

The World Doesn't Pay You Enough to be Nasty

Being nice is overrated, but so is being nasty.

But there's a reason why we like to get nasty. It's a lot easier to start a fight than it is to take charge of your life when things seem out of control. Our desire to manipulate others often stems from the need to compensate for our own inability to feel a sense of agency in relation to our goals. We enjoy pulling other people's strings because those are usually the only strings we know how to pull.

It's actually very difficult to get caught up in a pattern of being nasty to people when you have a sense of purpose combined with an action plan that you believe in. For people who have those two things, being nasty usually feels like a distraction from a much more meaningful bigger picture.

People who routinely rely on nastiness as a strategy for being heard, gaining respect, or getting their way typically fall into five categories:

1. They're wealthy or powerful — These are the sociopaths who have a level of privilege/prosperity that insulates them from the consequences that would completely bury the average person.
2. They're shock jocks — These are the comedians, commentators, performers, and personalities who have found a way to merge their delight in nastiness with their personal brand/public image. They may or may not be wealthy/powerful, but they are able to get away with things that would destroy most people simply because they've built a reputation for being shocking or unpleasant.
3. They're Trolls — These are people who simply "get off" by triggering negative emotions in others. Some trolls are clueless. Some are conscious. Some trolls are correct in what they say. Some trolls are crazy all the way. Sometimes trolls succeed in ruffling feathers. Sometimes trolls fail to make any impact at all. The distinguishing mark of a troll, however, has nothing to do with any of those things. What makes a troll a troll is their craving for "dark ecstasy." Trolls get high when they have a reason to believe that they are the primary causal factor in someone else's anger, sadness, insecurity, etc. For a troll, dark ecstasy is worth the time and inconvenience. That's why they always outlast you. While you're busy fighting them, they're busy feasting on the emotional energy generated by the fight itself. As you become more drained, they become more satiated.
4. They're careless — By "careless," I don't mean the colloquial sense of being reckless, irresponsible, or arbitrarily nonchalant. I mean "based on the costs/benefits as they perceive them, whether their judgments are accurate or inaccurate, they genuinely don't care about the consequences of being seen as a nasty person." This may be

because they feel morally justified in some kind of way or because they see themselves as having nothing to lose. Regardless of motive, the people in this group have established a high tolerance for the social disapproval that comes with the role they've decided to play.

5. They're clueless — These are the people who simply lack the long-term vision or social intelligence to see how much damage they're doing to their social capital, networking potential, and public reputation. This is usually combined with the fact that they've experienced some short-term effectiveness here and there with getting what they want through immature/intimidation/invalidation tactics.

People in groups 1-4 may be repugnant, but they're quite easy to understand and predict once you figure out what drives them. And most importantly, people in these groups rarely see themselves as victims. They're too busy making victims of other people. And even if they were initially inspired by the experience of being a victim of some kind, they have successfully numbed themselves or insulated themselves from the various ways in which others might punish them for their nastiness.

What I find most interesting, however, are the people in group 4. These are the people who frequently get nasty, but who also frequently get frustrated when the world responds antagonistically to their nastiness. Think of the keyboard warrior who tries to emulate his favorite political commentator by posting mean-spirited things online in order to trigger someone on the other end of the political spectrum. Then when people misunderstand him or attack him or label him a [insert slur of choice here], he loses his cool and feels like he's being treated unfairly.

Now unlike his favorite political commentator, the keyboard warrior doesn't have a book whose sales are going to increase in response to all the insults being hurled at him. Unlike his favorite comedian, he hasn't developed the thick skin, or the cash flow, or the social standing, or the large alliances that enable him to keep his existing job or get a new job in spite of his online rants. This phenomenon extends well beyond politics of course. The world is filled with people of all ages who get unpleasant wake-up calls alerting them to the fact that someone doesn't want to befriend them, date them, hire them, work with them, put up with them, or trust them because of their self-perpetuated reputation for being nasty.

I recently watched a movie called *The Florida Project* in which one of the characters found herself in a situation where she really needed a favor. Due to a recent change in policy, a hotel she needed to spend the night at was roughly \$10 above her budget. As soon as the front desk receptionist informed her of the price, she immediately lost her cool and gave everyone who was in sight a piece of her mind. She told them how stupid their policy change was and she demanded (not requested) that they lower their price to the rate she

was expecting. The hotel manager refused to accommodate her request.

After a prolonged commotion, a guy in the lobby decided to play the good Samaritan and put up the cash necessary to pay for the room. I was shocked by what happened next. The hotel manager tells the guy he can keep his money because they didn't want a customer like that lady staying at their hotel. Do you think the lady learned her lesson? Of course she didn't. She got even angrier and decided to protest the decision by pouring her entire can of soda on the hotel lobby floor. Then she went outside and wept because she couldn't catch a break. This is the life of the clueless: Never afraid to get nasty when other people don't give them their way, but always managing to be shocked when no one wants to put up with them.

When I first saw that scene I thought "they should have taken it easy on that lady and given her the room." Then when I saw her pour the can of soda on the lobby floor, I thought "I can only wonder how much damage she would have done if she got inside one of those rooms." People who are very comfortable with getting nasty are also usually very good at finding reasons to get nasty. Such a gift does not often go to waste.

When wealthy celebrities get nasty, we aim straight for their heads. Then we tell them to publicly apologize, get rehab, and devote lots of time to becoming a better person who services their community. And in most cases of which I'm aware, there's justification for this. But the amount of people who will ever procure the "advantages" belonging to groups 1-4 are relatively small. Most of the nasty people in our world belong to group 5. They're clueless. They're gradually undermining their own ability to create the results that matter most to them because of their lack of social/emotional IQ. In other words, they do care very deeply about what others think and they need a significant amount of goodwill/cooperation from others in order to achieve their goals.

If you really want to help rid the world of nastiness, don't focus on Hollywood and Washington D.C. alone. Sweep around your own front door and help out your neighbor when you have the chance.

None of us are above the temptation to stoop to a level of behavior that leads away from our individual goals. Nearly everyone has a story or two about how they got their way by being caustic or combative, but unless you plan on becoming a public figure who consistently rakes in a decent chunk of cash for being a shock jock, being nasty will likely work against you in the long run.

In the end, I consider it better to not be nasty at all. But if that strikes you as some kind of high-sounding moral advice from a wannabe guru vainly trying to "make the world a better place," I at least beg you to consider the following the next time you're tempted to get nasty as the default response to not getting your way: Be slow to lose your cool unless

you're cool with losing. When you compromise your composure, you compromise your ability to win. .

Even if you go unpunished by the people you're being nasty to, you're risking a ton of social capital with the people who are observing you. And don't be clueless. Someone is always observing.