers, and social workers can be particularly vulnerable. The empathy required of these professionals sometimes leads them to cross a boundary to advocate for an HCP and personally confront or publicly attack their Target(s) of Blame.

It's better for these professionals to avoid the role of advocate and support their clients while remaining neutral. If conflicts arise, they should refer their clients to legal professionals and stay focused on therapy that helps the person grow—rather than building a case against their clients' Targets of Blame. If an HCP's therapist begins to act as a negative advocate toward you, seek support from your own therapist or another appropriate positive advocate.

## A Case of False Allegations

A good example of a professional negative advocate was at Duke University in 2006.<sup>2</sup> Members of the Duke lacrosse team hired two strippers for a house party. The next day, one of the young women, an African-American, alleged that she was sexually assaulted by some team members.

The district attorney, Mike Nifong, picked up her case and ran with it without doing a proper investigation. He charged three of the team's players with rape and made numerous public pronouncements against the students. He was also running for reelection in a multicultural district, so he alleged that Duke's campus culture had serious issues with racism and sexual assault. Soon there were campus demonstrations and national criticisms of Duke University, the lacrosse team, and the three players who were charged.

Then, DNA testing excluded all of the students accused. However, Mr. Nifong initially withheld this evidence. Though he eventually dropped the charges, the damage had been done to the university, the lacrosse team, and the three players' reputations. Mike Nifong had his law license revoked by the North Carolina Bar Association. Not only was he found to have withheld evidence, but he also was determined to have lied to the court and state bar investigators.

This appears to be a good example of a professional becoming an overzealous negative advocate. Not only did he lose his law license and face public humiliation, but the young woman he thought he was helping got into far deeper trouble than if he had not so recklessly taken on this high-profile role as her advocate without doing a proper investigation and releasing all relevant evidence.

Even if Nifong meant well, it wasn't hard for this negative advocate to ruin several people's lives, including the possible HCP he was advocating for. (It's hard to tell if she was an HCP, or if she wasn't and the DA was the primary force driving the case.) Regardless, the allegations ruined her own life and the lives of her accused. Other Targets of Blame—on campus and in the news media—included the lacrosse team coach, who was publicly blamed for allowing his team to run wild. He defended his students but resigned under a cloud of scorn months before the DNA evidence came out. If the negative advocate in this situation had taken the time to investigate before using his high-profile professional role to further a potential HCP's claims, the whole situation may have been avoided.

## Spotting Negative Advocates

Negative advocates are often recognizable because they can be very emotional about the HCP's situation and come on strong trying to persuade you to completely support the HCP as well. They tend to employ a lot of all-or-nothing thinking and all-or-nothing solutions for the HCP. (*"They have been totally taken advantage of in this situation. Can't you see that? You've got to help them or completely give them a break on this!"*)

Sometimes negative advocates can be even more intense and absolute than the HCP, because they never had a prior positive relationship with you, which the HCP may have had (as a former spouse, coworker, neighbor, etc.). This means that they may be totally hostile toward you, while the HCP may still feel some ambivalence because they once liked you. Negative advocates sometimes have a "knight in shining armor" problem. (*"I will fight for you to the ends of the earth!"*)

These advocates are often people with more outward credibility than the HCP as well, such as a respected family member, community member, lawyer, minister, or counselor. When they speak, more people listen than when the HCP speaks. HCPs try hard to recruit such people, because they seem to have more power than themselves, and there is strength in numbers. HCPs don't rely on the facts of the case, they rely on the number and power of their negative advocates. They often show up with their multiple negative advocates at court, at homeowners' association community meetings, in the workplace, and at government agencies.

Almost anyone who hangs around an HCP can serve as a negative advocate for them—and you should always assume there will be negative advocates if you are dealing with an HCP. If someone approaches you claiming to be helping or representing the HCP, assume that they are likely to be a negative advocate and develop your impression of them from there, using your personality awareness skills. Be cautious and, if possible, have a positive advocate for yourself nearby if you meet with a potential negative advocate for the HCP.

However, remember not to angrily confront a possible negative advocate. They may actually be family members, friends, and professionals who are victims of the HCP's extreme behaviors themselves. I find that it helps to ask what they think of a situation before concluding that the person is a negative advocate or a positive advocate. Instead, approach the HCP's personal associates with empathy, attention, and respect, and provide accurate information about the situation when you can. Even if you're speaking to a negative advocate, they may stop advocating for the HCP once they hear your side of the story.

You'll notice that I mentioned bringing a positive advocate for yourself if you are meeting with a possible negative advocate. This can be a friend, professional (like a counselor, lawyer, or mediator), or family member whom you trust. You must be able to trust that your positive advocate will not jump to conclusions at the urging of an HCP. Your positive advocate should not play a stronger role in interactions with an HCP or negative advocate than you. Instead, a positive advocate will provide support and encouragement to you, without taking a position in the dispute—unless he or she has done a thorough investigation of the facts.

A positive advocate may not even be present during a confrontation with an HCP, but someone who helps you prepare to deal with one. They can suggest actions that you can try with the HCP, or offer contacts or resources of others who can help you. This could be a family member, friend, lawyer, or counselor who doesn't encourage you to take sides (like a negative advocate), but instead encourages you to look for helpful solutions to problems without blaming anyone.

## Dealing with Negative Advocates

If you're involved with an HCP, it often helps to engage with their advocate(s), whether negative or positive. This is especially true if their advocates reach out to you in a neutral fashion. I have often found that it's possible to slow down a negative advocate or turn them around by employing the CARS Method<sup>SM</sup>. Emphasize connecting with the negative advocate and responding to their misinformation by respectfully sharing your own side of the story. (*"I hear your concerns. Let me give you some more information before you proceed further."*) However, as I suggested before, you may want to have someone else with you if you have an in-person meeting. That person should be someone who will not add to the conflict but instead can remember what was said and give you support if needed.

Of course, there are circumstances in which it's not a good idea to meet with an HCP's negative advocate. If their initial approach is extremely aggressive, perhaps consider disengaging and approaching them at a later time. If there are ongoing safety concerns, then it's often best to have someone else speak to the



negative advocate and/or the HCP on your behalf. This could be a common friend or relative, therapist, lawyer, or some other representative whom you would consider a positive advocate for yourself.

If you consider it safe, however, consider striking up a casual conversation with potential negative advocates for the HCP. This may give you an opportunity to gently explain that you have a different point of view and offer to answer any questions he or she may have about you. When they realize that you are not defensive and do not agree that you have done anything wrong, it opens the door for them to reconsider their position.

## Don't Become a Negative Advocate

Before ending this chapter, I want to caution you that all of us are at risk of becoming negative advocates for other people. It's important to maintain a healthy skepticism around people who seem very upset and want you to advocate for them against someone else. It's always good to get a second opinion about the person or the action they want you to take on their behalf.

If you are in a relationship with a potential HCP, you have probably been asked to do favors or fight for them against other friends and family members—even people you like. The thing to remember is that HCPs frequently turn on their negative advocates if they feel they are not advocating strongly enough or not advocating in the “right way.” All HCPs easily succumb to feelings of betrayal when their negative advocates back away.

If an HCP tries to recruit you to their cause, stop them from the start. Try to emphasize that the situation they are in is best handled by themselves or others who know the situation better. Be mildly interested, but don't appear to take a position on their conflicts. (*“That sounds too bad. But I think you can handle this yourself. Try doing some reading on the subject or consult with someone familiar with those types of issues. Unfortunately, I'm not in a position to help you on that.”*)

## Some Final Words

Realizing that you might have to deal with negative advocates in addition to an HCP may seem overwhelming, but it's important to be prepared for the possibility, and thus less likely to be surprised by unforeseen attacks. Always

have some short phrases and strategies ready for conversations you're unsure or uncomfortable in, such as *"That's interesting. I'll have to think about that."* Remove yourself from the situation, then take a break to figure out what to do next or get some consultation from people you trust.

It's key to avoid overreacting with anger, fear, or helplessness in these scenarios. You don't want to show those vulnerable emotions to someone who may want to help ruin your life, allow your emotions to feed into their conflict, or make yourself more susceptible to their manipulations. Do your best to remain calm until you can share your feelings with a true friend or counselor.

While all of this information might make facing HCPs and their negative advocates seem impossible, the personality awareness you've developed in the process of reading this book already guarantees that you'll be more successful in avoiding them in the first place or dealing with them effectively from the start.

## Chapter 10

---

### Getting Help from Others (Who May Not Understand)

WHEN YOU'RE A Target of Blame for a high-conflict person, it can be devastating. It's common to feel isolated and helpless, like you're the only person who has ever had to go through this. Who can you talk to? This isolation, and the manipulations of the HCP, may make you feel that no one will understand you or that others will consider you the one at fault. HCPs turn everything upside down. According to the high-conflict person and their negative advocates, reactions you think are reasonable are now considered totally wrong, and things you think are totally wrong are now considered reasonable.

Rest assured that there are tens of millions of people going through this at any given time around the world. While few people understand the patterns of high-conflict behavior and high-conflict personalities already, more and more people are learning about this by going through this painful experience themselves. While most don't understand the specifics of being a Target of Blame, they can recognize that these situations are not normal. If you explain the patterns of HCPs that I've described throughout this book, you can often find someone who will try to understand your situation.

### Getting Help

Who should you talk to? Who will understand what you're talking about? People who understand bullies (counselors, lawyers, police, and others), both in the workplace or in domestic violence situations, are often great sources of support because the same kind of aggression is a common pattern of many high-conflict personalities. While these people may not be familiar with the concept of high-conflict personalities or personality disorders, they usually are familiar with

some of the things to do when facing an abuser or constant liar, and may be able to offer advice.

The next part of this chapter will detail *who* you might approach for getting help in dealing with your HCP, before we address *how* to help them understand your situation.

## Counselors

Most counselors are trained in working with mental health problems that are generally obvious, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and normal relationship problems, but may not be used to working with high-conflict personalities and personality disorders. This isn't helped by the fact that some personality disorders do not benefit from counseling. For example: Paranoids rarely go to counselors, out of distrust. Antisocials seem to get worse in counseling, as they learn the language of empathy and caring, which they can then mimic to manipulate others while spinning a con.

Make sure you seek a counselor or therapist trained in working with personality disorders. For example, many therapists have been trained in dialectical behavior therapy (known as DBT—a method for treating borderline personality disorder), schema therapy, and other cognitive-behavioral therapy methods that help people change from negative to more positive thinking and behavior. A professional can help you understand and anticipate some of the problems you may face with your HCP and help you develop strategies for dealing with them. However, even a counselor can become emotionally hooked by HCPs and believe that you are the problem, not the HCP. So it helps to get the names of three counselors to interview to see if they can really help you.

Here are four questions you should ask them:

1. How much work have you done with clients who have borderline, narcissistic, or histrionic personality disorders or traits?
2. Have you ever had clients who had to deal with a family member, coworker, neighbor, or other person with a personality disorder?
3. Have you ever had a client who seemed like the Target of Blame for a high-conflict person: a person who purposefully or inadvertently was trying to ruin their life? If so, how did you help them?

4. Would you be open to learning more about this type of person from books or articles that I might bring you?

Since many counselors may have limited experience with these types of personalities, the most important thing may be whether you feel comfortable talking to them. Asking these questions can help you determine who will help you the most based on your specific HCP situation, but the final decision is up to you. There is no right answer, as it's based on your unique situation and how you feel.

## Lawyers

Lawyers often deal with cases involving HCPs and personality disorders without realizing it. While lawyers have less mental health training than a counselor, they may have more experience with trying to stop high-conflict behavior using legal methods. Many HCPs end up in the legal system because they are suing someone they wrongly blame for problems in their lives, or they are frequent defendants because of their own bad behavior toward others.

Most lawyers have probably faced situations somewhat like yours—real estate disputes, employment conflicts, business disputes, personal injuries, divorce cases, and more. Seek a lawyer who has experience in the area of the law that covers the conflicts you are having with your HCP. Ideally, get a referral from someone who has had a positive experience with a particular lawyer.

As with a counselor, I suggest interviewing at least three lawyers, either to represent you or to be a consulting lawyer while you handle your own case. Before you decide to handle your own case, take into account the size of your case, the complexity of the case, the difficulty of your HCP, and whether their lawyer is a negative advocate. The more difficult, large, and complex the case is, the greater the likelihood that you would benefit from hiring a lawyer. Here are some questions you might ask the lawyers you meet with:

1. Have you handled a case similar to mine? How did you handle it?
2. Have you ever handled a case in which the other party appeared to have a personality disorder?

3. Have you ever had a client who seemed like the Target of Blame for a high-conflict person, someone who purposefully or inadvertently was ruining their life? If so, how did you help them?
4. Would you be open to learning more from books or articles that I might bring you, or talking to a mental health professional who is familiar with the type of personality I think is involved in my case?

As with interviewing counselors, there's no right answer for who is the best lawyer in your situation. You will have to decide who you feel most comfortable with in terms of their knowledge and ability to communicate well and support you.

## Family Members and Friends

Much of the time, family members and friends may be your biggest resource in getting away from an HCP. However, you have to be careful that they act like positive advocates for you rather than becoming your own set of negative advocates. Remember that the intense emotions of a high-conflict person are highly contagious for everyone involved on both sides of a dispute. Although their intentions are good, friends and family will instinctively want to drive the case, tell you what to do, and confront your HCP and/or their negative advocates themselves. Anticipate the intensity of the emotions of your family and friends in their eagerness to help you and if you notice this happening, educate your family members and friends about what will help you and what will not. Tell them how to be positive advocates for you and set clear boundaries that will prevent them from becoming negative advocates, such as:

- Offer you encouragement and support, rather than telling you what to do.
- Inform you about resources—like people, reading material, and websites—and suggest proposals you might make; but be understanding if you don't pursue all (or any) of them.
- Don't speak on your behalf to the HCP or their advocates without your approval.
- Don't spend a lot of time bad-mouthing the HCP and their advocates to you, since this can just make it harder for you to think positively and focus on searching for solutions.

## Explaining the Patterns

Some of the people you approach for help will not see anything wrong with the HCP's behavior. They will tell you that you are overreacting or that *you* are the real cause of the problem. Don't try to argue with them, but decide if these are the people for you to count on for help. Keep seeking those who will understand and explain the patterns of high-conflict behavior that you are dealing with, but keep in mind that it's better not to use the terms *personality disorder* or *high-conflict personality* until you are familiar with the person. Many people are turned off by these terms at first and may think you're name-calling or overreacting.

Once you have decided who you want to get help from, calmly explain to the person the HCP's patterns of behavior that are harmful to you. Take the three biggest troublesome behaviors and explain them as patterns that won't stop without other people's help. Give three or four of the strongest examples to show that each pattern of troublesome behavior repeats and how it is damaging to you and/or others. You want your explanation to alert them to patterns they may not have seen when they only heard about a single disputed incident.

The following example applies all the knowledge from these last few chapters to a high-conflict situation involving a negative advocate, and how it could be turned around by describing three key behavioral examples to a potential positive advocate.

## The University Employee

Angelica was a new secretary at a university. She shared an office with her immediate supervisor, Dr. Rogers, who is in charge of a special program. He acts incredibly pleasant toward others but seems to have a personality change whenever the office door closes behind him, sniping, "I've told you a hundred times to send a handwritten thank-you note to people who personally visit our program from out of town. I don't want you just sending an email thank-you," or, "We are unique! You have to keep telling people that! Why is that so hard for you to understand?" or, "I'm going to be coming in late tomorrow morning. Please just say I'm here, but busy." Sometimes Angelica overheard him yelling disparaging remarks at other people on the phone.

All of this behavior made Angelica very nervous. She never knew what he would say to her next, only that it probably wouldn't be very nice. She liked and

respected the university, and didn't want to risk losing her job by fighting back, so she started a casual conversation with one of the other staff members down the hall. She asked what her supervisor's reputation was around the university.

"Oh, everyone thinks he's the greatest! He even writes personal thank-you notes to all the visitors to the program from out of town. He's always very nice to us. I think he'll go far at this school. Why do you ask?"

Angelica said she was just curious. She wondered if anyone else knew what he was really like behind closed doors. If they did, they weren't talking about it. Given his great reputation at the school she thought he must just be picking on her.

Then Angelica met Dr. Rogers's wife. When she got Angelica alone she said, "I know it's probably not easy working for my husband. But don't you dare get him into trouble. We need his salary and we're hoping he will move up in the administration in a year or two." Angelica felt trapped.

Dr. Rogers seems like an HCP, since he is treating Angelica like a Target of Blame and his wife's private talk suggests that he has treated others that way, too—probably even her. He has asked Angelica to be his negative advocate by covering up for him when he comes in late. He also seems to have narcissistic traits: He tries to give a superior impression of himself and his program; and he is arrogant and insulting—at least to Angelica. Angelica can seek relief from her supervisor using the methods for dealing with an HCP. First, she needs help. So who can she get support from?

Should she speak to her supervisor's boss? Should she talk to the human resources department? Should she make a complaint of bullying to Dr. Rogers's supervisor? She had a cousin who worked on the other side of campus and decided to talk to him.

"I don't think you should do anything," her cousin said. "You're just being too sensitive. I've heard of him and everyone thinks he will go far at this school. Besides, if everyone likes him, it will hurt you more than him if you say anything. I'd suggest you just suck it up."

Angelica felt crazy. Would anyone understand what it was like to be in her shoes? She had never met someone as difficult as Dr. Rogers. As we've discussed, this is very common when dealing with an HCP. Because HCPs often look good from the outside, people may struggle to believe your complaints.

"But here's an idea," her cousin said. "Many universities have an ombuds office on campus, which is confidential and might be able to help you or tell you who to talk to. I think we have one of those."



Before she went to the ombudsman's office, Angelica decided to organize her thoughts so that the person she spoke to would understand she was facing a serious problem. Note that Angelica should choose three patterns of Dr. Rogers's HCP behavior with three examples for each, because too many might overwhelm the person and too few may not convey the seriousness of the HCP's behavior. Approximately three examples help show that a pattern exists, without giving so much information that the person tunes out. Here are the patterns that she described.

**First pattern of behavior:** *He has frequent and sudden outbursts of anger, during which he directs very disparaging remarks toward me.* She then wrote down the three worst examples, including when and where they occurred (to show that her memory was credible and to make them easier for the ombuds person to remember).

**Second pattern of behavior:** *He takes credit for what I do as if he personally did it.* She gave the example of the thank-you notes, and two other examples.

**Third pattern of behavior:** *He presents a false image of himself as a super-nice guy, while treating me like dirt behind the scenes.* She gave two examples of his comments to her about other people behind their backs, as well as when his wife talked to her to show that it must happen a lot at home, too.

When she spoke with the woman at the ombudsman's office, the woman completely understood: "I have seen several cases like this, so I know what it's like when you're dealing with a possible high-conflict person. Let's look at your choices. . . ."

Angelica felt so relieved that she found someone who understood HCPs and their negative advocates. While the ombuds office couldn't fix the situation for her, she was given several choices for how she could proceed, and she no longer felt alone.

### Three Theories of a High-Conflict Situation

In the previous example, Angelica was able to find help simply by presenting a positive advocate with Dr. Rogers's pattern of negative behavior. But if a

potential positive advocate needs more convincing, it helps to explain the three theories of any high-conflict situation to others. When people just have one view of the situation—whether yours or the HCP’s—they often get it wrong. Here are the three theories that you can present to a potential positive advocate, to reduce the risk of them wrongly blaming you:

1. Person B says Person A has a pattern of acting badly, and it’s true. Person A is probably an HCP.
2. Person B says Person A is acting badly, but Person B is actually acting badly, not Person A. This is because Person B is “projecting” their own negative thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior onto Person A. Person B is probably an HCP, and Person A is probably not.
3. Both Person A and Person B are acting badly. Both are likely HCPs.

In reality, we should all consider these three theories whenever someone tells us that someone else is acting badly. All three of these theories look alike on the surface because they all involve high-conflict emotions. When we jump to a conclusion, we run a great risk of getting it wrong. This is especially true with HCPs, because they are preoccupied with blaming others and because their high-conflict emotions are highly contagious and therefore very persuasive.

By explaining this to someone and laying out each of the arguments for the three theories for them, you may be able to open their mind to the possibility that you are the Target of Blame for an HCP, and not the other way around. Much of my work as a lawyer involved convincing others that my client was an innocent Target of Blame and needed protection from an HCP, and sometimes that process took months or years. Be patient and persistent.

The key is to open the minds of the decision makers, potential advocates, or other people involved, so that everyone considers the case for all three theories. Once their minds are open, it becomes much easier for them to focus on the evidence for and against each theory and understand what is really going on. The following example applies the three theories’ reasoning to an alleged domestic violence situation.

## The Family

Carolyn calls the police and says that Kevin, her boyfriend and father of their two-year-old, has been beating her. The police arrive and Kevin says he never touched her. Instead, he says she hit her head against the wall to give herself a bruise, to get him kicked out of the house. She was mad at him because he wouldn't give her money to buy drugs. The police have to decide who to believe, and whether to remove one of them from the home—often very quickly.

Which story do you believe? Did you find yourself automatically believing Carolyn or Kevin? If you did, there's a good chance that you guessed wrong. It's called *confirmation bias*. This means that you are predisposed to believe one theory and therefore you are likely to prove it to yourself, and miss all the evidence that points to the truth.

Instead, take the three-theories approach and look for any patterns of behavior that tend to prove or disprove each theory in this case. For example, does Kevin have a history of domestic violence? The police can easily look up his arrest record. Does Carolyn have a history of drug use? The police could look for needle marks or drug scabs on her body; or ask Kevin for evidence of her drug use, such as hospital records or multiple prescriptions for pills. For the sake of safety, especially for the child, you can see the benefit of knowing what patterns of behavior to look for. Personality awareness skills can be very helpful here.

Of course, by now, you should be considering the possibility that both of them have a history of bad behavior. But you cannot assume that, as I have seen many cases where an abused woman has been falsely accused of using drugs; or a man has been falsely accused of domestic violence. All three theories must be considered, or decision makers may help the wrong person—and in this case, possibly put a child's life at risk.

Unfortunately, sometimes police, counselors, lawyers, judges, and other decision makers fail to consider all three theories fully, and get it wrong.

## Some Final Words

Dealing with high-conflict people often requires Targets of Blame to get help and support from others to fully break away from a person or situation. This is especially true because HCPs so quickly recruit and gain support from negative advocates. Yet getting help in dealing with an HCP involves explaining their confusing patterns of behavior, made even more difficult by the fact that HCPs can make their Targets of Blame look like the problem—the only problem.

Therefore, it's important to ask others to consider that there are at least three theories to each conflict situation, and walk them through the evidence and arguments for each. Tell them that you've recently learned about *personality awareness*, and demonstrate how approximately three patterns of their negative behavior, supported by approximately three of the worst examples that demonstrate each pattern, show that you've become the Target of a high-conflict person. Remember:

### THE THREE 3'S:

*3 Theories, 3 Patterns, 3 Examples of Each.*

In general, don't waste your time and emotional energy in trying to convince those who don't want to understand your situation or who blame you for your circumstances. It's not your fault, and it can quickly become exhausting and detrimental to you to attempt to bring them around. Many people lack personality awareness, may find it hard to understand your side, or may have a high-conflict personality of their own. Try not to take their lack of support personally. Instead, put your energy into finding people who do listen and understand.

## Chapter 11

---

### The HCP Theory

**S**OONER OR LATER, people ask me: Why are there high-conflict personalities?

And why do their numbers seem to be increasing in society? I have been asked these two questions hundreds of times and I have been thinking about them for almost two decades. In this chapter, I'll do my best to answer them in a historical context and offer my own interpretation about what this means for the future of our society—put together, it's what I call *the HCP Theory*.

So if these five types of people are so destructive, why do they still exist? My belief is that the “wiring” of the high-conflict brain that causes their extreme behaviors has historically been an asset to society in wartime but can be unnecessarily disruptive in peaceful civilizations. Their prevalence seems to increase or decrease in history based on how well-organized or disorganized a society is at that given time. In times of social upheaval, we seem to see more HCPs. For example, we are currently seeing an uptick in high-conflict personalities, partly because we are living in a time of rapid technological and social change, which is exacerbated by a huge media culture that focuses on images of negative, high-conflict behavior. The media focuses on these negative images and behaviors to grab your attention, but they're also teaching new generations that this is the new normal for relationship behavior. For some, this media diet becomes a rigid part of their personality—a high-conflict personality.

### Two Hemispheres of the Brain

To follow the HCP Theory, we first need to understand that high-conflict personalities and personality disorders usually go hand in hand. This is an important connection that most legal and workplace professionals know nothing about.

As we discussed earlier, this connection explains their all-or-nothing thinking, unmanaged emotions, tendency to blame others for their problems, and extreme behavior—all characteristic of personality disorders. But then I learned that high-conflict people and those with personality disorders likely share a key biological similarity as well.

Several years ago I attended a two-day seminar for therapists about “right brain” communication with Dr. Allan Schore, a psychiatrist and brain researcher at UCLA.<sup>1</sup> From that seminar and after looking into further brain research, the following started to make sense to me regarding high-conflict behavior.

All people have two fundamentally different systems for solving conflicts, each of which activates a different side of our brains:

- One for acting quickly in a crisis, possibly to save our lives.
- The other for analyzing problems in detail and figuring out several possible solutions.

**The Relationship Brain (RB):** This first defensive, protective system seems to be most active in our right hemispheres. This part of the brain is always paying attention to our relationship with our immediate environment to identify any threats to us or potential crises. This includes physical dangers but also social dangers, such as a threatening tone of voice, facial expression, or hand gesture.

In fact, Dr. Schore explained that the right brain has more neurons connected to our bodies than the left hemisphere. So when you have a gut feeling or make a gut decision, you are more likely using your right brain. This helps us take action in a split second, if necessary, to avoid a danger.

**The Logical Brain (LB):** In contrast to the quick action of the right brain, the left brain seems to be where more of our complex problem-solving occurs. This includes looking at details, analyzing alternatives, and planning for the future. Of course, this type of thinking is slower but more reliably accurate.

## Working Together

Generally, the right brain and the left brain work very closely together, switching back and forth from one type of thinking to another. Dr. Schore said that most of the time our left brains dominate our thinking, but in a crisis our right brains

quickly take over to protect and defend us. However, when one hemisphere's type of thinking is dominant and shows more brain activity, the other hemisphere remains somewhat active. So how do they work together so well?

The answer lies in the "bridge" between the hemispheres, the corpus callosum. It usually has two hundred million to three hundred million neurons in it, connecting the right brain and the left. For most people, this connection works fairly smoothly. But what if it doesn't?

In a study by Martin Teicher and his associates at Harvard University,<sup>2</sup> they found that many repeatedly abused children have smaller, damaged corpora callosa. This makes it harder for them to shift back and forth between problem-solving and crisis mode. So one minute they're doing fine, and the next minute they are inexplicably outraged and can't listen to reason.

The study suggests that this damaged corpus callosum may be one of the causes of borderline personality disorder in adults, many of whom have displayed difficulty in right and left brain communication in other research studies. This would explain why people with the disorder experience such frequent mood swings: from extremely friendly and logical to extremely angry and irrational and back again—sometimes in a matter of minutes. This damage can be caused by the stress of physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, neglect, or even growing up in a war zone.

In fact, Teicher's research suggests that a reduced corpus callosum may help a child survive into adulthood in a dangerous environment. With a smaller corpus callosum, he or she reacts more quickly for survival purposes in a war zone or abusive household, rather than spending precious time analyzing a conflict situation. Of course, a hair-trigger response to stress—such as a strong fight-or-flight response—does not work very well in a peaceful, adult environment like an office.

The good news is that proper treatment, such as dialectical behavior therapy, may help strengthen the corpus callosum as the person learns practical skills for calming their own emotions and distress, and as a result, build more connections in the corpus callosum over time.

Keeping in mind that high-conflict personalities tend to coincide with personality disorders, this and other brain research explains why many people with high-conflict personality disorders use faulty logic in stressful situations. It also explains why it's better to try to calm HCPs first by connecting, then analyzing, responding, and setting limits with them. If you begin aggressively, or by trying to give them insight about their own bad behavior, you are *talking to*

the “*wrong*” brain, which triggers an impulsive fight-or-flight response in the HCP and makes things worse. The CARS Method<sup>SM</sup> you learned earlier was developed in part to anticipate an HCP’s reactionary brain response and calm them enough to reach their logical, analytical brain.

## Social DNA

But what about how people are socialized? Depending on which researchers you talk to and which personality disorder you’re talking about, a personality disorder can be 40 percent to 80 percent inborn. Personality researchers say that we are born with some personality traits already in place, which are then strengthened or weakened by our life experience. Nature and nurture.

For example, all five of our high-conflict personality disorders seem to be significantly influenced or exacerbated by negative life experiences, especially during early childhood when lifelong brain development is occurring. For example, in early childhood the “attachment” between a child and his or her parents can make a huge difference throughout his or her life. If this attachment is insecure (the parent doesn’t sufficiently soothe the child and let the child explore at his/her own pace), then the child may cope by clinging to, losing interest in, or fearing the parent. These early-life coping methods are risk factors for developing adult personality disorders, depending on other positive or negative life experiences growing up.

If there was child abuse, or the child is taught excessively high self-esteem, there is also a higher risk of developing personality disorders, especially if the child is already born with some of these personality traits.

On the other hand, antisocial personality disorder appears to be more inborn than the other disorders, such that the person’s environment may play a very small part in the development of a full-blown personality disorder. This means that those with this disorder are the least likely to change as adults, and may be the least likely to care about you or anyone else in terms of who they hurt.

*Why are they born this way?* It seems that people with personality disorders and high-conflict personalities have always been present throughout written history. They may be part of the gene pool for a good reason, otherwise they would not have survived this long. Here’s my theory about this.

According to anthropologists, human beings have been around for about 150,000 to 200,000 years with our current brain capacity.<sup>3</sup> However, it wasn’t



until about seventy-five thousand years ago that humans developed spoken language.<sup>4</sup> And it's universally known that it wasn't until about five thousand years ago that we developed writing. Therefore, for half of human history—the first half—we communicated nonverbally. Probably grunts and gestures and facial expressions.

Even today, most people agree that nonverbal messages are about 90 percent of how we communicate. Since the right brain seems to handle most of our nonverbal communication, people who have stronger expression of emotions and aggressive behavior can more quickly grab our attention and more easily manipulate us, even in modern times despite having more access to written history and problem-solving methods. So the extreme traits exhibited by HCPs are, in some situations, actually superior traits for survival and success.

*Wartime personalities?* High-conflict personalities may actually serve a purpose in times of war. Think about it:

**Antisocial HCPs:** These are the warriors, who can fight without a conscience. Many enjoy hurting others—sometimes even killing them. They will do *anything* to dominate others and are most highly defensive against anyone trying to dominate them. They are big risk-takers and are driven to excitement, even when it may endanger their own lives. They are who you want fighting on your side in any intense life-or-death battle. They are also highly promiscuous, which helps rebuild the population after a war.

**Narcissistic HCPs:** These are the leaders—those who want to be seen as superior to everyone else. They can be very charming and highly persuasive in getting others to follow them and believe in their schemes. They enjoy treating their enemies with disdain and public insults, but they flatter those on their side with praise and attention. They can be very seductive politically and sexually. These traits help increase the number of their followers and persuade people to trust in them. They serve best as revolutionary leaders, as they see themselves as superior to the status quo or existing rules, laws, and institutions. But they generally aren't good at building peaceful societies or organizations after a revolution. As I noted earlier, FBI profilers report that many terrorist leaders have this personality. Overthrowing the existing order may be necessary for progress in some situations, but not in others, so these narcissistic leaders are often overthrown themselves during peacetime.

**Borderline HCPs:** These are your relationship protectors—to the extreme. They hold tight to their children and their spouses/partners. They may be the

best survivors in wartime, because they passionately protect their families against all outside threats. They can be extremely jealous and sometimes even violent in order to protect their home and community. As husbands, they may try to “protect” their mates by physically dominating and controlling them. As wives, they may be super-watchful for any infidelities on the part of their mates and may keep tight control over their children to keep them nearby. This may help the family survive against an outside threat.

**Paranoid HCPs:** These personalities are very suspicious of everyone. They may spot the enemy or potential betrayals before anyone else does. They are ever watchful for conspiracies outside and inside their communities. They also remember past offenses and hold grudges, which may help in catching traitors.

**Histrionic HCPs:** These personalities are very dramatic and reactive to the slightest minor event and social misbehavior. They excel at getting and holding other people’s attention. They can focus everyone on their own stories and cries of crisis. They can override individual distractions in a family or community, and bring everyone together to hear their alarming news. This may help the whole community survive.

You can see how each of these high-conflict personality disorders may have helped human families and communities survive even before there was spoken and written language. In other words, they may only be “disorders” in modern civilized societies, where there is no war or other extreme unrest occurring in day-to-day life. In fact, the ability and desire to manage and restrain high-conflict personalities may be a sign of a successful civilization.

## Cultural Influences

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I believe cultural influences also play a big part in creating high-conflict personalities. In their book *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell state that personality development is influenced more by the decade you’re born in than by the family you’re raised in.<sup>5</sup> I wouldn’t go that far, as I believe that family influences are more important based on my experiences as a therapist. But cultural influences can indeed be very powerful.

This is easy to see if you compare people born in the 1920s to those born in the 1980s. The first group is known by many as the “greatest” generation. They went through the Great Depression and World War II. They were well trained in helping each other out: with 25 percent unemployment, people losing homes, limited food available, it was a time of selflessness and sacrifice. The family, community, and nation were the larger causes to which everyone dedicated themselves. They didn’t even like to talk about themselves. All of this became part of their personalities as a whole generation.

On the other hand, people born in the 1980s to the early 2010s, millennials, are the first generation to grow up with personal computers. For millennials, spending time alone with numerous electronic devices is normal, and excelling at using these devices is highly valued both socially and economically. Looking out for yourself and your individual success has become the cultural priority. (Of course, this trend toward individual focus began in the 1960s and 1970s with the baby boomers, after birth control and smaller families became a cultural norm.)

Starting in the 1970s, individual rock stars, movie stars, sports stars, and billionaires became the most culturally admired people. Individual rights and freedoms have become the focus of people’s political energies—on both the left and right.

When the societal group used to be more important than the individual, there were lots of social restraints and criticisms for high-conflict behavior. Now, high-conflict individuals have fewer restraints, get more attention, are considered exciting, and often are rewarded with media attention, financial success, and political power for their actions. When these behaviors go unchecked and are celebrated, we get more of them.

In terms of personality disorders, all five of our high-conflict personality disorders appear to be on the rise. The NIH study referenced throughout this book showed the highest number of personality disorders in the youngest age group (twenty to twenty-nine) and the lowest in the oldest age group (sixty-five and older).<sup>6</sup> Since personalities are fairly stable over a lifetime, it seems to me that this is the result of an increase in personality disorders in society, with each younger age group having more.

Why? I believe as part of my theory that our culture is teaching the behaviors of personality disorders through the intensive media exposure of the past twenty years. Since the 1990s, cable TV and the Internet (and the loss of print media) have escalated the emotional aspect of 24/7 news and increasingly extreme dramas, which emphasize bad behavior rather than good in order to get your

attention. While this is entertaining for adults, it's social training for children. If you were to suddenly land on Earth and watch our 24/7 programming, you would believe that the world was at war everywhere—even though it is more at peace than at any other time in recorded history.<sup>7</sup> So why do we see the number of HCPs growing in a time of relative peace?

*Disruptive personalities?* High-conflict personalities can sometimes serve a purpose during peacetime. High-conflict personalities get our attention and may lead people to disrupt the existing order when it *feels* like there's too much instability or social rigidity. We may be experiencing our own socially conflicted period at the moment, because parts of our society have become too rigid (income inequality, lack of upward mobility, government regulations, etc.) and other parts may be too unstable (the Internet, gun violence, wars in the Middle East, etc.).

For example, we regularly hear about technology companies “disrupting” established companies and industries. Some of the early leaders of these tech companies have been considered high-conflict personalities, particularly narcissistic HCPs. These leaders are revolutionaries, pushing their extreme ideas and behavior to change the way we do things—sometimes for the better and sometimes for worse.

A prime example was Steve Jobs, who was well known in Silicon Valley for his all-or-nothing thinking, unmanaged emotions, extreme behavior, and his tendency to have Targets of Blame who he would impulsively fire, scream at on the phone, or humiliate in public.<sup>8</sup> He succeeded in disrupting many areas of industry (computing, music, cell phones, photography, etc.) in ways that most people would say was for the better, because the people around him were able to manage him sufficiently to get the best of his thinking and talents, while setting limits on his more extreme behaviors.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, not every high-conflict personality will be as helpful to society as Steve Jobs. Since a high-conflict culture will produce more HCPs, both good and bad, it has become essential for us to educate ourselves in the principles of personality awareness to survive the present and the future.

## Some Final Words

Nations, communities, families, and individuals need to be watchful for high-conflict personalities and try to have a balance of stability and flexibility in their

relationships with others. With sufficient rules and laws, many people with high-conflict personalities can be sufficiently managed and become productive contributors to society. But this requires personality awareness on a large scale.

It's also important to approach your personality awareness with empathy. High-conflict people may have been born that way or learned their patterns of behavior from abusive or indulgent childhoods, and from our current "high-conflict" media culture. They didn't choose to have personality problems and these problems tend to ruin their own lives as much as anyone else's. Yet these personality patterns are very deep and resistant to change. I believe that the more people are educated about high-conflict personalities, the more peaceful our personal and social lives will be.

And that's the HCP Theory! At least so far.

## Chapter 12

---

### Self-Awareness

TO SUM UP this book and help you remember its key principles, I want to keep it simple: For the past several years, I have taught an intensive law school course on managing high-conflict personalities in legal disputes. One year, some of the students wanted to know the one word that would summarize the most basic difference between HCPs and everyone else so that they could make sure that they didn't become high-conflict people themselves. After some discussion, we agreed that the one word should be *self-awareness*. In this last chapter I want to emphasize two types of self-awareness:

1. Self-awareness that helps you spot high-conflict personalities
2. Self-awareness that helps you refine your own personality

### The Essential Difference

People with non-disordered personalities are constantly monitoring their own actions, learning from their experiences and changing their behavior as a result. They ask questions like: “What did I do wrong to get that response?” and “What should I do differently next time?” Those are healthy, self-aware responses, and asking them of ourselves helps people get along. This second kind of self-awareness that helps us refine our behavior and personalities is the reason that human beings can survive almost anywhere in the world, alongside almost any other human beings. Self-awareness is essential to our collective survival and success.

But high-conflict people and all people with personality disorders lack this social self-awareness. They are destined to repeat a narrow range of behavior, regardless of the consequences. Of course, there is a range to this lack of self-

awareness. Some have a small ability to reflect and change, but it's limited—otherwise they wouldn't be HCPs.

In general, HCPs don't realize their impact on other people. They don't register that their aggressive and rigid behavior patterns offend other people and push them away. They misjudge other people's moods and think they can read their minds. They fundamentally see other people as adversaries, even if all of their social cues say otherwise.

You probably realize this if you are in a close relationship with a high-conflict person. You may always feel like you are walking on eggshells, because your normal level of self-awareness is always at odds with their lack of it. It can be exhausting. For HCPs, their self-awareness deficit leaves them depressed and anxious, because their efforts fail to get them what they want in relationships. Instead, they cause their worst fears to come true.

## The Five Types of Patterns

Here's a quick review of what happens to the different HCPs because of their lack of self-awareness.

*Borderline HCPs' worst fear:* being abandoned.

Their pattern of mood swings, intensity, sudden anger, and manipulation causes people to become angry with them and want to abandon them.

*Narcissistic HCPs' worst fear:* being disrespected and seen as inferior.

Their pattern of arrogance, insults, entitlement, and demanding admiration causes people to see them as inferior and want to insult them back.

*Antisocial HCPs' worst fear:* being dominated by others.

Their pattern of dominating others emotionally, financially, physically and by any other means necessary causes people to want them locked up and dominated by the authorities.

*Paranoid HCPs' worst fear:* being betrayed by those close to them.

Their pattern of acting suspiciously, holding grudges and accusing others of being involved in conspiracies against them causes people to whisper about

them to others and to turn away from them (“betray” them) after a build-up of frustration with them.

*Histrionic HCPs’ worst fear:* being ignored.

Their pattern of endless dramatic intensity burns out those around them, who soon try to ignore their stories and eventually can’t wait to get away from them.

## Personality Awareness

Now that we’ve looked at the problems of lack of self-awareness, let’s look again at personality awareness. This is about recognizing *patterns of behavior*—other people’s and your own. This is not intuitive; we all have to learn it. Until people learn to recognize these patterns, they’ll continue to get these extreme personalities backward and think they are strong, good, and appealing.

Once you know what *patterns* you’re looking for, you can use your self-awareness to know *how and where* to look. Let’s review how the WEB MethodSM can help you.

**Words:** Watch out for words that grab your attention, especially a pattern of all-or-nothing language. “*You always . . .*” “*You never . . .*” “*It’s my way or the highway!*” “*It’s ALL your fault!*” Keep in mind that we all say these things occasionally. It’s the *pattern and intensity* of frequently speaking and writing this way that should grab your attention.

**Emotions:** Pay attention to how the person handles their emotions *and* how you feel around the person. This is where self-awareness can be very important.

First, does the person have a *pattern* of unmanaged emotions, such as rage, tears, rapid mood swings, emotional distractions (such as becoming defensive against any little criticism instead of getting tasks done), preoccupation with past grievances, extremely loving someone they just met, suddenly hating someone they used to love, and so forth? Or are their emotions tightly controlled because they fear losing control? Do they eventually lose control anyway, with dangerous consequences?

Second, what are your emotions when you are around the person? Are they extreme? Extremely negative feelings are a warning sign that their pattern of behavior is likely a negative one. Extremely positive may also be a warning sign, namely of an HCP’s ability to manipulate you or your impression of him or her.



Are the emotions you feel appropriate for the situation? I've detailed common emotional warning signs for each HCP type here. If you find you often feel any of the following around a specific person, they may be an HCP.

**Borderline HCPs:** Do you feel extremely frustrated with the person, like you want to shake them or yell at them to get them to stop behaving in some inappropriate way? Do you feel like you want to abandon them but soon feel like you want to be with them again? Do you feel that no one has treated you in such a loving manner before? Do you feel that no one has ever treated you so badly before? Are you amazed that your emotions swing back and forth so extremely with this person? Do you feel like you are a weak person given how you deal with them?

**Narcissistic HCPs:** Do you feel stupid or otherwise inadequate around the person? Do you feel in awe of the person and amazed that he or she is spending time with you? Do you feel pressured to make admiring statements to the person? Do you feel pressured to make insulting statements about other people while you are around this person? Do you feel angry that the person is paying attention to other people more than to you? Does it feel like this person has lost interest in you or now insults you in front of others? Do you sometimes feel as though the person has forgotten that you exist?

**Antisocial HCPs:** Do you sometimes feel a sense of danger just being around this person? Do you sometimes get a cold, creepy feeling when this person is around? Do other people tell you that this person can't be trusted and is a con artist? Do you strongly resist the idea that this person can't be trusted and is a con artist, without asking anyone else for their opinion? Do you feel dominated by this person? Do you feel isolated from others by this person? Do you feel that you cannot safely disagree with or get away from this person?

**Paranoid HCPs:** Do you feel that you have to constantly prove your trustworthiness to this person? Does it seem like you cannot tell this person how you really feel? Do you feel like whispering when you talk about this person to other people? Do you frequently have to defend where you have been or who you have been with to them? Do you want to discuss your concerns about this person with someone else but are afraid to do so?

**Histrionic HCPs:** Do you want to get away from this person all the time? Do you feel trapped by listening to their stories? Do you find it hard to catch your breath around this person? Do you frequently feel distracted by their emotions and stories, so that it's hard to get anything done?

This is just a brief summary of some of the emotional reactions you would expect if you were around one of these five types of people, which we covered in greater detail in earlier chapters. Since HCPs are generally more emotional people, and emotions are contagious, an awareness of your own emotions is one of your best sources of information for whether you should be especially cautious around someone.

**Behaviors:** Does the person's behavior shock you? Does something in their history stand out to you as abnormal? Do you find yourself searching for excuses to justify something extreme they did? Remember the 90 Percent Rule. Has the person ever engaged in a behavior that 90 percent of people would never do? In general, try to get a history of their behavior in prior relationships, such as in dating or in employment. Of course, you may hit a brick wall because others are afraid of the person or don't want to think about the information. But that brick wall may tell you that there's a lot that's *not* being said.

Notice if you feel that you have to apologize for or defend the person's behavior to other people. Be aware if you are repeatedly trying to manage the person's behavior or trying to talk them into changing into a better person.

## Avoiding and Dealing with an HCP

Once they learn about HCPs, most people prefer to avoid them completely, but there are some basic precautions you can take if you choose to or have to engage with someone you suspect is an HCP. (Use your self-awareness to help you decide if you want to avoid the person or deal with him or her at some level.) Remember to watch out for "overdoing" your responses to any person at the start, like: overflattering (narcissistic HCPs), overcaring (borderline HCPs), overhelping (antisocial HCPs), overengaging with stories of danger (paranoid HCPs), and overattending to their dramatics (histrionic HCPs). If you feel the pull to do these things to calm the person down or reassure them, just remember how hard it can become to back off later.

If the person isn't too intensely high-conflict and you feel confident that you can manage your relationship with the HCP to benefit from their strengths or interests, then you may decide to deal with them using methods such as those in this book. Remember the CARS MethodSM:

- Connecting with empathy, attention, and respect
- Analyzing options or alternatives
- Responding to hostility or misinformation
- Setting limits on high-conflict behavior

Refer to earlier chapters for specialized advice, but remember to emphasize respect, give the HCP a choice in the situation, and be brief, informative, friendly, and firm when responding to their hostility or setting limits. Use your self-awareness to decide when you need support and/or consultation from others to assist you in using the CARS MethodSM to deal with an HCP.

## Self-Awareness Skills

Now that you have developed personality awareness and are using your self-awareness to spot HCPs, also be sure to direct your awareness toward yourself. From time to time, check yourself to see if you are demonstrating some of the behaviors of a high-conflict person.

Do you sometimes think you're superior or feel sudden flashes of anger or want to dominate other people? These are normal human traits and we all have them to a small degree. It's when we get stuck in a *pattern* of these behaviors and don't reflect on ourselves that we become at risk of becoming high-conflict people.

Regularly look at your own behavior and think about changes you may want to make to improve yourself and your relationships with others.

After experiencing a conflict, ask yourself:

“What did I do to get that response?”

“What can I do differently next time?”

Of course, you may not have done anything to trigger an extreme response you received. But you can always find something in any conflict that you could

do differently in the future. It's not a question of blame but instead a question of openness to learning and change.

## Conclusion

I have tried to inform you about a growing problem that affects our relationships in every area of our lives. I hope I haven't scared you but rather informed you so that you feel more confident in spotting, avoiding, or dealing with high-conflict people in your life. The key is self-awareness, as we've been discussing, including being aware of when you need support and consultation. You're not alone.

HCPs who can ruin your life are only about 10 percent of the population, but they affect just about everyone's lives. We can all help each other—including HCPs themselves—by understanding these personality problems, how to respond, and how *not* to respond. We can be compassionate while also protecting ourselves. Now, it's up to you!

# Appendix

## 40 Predictable Behaviors of HCPs

Since high-conflict people (HCPs) tend to treat all of their relationships as inherently adversarial, there are at least forty things you can generally predict about them, once you see the four primary characteristics of *all-or-nothing thinking*, *unmanaged emotions*, *blaming others*, and *extreme behaviors*. This is regardless of where they live, their level of intelligence, occupation, or social position. They:

1. Won't reflect on their own behavior.
2. Won't have insights about their part in problems.
3. Won't understand why they behave the way they do.
4. Won't change their behavior.
5. Won't seek counseling or any form of real advice.
6. Won't understand why they succeed in the short term (when they are initially charming and persuasive) and why they fail in the long term (when reality sets in).
7. Will become extremely defensive if someone tells them to change.
8. Will claim their behavior is normal and necessary, given the circumstances.
9. Will lack empathy for others, although they may say the right words.
10. Will be preoccupied with drawing attention to themselves.
11. May be preoccupied with the past, defending their own actions and attacking others.
12. May have a public persona that's very good, covering a negative personality in private.
13. May call others crazy when it's suggested that they are being inappropriate.
14. May bully others, but defend themselves by saying that they were bullied.
15. Will be preoccupied with blaming others, even for very small or nonexistent events.
16. Will have lots of energy for blaming others, since they don't spend it on self-reflection.

17. Will have Targets of Blame, who are intimate others or people in positions of authority.
18. Will focus on a single Target of Blame, and try to control, remove, or destroy that person.
19. May assault their Target(s) of Blame financially, reputationally, legally, physically, *etc.*
20. May engage administrative or legal procedures against their Target(s) of Blame.
21. Will constantly seek negative advocates to assist in blaming others and defending themselves.
22. Will easily turn against their negative advocates when they don't do as they're told.
23. Will demand loyalty from others and tell them what they need to do.
24. Will not be loyal themselves, claiming they were betrayed.
25. May be very secretive, yet demand full disclosure from others, including confidences.
26. May breach confidences about others when it serves their purpose.
27. Will truly wonder why so many people "turn against them" over time.
28. Will turn on family and good friends in an instant; may try to repair the relationship.
29. Will have few, if any, real friends over time.
30. Will not be happy most of the time, except when people totally agree with them.
31. Will have high-intensity relationships, starting with intense attractions but ending with intense resentments and blame.
32. Will have unrealistically high expectations of their allies, which will inevitably be dashed.
33. Will sabotage themselves, working against their own self-interest.
34. Will create many of the problems that they claim they are trying to solve.
35. Will project onto others what they are doing or thinking themselves.
36. Will lack self-restraint, even when it's in their best interests to restrain themselves.
37. Will do things impulsively, then sometimes regret it and other times not regret it.
38. Will ask for many favors, yet will not reciprocate favors.
39. Will respond to requests with unrelated demands, often ignoring the request altogether.

40. Will “split” those around them into all-good and all-bad people, triggering many conflicts.

In general, people are shocked at how intense, but predictable, these behaviors can be. Once they see the actions and four primary characteristics given on page 187, they can focus on avoiding the person or using the CARS MethodSM described in this book to help manage their relationship.

# Acknowledgments

There are so many people to acknowledge for their encouragement and ideas over the past twenty years that have led up to this book. First and foremost, I am very appreciative of my wife, Alice, for discussing these ideas with me, for sharing her insights as a therapist, for her early editorial assistance, for her tolerance of my endless writing, and for being a low-conflict partner.

Second, I thank Megan Hunter, who helped launch my speaking and writing career by believing that this information was needed in the world, and who cofounded the High Conflict Institute with me a decade ago.

My parents, Margaret and Roland Eddy, and stepmother, Helen Eddy, gave me life skills and a sense of empathy and service to others. In many ways my work has become a combination of my mother's community social work and my father's scientific analysis and teaching.

Over the ten-year existence of the High Conflict Institute, there are several staff members and speakers for the institute who I give credit and thanks for broadening my thinking, testing my theories, and making this work much more enjoyable and compassionate: Megan Hunter, Michelle Jensen, Trissan Dicomès, Diane Buchman, Michael Lomax, L. Georgi DiStefano, John Edwards, Shawn Skillin, Regina Schnell, Tracey Lipp, Louise Vandenbosch, and Andrea LaRochelle.

There are three friends who deserve special thanks for more than forty years of sharpening my thinking and encouraging my life's work in conflict resolution: Dennis Doyle, Norma Mark, and Austin Manghan. There are many other friends and colleagues who have engaged in hundreds of discussions over the years with me about high-conflict people and how to help them and those around them. There are too many to list here, but they know who they are.

I especially want to thank Scott Edelstein, my literary agent and writing guide for more than a decade. He has always given me good advice and information about the ever-changing field of publishing. He gets credit for this



book being written and for its title. About five years ago he sat down with me and said people need this book and that I was the one who should write it. When I was distracted by other projects and not feeling confident about it, he kept me moving forward. And here it is!

Last, but not least, I want to thank my editor with TarcherPerigee/Penguin Random House, Amanda Shih. She kept me focused on writing this book for the general public, with the idea that many people would have no background at all in this subject so I needed to make it more accessible. She kept asking me to explain things further, to give more examples, and to take out unnecessary comments. All of this has made it a much clearer and more useful book for everyone.

# Notes

## CHAPTER 1

- [1](#) American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Hereafter *DSM-5*.
- [2](#) I want to credit Gregory Lester, PhD, with presenting the “dropped from the sky” and “victim in life” concepts in his lectures on personality disorders that I have attended.
- [3](#) The *DSM-5* says: “Data from the 2001–2002 National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions suggest that approximately 15% of U.S. adults have at least one personality disorder” (page 646).

## CHAPTER 2

- [1](#) The *DSM-5* says that a characteristic of personality disorders is: “The enduring pattern is inflexible and pervasive across a broad range of personal and social situations” (page 646). Since people with high-conflict personalities tend to have personality disorders or traits, this is one of their characteristics as well.
- [2](#) Michael Muskal, “Phoenix Lawyer Shot After Mediation Session Dies,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2013.
- [3](#) Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protect Us from Violence* (New York: Dell, 1997).
- [4](#) The CARS Method<sup>SM</sup> is spelled out in detail in my book *It’s All Your Fault!: 12 Tips for Managing People Who Blame Others for Everything* (Scottsdale, AZ: Unhooked Books, 2008).

## CHAPTER 3

- [1](#) The National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, described in the *DSM-5* (see chapter 1, note 3), was funded by the National Institutes of Health. It was a large and detailed study of the prevalence of personality disorders in the United States population. They found that each younger age group had a higher percentage of these disorders than the older groups. This suggests that the personality disorders are increasing with each generation. Here are the three reports from that large study, which combined are referred to as “the large NIH study” throughout this book:  
B. F. Grant, D. S. Hasin, F. S. Stinson, D. A. Dawson, S. P. Chou, W. J. Ruan, and R. P. Pickering, “Prevalence, correlates, and disability of personality disorders in the United States: Results from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions,” *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 65, no. 7 (2004): 948–58.  
B. F. Grant, S. P. Chou, R. B. Goldstein, B. Huang, F. S. Stinson, T. D. Saha, S. M. Smith, D. A. Dawson, A. J. Pulay, R. P. Pickering, and W. J. Ruan, “Prevalence, correlates, disability, and comorbidity of *DSM-IV* borderline personality disorder: Results from the Wave 2 National

Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions,” *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 69, no. 4 (2008): 533–45.

F. S. Stinson, D. A. Dawson, R. B. Goldstein, S. P. Chou, B. Huang, S. M. Smith, W. J. Ruan, A. J. Pulay, T. D. Saha, R. P. Pickering, and B. F. Grant, “Prevalence, correlates, disability, and comorbidity of *DSM-IV* narcissistic personality disorder: Results from the Wave 2 National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions,” *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 69, no. 7 (2008): 1033–45.

[2](#) Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon, 2012).

[3](#) S. Carpenter, “Buried Prejudice,” *Scientific American Mind* 19, no. 2 (2008): 33–39.

[4](#) Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*. This author says that we are “groupish”—that human progress has been made because we learned to collaborate starting hundreds of thousands of years ago.

[5](#) Cass R. Sunstein and Reid Hastie, *Wiser: Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015).

#### CHAPTER 4

[1](#) Stinson, F. S., et al., 1036.

[2](#) *Ibid.*, 1038.

[3](#) *Ibid.*

[4](#) *Ibid.*, 1036.

[5](#) *DSM-5*, 646.

[6](#) Joseph Burgo, *The Hero as Narcissist: How Lance Armstrong and Greg Mortenson Conned a Willing Public* (Chapel Hill, NC: New Rise Press, 2013).

[7](#) <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/shame/201301/lance-armstrong-narcissism-and-what-lies-behind-it>.

[8](#) <http://comedownoffthecross.wordpress.com/2013/01/19/sociopath-or-narcissist/>.

[9](#) Alex Gibney, *The Armstrong Lie* documentary (United States: Sony Pictures Classics, 2013).

[10](#) Joe Navarro, *Hunting Terrorists: A Look at the Psychopathology of Terror*, 2nd Ed. (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 2013), 37–38.

#### CHAPTER 5

[1](#) B. F. Grant, D. S. Hasin, et al., 536.

[2](#) *Ibid.*

[3](#) Randi Kreger, *The Essential Family Guide to Borderline Personality Disorder: New Tools and Techniques to Stop Walking on Eggshells* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2008).

#### CHAPTER 6

[1](#) B. F. Grant, D. S. Hasin, et al., 951.

[2](#) *Ibid.*, 952.

[3](#) Donald G. Dutton, *The Abusive Personality: Violence and Control in Intimate Relationships* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998).

[4](#) B. F. Grant, D. S. Hasin, et al., 952.

[5](#) Paul Babiak and Robert D. Hare, *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work* (New York: Regan Books, 2006). These authors state: “APD is similar to sociopathy. . . . The prevalence of those we would describe as sociopathic is unknown but likely is considerably higher than that of APD” (page 19).

[6](#) Ann Rule, *The Stranger Beside Me* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1980; Seattle: Planet Ann Rule, LLC, 2017).

- [7](#) U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission Office of Investigations, Investigation of Failure of the SEC to Uncover Bernard Madoff's Ponzi Scheme—Public Version, August 31, 2009. Retrieved on May 10, 2017, [www.sec.gov/news/studies/2009/oig-509.pdf](http://www.sec.gov/news/studies/2009/oig-509.pdf).
- [8](#) Diana B. Henriques and Al Baker, "A Madoff Son Hangs Himself on Father's Arrest Anniversary," *New York Times*, December 11, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/12/business/12madoff.html>.
- [9](#) Ashley Reich, "Ruth Madoff Divorce? Bernie Madoff's Wife Cuts Ties: Report," *Huffington Post*, October 15, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/15/ruth-madoff-divorce-bernie-madoff\\_n\\_927295.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/15/ruth-madoff-divorce-bernie-madoff_n_927295.html).

## CHAPTER 7

- [1](#) DSM-5, 951–52
- [2](#) *Lassiter v. Reno*, 86 F.3d 1151.

## CHAPTER 8

- [1](#) B. F. Grant, D. S. Hasin, et al., 952.
- [2](#) *Ibid.*
- [3](#) DSM-5, 667.
- [4](#) *In re Carrington H.*, 483 S.W.3d 507, 521–22.
- [5](#) *Ibid.*, 509–10.
- [6](#) *Ibid.*, 507, 507, 522.
- [7](#) *Ibid.*, 507, 522–23.
- [8](#) *Ibid.*, 507, 513.
- [9](#) *Ibid.*, 507, 529–30.

## CHAPTER 9

- [1](#) This term *negative advocate* was introduced in 2003 in the first self-published version of my book *High Conflict People in Legal Disputes*, which was titled *High Conflict Personalities: Understanding and Resolving Their Costly Disputes* (San Diego, CA: William A. Eddy, 2003).
- [2](#) Justin Block, "10 Years Later, The Duke Lacrosse Rape Case Still Stings," *Huffington Post*, March 11, 2016, Updated December 29, 2016.

## CHAPTER 11

- [1](#) Allan Schore is the author of several books from which this information is drawn, primarily *The Science of the Art of Psychotherapy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).
- [2](#) Martin Teicher, "Scars That Won't Heal: The Neurobiology of Child Abuse," *Scientific American* 286, no. 3 (2002): 68–75.
- [3](#) Rob DeSalle and Ian Tattersall, *Human Origins: What Bones and Genomes Tell Us About Ourselves* (Number Thirteen: Texas A&M University Anthropology Series, D. Gentry Steele, ed.).
- [4](#) Carl Zimmer, "Monkeys Could Talk, but They Don't Have the Brains for It," *New York Times*, December 9, 2016. This article cites researchers who say that humans' evolution of speech came primarily from changes in the vocal tract allowing the tongue to move back into the throat. "It's not until 75,000 years ago that you find fossils of fully modern humans with a vocal tract like that."
- [5](#) Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 2009).
- [6](#) B. F. Grant, D. S. Hasin, et al., 952.

- [7](#) Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011).
- [8](#) Robert Sutton, *The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't* (New York: Warner Business Books, 2007).
- [9](#) For an analysis of how those around Steve Jobs successfully used methods like the CARS Method<sup>SM</sup>, see Bill Eddy and L. Georgi DiStefano, *It's All Your Fault at Work: Managing Narcissists and Other High-Conflict People* (Scottsdale, AZ: Unhooked Books, 2015).

## About the Author



Photo by Gregg Eisman

BILL EDDY is a lawyer, therapist, mediator, and the president of the High Conflict Institute. He obtained his law degree from the University of San Diego, a master of social work from San Diego State University, and a psychology degree from Case Western Reserve University. He has taught at the University of San Diego School of Law and the National Judicial College. Eddy currently provides training to professionals worldwide on the subject of managing high-conflict personalities, and is a part-time faculty member at the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University School of Law, and at the Monash University Law Chambers. He lives in California.

For more information and resources, visit: [www.HighConflictInstitute.com](http://www.HighConflictInstitute.com)  
[www.NewWays4Families.com](http://www.NewWays4Families.com)

[www.BIFFresponse.com](http://www.BIFFresponse.com)



Penguin  
Random House  
PENGUIN PUBLISHING GROUP

## ***What's next on your reading list?***

Discover your next  
great read!

---

Get personalized book picks and up-to-date news about this author.

Sign up now.



**Get more e-books from [www.ketabton.com](http://www.ketabton.com)  
Ketabton.com: The Digital Library**