

COLD VIOLENCE: THE PERVASIVE ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

職場冷暴力

Every office worker knows that your relationships with colleagues are crucial to career success; psychiatrist and business consultant Lin Yu-Hsuan is here to remind us that those relationships can affect your mental and physical health as well. Here, Dr. Lin helps us all get ahead of the game by identifying six toxic personality traits that commonly appear in work environments, and instructing us on how to stay clear of their influence.

If you live to be eighty years old, you'll likely have spent forty years at work. As every office worker knows, your interactions with co-workers determine whether that time feels like heaven or hell. The work environment also seems to bring out certain well-known toxic personalities – the overbearing narcissist, the exhibitionist, the needy follower, and others. What do we do when we find ourselves forced to work with such people? Do we resist them, or do we just grin and bear it?

In this groundbreaking book, psychiatrist and business consultant Lin Yu-Hsuan asserts that enduring the “cold violence” of abusive co-workers will only make things worse. Dr. Lin first teaches us to identify six psychological profiles that express as common toxic personalities in the workplace. He then offers suggestions on how to marshal your own strength and the support of others to contain and protect yourself against their influence. Should you find yourself in a situation so bad you're thinking of switching jobs, Dr. Lin also offers tools of self-analysis that will help you find the most beneficial way to leave your current job and land in a better position.

Dr. Lin is one of the few psychiatrist who also has extensive experience consulting for international businesses. *Cold Violence* employs his



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scientific expertise as a clinician in tandem with his flexible experience in business consulting to bring a fresh, informed perspective to a problem that confronts all of us. Don't let the question "How do I deal with awful co-workers?" torment you for your entire career; let *Cold Violence* show you the way to a better work environment.

Lin Yu-Hsuan 林煜軒

Lin Yu-Hsuan studied medicine at Chang Gung University and earned his PhD from the Institute of Brain Science at National Yang-Ming University. After becoming certified as a psychiatrist, he first worked as a medical advisor at Pfizer. Now he holds multiple research, clinical, and teaching positions at the National Health Research Institutes and at National Taiwan University Hospital.

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By Lin Yu-Hsuan

Translated by Eleanor Goodman

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Part I: The Origins of Cold Violence – Personality Disorders

When I first started working for international companies, the sales director at my very first meeting brought out a thick pile of documents. In addition to us parsing our business achievements, she also wanted us to analyze what kind of personality traits our best clients had, which she hoped would lead to more orders. As a qualified psychiatrist, I was extremely familiar with analyzing personalities, so out of curiosity I asked, “How do you go about doing this kind of analysis?”

“According to the four different personality types, of course – lions, owls, peacocks, and koalas. How do you psychiatrists go about it?” The sales director and my colleagues were interested to hear what I had to say.

I could easily imagine how using animals to describe different personality types might line up with how psychiatrists discuss certain personality defects. A “lion” is the king of the animal world, overbearing and imperious, which describes the narcissistic personality; the “peacock” likes to show off his gorgeous feathers and always needs a stage, which describes the histrionic personality; the “owl” seems learned, in control, and perfect in every way, just like someone with Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder; and then of course there’s the koala just hanging out in his tree, a perfect symbol for dependent personality disorder!

Today a lot of workplace personality analysis is done on the basis of these four caricatures, which themselves are found among the psychiatric definitions of the ten “personality disorders.” Of course, psychiatrists talk about the ten personality disorders in terms of mental illness. There are a few rare personality characteristics that are very unlikely to appear in the workplace.

But after many years of workplace experience, I believe that these four personality categories are not enough, since some merciless bosses and managers can be categorized as having “antisocial personality disorder,” and some low-level employees lazing about in hidden corners have “avoidant personality disorder.” Therefore, I would like to give a simple introduction to six personality traits that commonly lead to cold violence in the workplace.

These six personality traits can be divided into “malignant” and “benign,” in the same way a doctor distinguishes between malignant and benign tumors. Anti-social, narcissistic, and histrionic behaviors can be considered “malignant” personality disorders, because they cause a person to care only for their own good and not about the welfare of others. This type of unsympathetic boss or coworker is certain to inflict cold violence, and since it’s difficult to change such people, I label these “malignancies” that will metastasize, shift, and prove quite difficult to deal with.

In contrast, those with obsessive compulsive disorder, dependent personality disorder, and avoidant personality disorder care too much about others, as well as about themselves. These three anxiety-prone personalities come from fear and apprehension, and although they can be inconvenient, they are relatively “benign.”

As I introduce each personality trait below, I will first use a “workplace case study” to describe how they most readily perpetuate cold violence in the workplace, and then follow up with a deep “psychological autopsy” of these expressed behaviors. I will then offer some possible remedies based on the personality traits identified.

My intent in distinguishing between these different personality types is not to label people as necessarily psychologically abusive, nor am I using it as jargon to shame anyone. Rather, through this measured observation and analysis, we are able to gain insight into the shattered hearts such people may be hiding.

Margaret Thatcher, previous Prime Minister of the U.K., explained in a compelling and profound way why it is so important that we understand a person’s personality:

“Watch your thoughts, for they will become actions.

Watch your actions, for they will become habits.

Watch your habits, for they will forge your character.

Watch your character, for it will make your destiny.”

Understanding a person’s personality is a quick way of understanding their path in life. Personality disorders may be their weakness, but they are also the point at which cold violence can be addressed.

Antisocial Personality Disorder

Business heads and serial killers share a “calm” and “cold-blooded” personality which forensic psychiatrists and criminal psychologists label as the “antisocial” personality trait.

At National Taiwan University Hospital, I was the attending physician in charge of overseeing and evaluating those involved in criminal cases. I frequently had to evaluate the personalities of people charged with murder, rape, and kidnapping to determine whether or not they had a psychiatric disorder, and how these traits and illnesses had affected the crime. I was one of the few psychiatrists in Taiwan who also had experience working the business world, interacting every day for years with industry leaders.

I realized that although these two groups of people – business leaders and violent criminals – were worlds apart, their personality traits and methods were not in fact that disparate: when they acted, they did so calmly and unemotionally. Psychiatrists describe this type of personality as “antisocial personality”; books in criminal psychology call it “psychopathy”. In fact, among all of the categories of personality traits, the “antisocial personality” is the worst, and even the “Taiwan Mental Health Act” clearly puts antisocial personalities outside the category of mental illness to prevent cunning criminals from claiming their antisocial traits are a form of mental illness and thereby avoiding responsibility for their crimes.

I once went head-to-head with a man named Julio, who had been sent from South America to Asia Pacific region as a marketing director. The day he arrived in Seoul, the company held meetings for three days and two nights. When he got to the hotel that night, he proclaimed: “Tomorrow morning, we’ll meet in the main lobby!”

Early the next morning, a bus stopped in front of the lobby, and brought everyone to one of Korea’s most famous amusement parks. As the leader of the expedition, Julio never stopped urging everyone to ride the most intense roller coasters, and free-fall rides...The entire day, we screamed on one ride and to the next, and then, without giving us any chance to digest the terror, Julio took us to an fancy evening banquet.

I politely went up to Julio and said, “Hi, Julio (*dzu-lyoh*). Thank you very much!”

“Hi, Yu-Hsuan. My name is *Julio (hoo-lyoh)*,” he said, correcting my pronunciation to the proper Spanish one.

Julio is the only foreigner I have ever encountered who could properly pronounce my Chinese name from its English romanization. Not only that, but he was able to pronounce the difficult Indian, Pakistani, and Thai names as well. Everyone was very impressed by his obvious talent for languages.

Later on, after drinking quite a bit, he went around the table toasting people, drinking to a new goal: “Next year, you’ll make 180% in Hong Kong, right?” “Hong Kong up 250%! Cheers!”

I thought this was just the alcohol talking, but at a meeting the next day, Julio seemed like he was on the warpath. He had written the numbers from the night before – 180% increase here, 250% increase there – into a business plan as firm targets!

Everyone was stunned. Julio had sent in the troops and the effect was chilling.

Julio told us, “I know that in the past your numbers were inflated. Aside from loading cargo, what else can you do? Tell me precisely, what is our actual sales volume?” “What are you embarrassed about? This is a dirty business!” “If you don’t give me actual sales numbers today, what am I going to tell those idiots back at the headquarters?” Although he had put his finger on some real problems, his audacity left everyone stunned.