

5 Toxic Behaviors That Push People Away: The Best Way to Recognize These Behaviors and Change Them

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

There are certain people out there that everyone wants to be around. (See [Surround Yourself With Positive People](#).)

These people have more friends, get more jobs and are generally much happier than those who do not have these behaviors. In contrast, there are people out there who are consistently pushing people away.

I have seen the damage toxic behaviors cause. People with these behaviors have difficulties remaining in relationships, holding onto friends and acquaintances, keeping jobs and even getting jobs.

The best thing you can do is recognize if you have any of these behaviors and do what you can to fix it immediately.

1. Needing Validation Constantly

There are many, many people out there with low self-esteem who consistently need validation from others. Deep down, the need for validation is a survival technique. If we are not approved of by our tribe (or today "our company") we can be in serious trouble. The more people like us, the less likely it is that we are going to be "cast out" and expected to survive on our own. In addition, employers and our culture put a lot of pressure on people to look a certain way, live in certain areas, go to certain schools and live a certain lifestyle.

I think that a lot of people may feel they were not loved growing up, did not get enough praise, or did not feel validated in some way. Some people, when they were younger (before the age of 18), may have experienced profound issues fitting in with various groups. Many people become doctors, lawyers and professionals because they believe that this will get them the acceptance they crave so much. Once these people get into the working world, they want to be noticed, thought of highly and respected (by their peers and everyone else they encounter along the way).

In some cases, it is your parents' fault you are this way. There is something wrong with them that they did not build you up and make you feel more validated. There could certainly be other issues that caused this for you besides your parents and, frankly, it does not matter. The fact of the matter is that you likely have a giant problem.

In my career as a legal recruiter, I have always been amazed when I meet the people who are the most successful. The people who graduated first in their class from a top law school and have had a series of stunning accomplishments throughout their lives rarely feel the need to brag. Deep down, they are very secure with who they are. These people never tell others about their accomplishments, and their success (more than often) comes from within.

Years ago, I had a childhood friend with low self-esteem that used to send me a three-page email each week about what he had done. No one liked him growing up because he was always talking about himself. I would generally read his email over briefly and offer a few comments:

- "Great job on that date!"
- "Looks like you are getting closer to another promotion!"
- "I told you that they would really like you!"

After years of being friends with this person, he did something pretty shocking that violated my trust, and I told him I could no longer be friends with him. He realized there was no way I could be friends with him either. To my astonishment, though, after a few weeks he wrote me the following email:

"I really miss being able to send you an email about my week and have you comment on it. I do not know why, but I need this. I realize you cannot be friends with me anymore, but could I continue to email you each week?"

What this person was doing, of course, was emailing me because he needed validation and approval. His self-esteem was literally dependent on my weekly feedback. In this person's life, he did things mainly in order to get approval. He also based how he felt about himself on how he was perceived by others.

Your self-esteem should come from within and not from getting validation from other people. Your life is about the process and not each and every step, acquisition and achievement. If you constantly need validation, work through this with a therapist, take a course, read a book or something along those lines, but do not involve others in your need to feel good about yourself.

When you need validation from others, you drain them of their energy. If you constantly need to prove your worth and accomplishments to others around you, they are not going to like you. It does not make them feel good about themselves when you are acting like this all of the time.

- I once sat on an airplane next to a famous Olympic athlete and talked to her for over three hours without knowing who she was. She did not once bring up the fact that she was an athlete or famous. It was as if I was talking to just an unknown friendly, outgoing, nice young lady.
- In contrast, I have sat next to people who felt the need to tell me what great colleges they went to, what impressive companies they worked at, how much money they made and more within a few minutes of meeting them.

Which person do you think I liked more?

I am sure there are lots of people you know that are like this. They likely:

- Constantly talk about who they know
- Talk about how big their house is

- Always have the latest and greatest of something and brag about it
- Are constantly talking about their latest promotion or accomplishments
- Dress and act in a way that gets them constant attention

People who are like this are using the approval of others as a measure of their own self-worth. These people have a hole in their lives and do not have a deep down sense of their value.

While the need for love, respect and admiration is instinctual and is something that is important for many people, it is draining on others to give you this constant praise.

See the following articles for more information:

- [Your Power Must Come From Within](#)
- [Self Esteem and Lunch Room Tables](#)
- [The Importance of Your Sense of Self](#)

2. Thinking Nothing But Negative Thoughts

There are a tremendous number of people out there who cannot stop being negative. They constantly speak about

- negative things that have happened to them,
- how people have treated them poorly,
- why a given situation is bad,
- how things are not as good as they were before.

All of this negativity is something that is not fun to be around. This negativity is toxic and is something that is upsetting to the people around us.

I was at a party recently for someone celebrating their wedding anniversary. I was standing next to another man, and he was talking about how cheap the wine tasted and how insulting it was that he was being served such bad wine. I was about ready to walk away when the husband having the party walked over to speak with us. He was friendly and we spoke for a few minutes. When he walked away, the man standing next to me said:

“He looks terrible and as if he is about to die. He should not be having a party.”

The husband looked fine to me.

I was again about ready to walk away and get away from this negativity when another man walked up and started chatting with us about his new career in the financial services industry. We had a pleasant talk for a few minutes, and then he too walked away. The man standing next to me said:

“He looks like he got his suit from the Salvation Army. No one is ever going to give him any money.”

I instantly disliked and wanted to get away from the negative man. What is the point spending time with someone who has nothing but bad things to say about others?

At work, there are always people that are more than happy to talk negatively about their employer. These people are generally the first to lose their jobs when things are not going well.

You need to be positive. People are attracted to and want to be around those who are positive and not negative. Negative people sap the energy out of the organizations they are a part of and create problems.

See the following articles for more information:

- [Builders and Destroyers](#)
- [The Power of Gratitude in Your Job Search](#)

3. Always Acting Like a Victim

I know a woman who constantly talks about how awful her father was to her 20 years ago. I've known more people than I can count who love to obsess about how terrible an ex-wife or lover was. Many people blame the circumstances of their lives on others. I would estimate a significant portion of the population does. I know a man who was a cocaine addict for a few years back in the 1980s, quit in 1990 and for the past quarter century, has been blaming this former drug addiction for every problem he has ever experienced in his life.

If you are acting like a victim, you are putting the responsibility for your life on someone (or something) outside of yourself. You are basing your life on various assumptions about what “should be” rather than what “is”. This also makes you seem powerless.

People are attracted to and want to be around those who are self-directing, have power over themselves and do not drag others down with stories about how bad the world and others are. Employers want to hire people who can make things happen.

Some of the most inspiring people in the world are people who have overcome great obstacles and misfortunes to become extremely successful.

See the following article for more information:

- [Do Not Be a Victim](#)

4. Do Not Take Things So Personally

Many people become incredibly unhappy and unfulfilled based on things outside of their control. Most people who are unhappy and difficult to be around think that every negative thing that happens to them is about them (and not the other person). In reality, most people are far more concerned about themselves than you at all. Very little that people say often applies directly to you. If you see everything as a reflection of yourself, your self-worth is coming from somewhere external.

Years ago, I took a girlfriend of mine to party in a large townhouse in New York City. The girl having the party was not too friendly (to anyone) and, as we were walking away getting a cab, my girlfriend asked:

"Why do you think she was so rude to me?"

"I do not think she was just rude to you. I think she was rude to everyone. In any event, she probably thought she was richer and better than you or something."

To my astonishment, my girlfriend went absolutely ballistic. She started screaming at me, called me various names and in no uncertain terms told me that she was much higher class than me. She then proceeded to rattle off the names of several of her wealthy relatives and why they were so great.

My girlfriend took my statements about the party host (who simply was not very nice) very personally and made it 100% about herself. In reality, the host and my actions had nothing to do with her.

You see this all the time in people with low self-esteem. They take things that have nothing whatsoever to do with them very personally.

- I was walking through New York City years ago with a man from a suburb of Detroit (where I am from) and we were looking at art galleries in SoHo. The man kept commenting that the suburb also had art galleries that "were just as good."
- We went back to the apartment and the man commented that there were apartments and "lofts" in the Detroit suburb that "were just as cool."
- We went out for dinner and the man commented there were restaurants in the suburb that "were better."

You get the idea. The point is that ***the man was taking everything in New York City personally as if it were in competition with his identity and where he lived.*** If your self-esteem is this low, and you take this many things personally, there is something wrong.

In general, if people are very insulting to you and put you down (or otherwise do things to upset you), it is about them and not you. They are the ones with a problem. Do not let their issues drag you down and create problems for you. When confronted with their nastiness, just walk away.

Years ago, I was in the asphalt business. As part of this, I used to go to a factory to pick up hundreds of gallons of asphalt sealer every few days. There would traditionally be a line of trucks towing tanks at the plant each day having their tanks filled up.

There was an older man who had been in the asphalt business for 40+ years who generally would cut the line and drive right past a row of waiting trucks to the front of the line. He had been in the business a long time and felt he deserved the respect of others there.

At least a couple of times per year, someone who did not understand the ways of the plant (and was new to the business) would get out of their truck and start yelling, swearing and fighting with the old man. When this occurred, others in line (who gave the older man respect) would all hop out of their trucks and come to the old man's defense. These screaming (and in a few cases "pushing") matches would go on for several minutes and would always end with the person who challenged the old man being forced to apologize (or, if not, he would storm away from the plant).

What was interesting about this was that the old man was cutting the line for reasons that had to do with him. It never had anything to do with the people who got upset about it. The people who got upset were taking it personally.

Most things are generally not about you. Even if they are, it is irrelevant. As an adult in the working world, your self-esteem and identity should be such that you know exactly who you are and where you are going (even if someone insults you).

See the following articles for more information:

- [Do Not Be Vengeful and Let Hurt and Anger Go Through You](#)
- [Flow, Your Ego and Your Career](#)

5. Not Having Empathy for Others and Not Putting Yourself in Someone Else's Position

There are many people out there who have a complete lack of concern and feeling for others. They are more than happy to tear others down, make others feel bad about themselves, humiliate others anonymously online in a cowardly way, or just be plain cruel to others because they have the opportunity to do so.

One of the best ways to judge people is by how they treat others beneath them. In restaurants I have often been with people who constantly leave very low tips and treat servers horribly. I have seen people demean others who are working for them as maids, gardeners and so forth. I have known women that took pleasure in humiliating men and men who took pleasure in demeaning women.

When I see others who treat other people horribly and talk poorly about others, it upsets me. It makes me believe that these people will do the same to me (and they usually do).

Years ago, I had an employee working for me that took pleasure going onto blogs and writing anonymous (and cruel) comments about other lawyers and his former law firm. I never thought much of it, but I remember it made me uncomfortable. Years after he stopped working for me, he started doing the same thing to me and tried to do damage to me.

If you have a mean streak in you and like to hurt others, others will see you as toxic and avoid you. This will end up doing far more harm to you in the long run than it is worth.

See the following article for more information: [You Need to Stop Competing and Seeing the Differences Between You and Others](#)

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