

**“Psychological character traits in business:
Part 2: Avoidant Personality Disorder and
Histrionic Personality Disorder by Dr Mark
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This article is the second of a three part series highlighting six psychological character traits in business. We will be examining two traits in each publication in this series.

INTRODUCTION:

In Part 1 of the articles of this series, a definition for what is ‘normal’ behaviour was presented. If you have not read the definition, you may wish to read Part 1 prior to reading this article.

Avoidant Personality Disorder (“AvPD”):

What is AvPD? “Avoidant personality disorder is a pattern of social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation.” (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders, (“DSM-5”), American Psychiatric Association; 2013). In another definition, the avoidant personality type tends to avoid close interpersonal relationships and social situations. The reason for the avoidant individual’s aversion to interpersonal relationships is due to fear of embarrassment or being hurt by others.” (Maret Educational Series, 2006)

When transacting with your clients and/or staff, you should become aware of traits of this disorder that may be prevalent. You may categorise the person as being shy or timid but that sentiment may be accentuated when the individual or staff member displays further traits. Some of these specific traits, according to DSM-5 are:

1. Avoids occupational activities that involve significant interpersonal contact, because of fears of criticism, disapproval, or rejection;
2. Is unwilling to get involved with people unless certain of being liked;
3. Shows restraint within intimate relationships because of the fear of being shamed or ridiculed;
4. Is preoccupied with being criticized or rejected in social situations;
5. Is inhibited in new interpersonal situations because of feelings of inadequacy;
6. Views self as socially inept, personally unappealing, or inferior to others;
7. Is unusually reluctant to take personal risks.

When considering the management of your staff, be wary of the traits when you are needing to appoint people to management and leadership positions. For example, it would be unwise to appoint an individual to a leadership and or management position if they display several of the traits of AvPD. Similarly, if a client is wanting to purchase a business (small or large), consider the nature of the business and whether the nature of that business suits their character. For example, it would not be wise for a client that has AvPD to purchase a clothing retail business when sales techniques are essential and contact with the public is not negotiable.

According to Hoermann, S et al, (2013), people with AvPD are “intensely afraid that others will ridicule them, reject them or criticize them” and, that their “social life is rather limited having a small circle of confidants”. Individuals with AvPD would have difficulty in making friends according to Hoermann et al and to move ahead professionally. Could an Information Technology expert exhibit these personality traits? That is difficult to say and nor should “we easily box/label and characterise individuals”, according to Guest (2017). According to Kantor, M (2003), “Psychotherapists treating patients with AvPD often fail to identify the problem and so overlook the diagnosis”. In other words, it is wise not to act as a Psychiatrist or Psychoanalyst:- that is not your job or part of your service charter.

It is not known whether or not an individual displaying AvPD traits could only be doing so in a particular ‘window’ period of their career and that those traits could only be temporary. For the service provider or manager, it is sufficient to be cognisant of these individuals and whether a display of AvPD traits opens the thinking for further questions to be able to provide the best advice or make the most efficacious decision for a management or leadership appointment to a position.

Histrionic Personality Disorder (“HPD”):

Individuals with HPD like to be the centre of attention with a style of speech that can be impressive but lack substance or details. HPD individuals can interact with others in a sexually provocative manner and behave with theatricality. You may wonder that you have noticed some inebriated individuals with these traits. Perhaps so!

You would not be criticised in describing some of the traits as simply as hysterical (deriving from hysteria) Sullz (2010).

According to Zimmerman (1999), in ancient Rome, the word "Histrione" was used to define actors that represented farces and were theatrical. Much of the research and derivative of HPD rests in history and the roots of HPD is traced back to Freud. Indeed, HPD was mooted to be removed from the DSM system and according to Bakkevig and Karterud (2010), the characteristics of HPD should be preserved as forms of Narcissistic personality. The prevalence of HPD is approximately 1.8% of the general population and approximately in 10%-15% of psychiatric outpatients and equal in occurrence in males and females.

Fleming K, describes the DSM-5 definition of HPD being, "individuals who display patterns of attention-seeking, often dramatic behavior [sic] to gain the approval of others. This behavior [sic] may be flirtatious, emotional, seductive or otherwise in order to capture the attention of onlookers". Fleming plainly puts it as behaviour that is "over-the-top behavior [sic], such as emotional outbursts, noisy displays of temper, compulsive attention seeking and self-centredness".

Novais et al (2015) states that , "the first providing a detailed psychoanalytic description of the hysterical personality style was Wilhelm Reich, (1897–1957), an Austrian psychoanalyst".

Some of these specific traits, according to DSM-5 are:

1. Hallow, changeable emotions;
2. Assumed intimacy with others;
3. Hypersensitivity to criticism;
4. Manipulative behaviour;
5. Disproportionate emotional reactions;
6. Sexually provocative behaviour;
7. A compulsive desire for attention;
8. Preoccupation with appearance;
9. Suggestible and easily influenced.

There is no doubt in my mind that you would have encountered individuals with some of these traits. You should remain reserved in your judgement about them. However, consider an individual's traits when appointing them to a potential position, whether it be management or leadership or general position. Further, do not confuse an extroverted individual with HPD as the two are completely different. If you are needing to appoint a sales manager, there is no question that the person needs to have an extroverted disposition but it is when the barriers of the above characteristics are seriously and excessively crossed that an organisation should reflect whether that individual is suitable to the sales manager position or elsewhere.

If you have clients with HPD, it would not be out of the question for them to exaggerate matters to you as well. Maintain good records and notes and take extra care when they represent to you that their company or business is doing exceptionally well when in fact, you have reservations that the exact opposite is the reality. In this scenario, the '*cum grano salis*' idiom comes to mind and if you are an experienced operator, you should have enough 'salt' in your experience to seek more information or make conservative assessments.

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