

CASE STUDY

This manager was highly intelligent and very successful in his technical specialty. His management peers complained about him being ruthless with them and completely isolated. In contrast, his subordinates were totally loyal and committed to him as manager. This man's psycho-pathology emerged slowly and the only solution was a carefully managed transition to another role with long term support.



Senior Manager - Global Investment Bank

"This bank can't function without me"

What appears as successful behaviour in highly competitive businesses can sometimes mask psychological dysfunction. If left untreated dire consequences can occur for an individual, the organisation and for the people that work with and rely on the individual for a duty of care.

A new executive superior had been appointed to this manager's area and he immediately restructured the department, promoting some and moving others on. Nevertheless, this senior manager retained his highly specialised team and continued as leader of this critical function.

These changes and their consequences placed unwelcome demands on this manager. He fell out with his peers and under-performance became obvious.

I was asked by his executive superior to help him address these issues. My standard practice is to not take on a case until I had assessed the candidate for motivation to change. It was during this assessment session that this man's serious psychological issues began to emerge.

Initial impressions of this man were of a highly intelligent and

capable individual. Nevertheless he was unperturbed about the fact that he had been asked by his executive superior to review his performance and address the relationship issues with his peers and colleagues. In fact his only response was to recognise that others had made comment about him but that, therefore, the real problem was with them not him.

Under other circumstances this lack of genuine motivation would have excluded this manager as a candidate for counselling and coaching. However, his initial presentation indicated signs of deep and serious psychological issues so I agreed to further assess this manager to confirm whether, in fact, he was capable of change within the bank environment and assess how much effort and work would be required to achieve anything meaningful.

Weekly sessions over the next 3 months confirmed my initial suspicions about serious psychopathology. He was completely self-absorbed to the complete exclusion of anyone else's needs or concerns. His intelligence allowed him to be highly manipulative with peers to get what he wanted,

often to the serious detriment of his colleagues' careers and the good of the bank. He had also manipulated his subordinates to the point that they were completely dependent on him for their ability to function within the bank. He controlled all aspects of their working lives. The outstanding feature of his personality was a complete lack of conscience about this state of affairs and his actions.

The signs were consistent with what has been termed by clinicians as *sociopathic*. This syndrome typically requires long term psychotherapy. In the context of the bank his destructive effect on others could not be tolerated further. A plan was developed, in consultation with HR, about a sensitive transition and exit plan with further support outside the organisation.

Left unattended, this manager is likely to have wrought major problems within his department leading to high turnover, conflict and stalled careers with consequent poor departmental productivity and performance. The destructive potential should not be underestimated.