

Stop manipulators in their tracks

with

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Manipulators are creative creatures. They use a range of tactics to control or overwhelm you.

Often, you can't predict what a manipulative person will do next. They might start a conversation by shouting at you, then next they're in tears. Constant shifts in behaviour give them the benefit of surprise – which can throw you off guard. To prevent this happening, you need to remember four key facts about manipulative people.

1. They're damaged goods

Some people are so psychologically damaged that they can't help treating others badly. You can't change them, but you can walk away from their game playing. Resist attempts to make you feel guilty, shamed or defensive. Instead, tell yourself 'This is their problem. I can leave them to deal with it.'

2. They distort reality

People with personality disorders don't think the same way you do. Often they see things in purely 'black or white' terms. There's no point arguing with them. You'll get better results by saying, "That's an interesting perspective" and then changing the topic.

3. The most flexible person controls the system

Successful manipulators try to throw you off balance by changing tactics regularly. For example, bullies alternate between attacking you and praising you. This pattern is much harder to deal with than constant aggression. To handle it, you need to focus on the here and now. Respond to the tactic the manipulator is using *right now*. Deal with aggression by setting firm boundaries. Take attempts to flatter you with a grain of salt. As the manipulator shifts their tactics, you need to change yours.

4. You can delay your response

You don't have to react immediately to what the manipulator says. Instead, buy yourself some thinking time by saying, "I'll get back to you on that in half an hour." Use this time to plan your strategy and work out how to set a firm boundary. You might even want to consult a friend or co-worker before responding to the manipulator. An external perspective can give you insight into new ways to handle manipulative tactics.

Memorise these principles and they'll pop into your head right when you need them.

Book one of our conflict resolution trainers to run a course for your team.

Contact us now.

Subscribe to this newsletter at: www.thinklearnsucceed.com.au

What to say when a manipulator cries

by **Eleanor Shakiba**

Director, Think Learn Succeed

There are many reasons people cry. Feeling stressed, guilty or overwhelmed can prompt tears. But some people cry in order to put you off guard. To handle this manipulative tactic use the following three verbal defence strategies.

Acknowledge without agreeing

Summarise what the manipulator has said, being careful to label the message as belonging to them. For example:

Manipulator: If you weren't so mean, I wouldn't feel so sad

You: You feel upset and believe it's my fault

In this exchange, you empathise with the other person's sadness. However, you don't buy into the blame game.

Challenge generalisations

Manipulators use words like 'always' and 'never' to blow things out of proportion. You can use precision questions to challenge this sort of language. Precision questions highlight gaps in thinking by drilling down to specifics. They usually start with *what, how, or when*.

Manipulator: Of course I'm upset. You're always picking on me

You: When, exactly, have you felt picked on?

This response helps you do two things. First, you challenge the generalisation by asking for specific detail. Second, you reinforce the fact that the manipulator's feelings are their own responsibility.

Be sorry and glad at the same time

'Sorry, glad, create' is a verbal pattern that empathises and sets boundaries at the same time. Here's an example.

Manipulator: You picked on me last week about the mistakes in the annual report. And now you're picking on me about the timetable.

You: I'm sorry you feel picked on when I ask you to correct errors in your reports. And I'm glad you've told me about this, because now we can create a new way of working together. How would you like me to bring mistakes to your attention in future?

This response makes it clear that you will continue giving feedback to the manipulator, but that you're willing to negotiate about how it is delivered.

Need advice on what to say? [Ask Eleanor now](#). Send your question and we'll answer it in a future newsletter.

Say 'no' to manipulation

Real Life Success Story

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Rhys was sick of feeling guilty. Whatever he did for Jeanne was never good enough.

Rhys and Jeanne had been married for six years and lived just out of Sydney. Their relationship had hit a dead spot. If Rhys talked, Jeanne wanted him to shut up. If he was silent, she claimed Rhys was neglecting her. Jeanne alternated between angry shouting and pitiful tears. Now Rhys wanted things to change.

He enrolled in Think Learn Succeed's course *Dealing with Difficult People*. There he filled in a checklist that described typical guilt-provoking tactics. After ticking every box, Rhys realised that Jeanne was a classic manipulator. You can use the same tool to identify the manipulators in your world. If you tick more than three of the listed behaviours, chances are you're dealing with an expert in manipulation. They:

- Play victim or tell 'poor me' stories
- Spend a lot of time in martyr mode
- Blame other people for their own feelings
- Act as though they are confused or unable to understand their situation
- Attempt to divide you and the people who matter to you
- Respond in a hurt manner when you stand up to them
- Exaggerate problems in order to lure you into solving them

Once he'd acknowledged that Jeanne was manipulating him, Rhys was ready to become more assertive. A strategy that worked for him was:

- Labelling each tactic that Jeanne used (e.g. she's speaking victim language)
- Asking himself what options he had for dealing with her (e.g. rescuing her, walking away, asking probing questions)
- Considering the long-term consequences of each option
- Selecting an option that would work for him

Using this strategy put Rhys in control of his reactions to Jeanne. You can use the same strategy to feel more assertive around manipulative types.

Learn more about it

Do you know someone negative who drains your energy? That's an energy vampire! Learn how to handle these people in our interactive training course *Beat the Energy Vampire*. Manage your thoughts and feelings using Neuro Linguistic Programming. Then find out how to get energy vampires to change their approach. This is a fun introduction to tools for positive thinking.

Book one of our communication skills training courses for your team. [Contact us now.](#)



What's New

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New Courses for Your Team: Show Them the Value

Every client conversation is an opportunity to gain more business. Learn how to influence clients by showcasing the value of your services. You'll gain more sales, happier customers and skills for career advancement. Learn how to sharpen your negotiation and sales skills. Feel confident upselling and negotiating with clients. Use hypnotic language to boost your influence. Get the skills you need to take your communication to higher level now.

Read course outline.

News from Eleanor Shakiba

Where to see Eleanor this month:

22 June: **Effective Negotiation** [Sydney](#)

Or book your one to one session with Eleanor. Call 0433 126 841

New Resources for You

Handle Guilt Mongers podcast

Does someone you know excel at making you feel guilty? It's time to take control of your reaction. *Handle Guilt Mongers* will help you do it. All you have to do is relax and take in the behaviour programming suggestions.

Download now

About Think Learn Succeed

We teach people to create, relate and communicate. If you need team training, we can create a customised session. If you want individual coaching, we'll deliver it by phone or face to face.

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