

# Toxicity alert: Identifying classic signs of toxic behaviour in the workplace

If you have always suspected that you might be infected by toxic behaviour at work, here's a list of toxic behaviours to look out for.

By: [HRM Asia Newsroom](#) | November 12, 2024

Topics: [Employee Experience](#) | [Features](#) | [Health and Wellness](#)



Despite many organisations practising rigorous hiring and a relentless focus on positive values, toxic behaviours can sneak in, often masquerading as competence or ambition.

Even organisations designated as Great Places to Work are not immune and the onus is on leaders to prevent toxicity that may go under the radar from festering into a larger organisational problem.

Working with toxic people can create a tremendous emotional burden, leaving employees feeling emotionally and mentally drained. This leads to stress, anxiousness, burnout, and in extreme cases, severe depression and suicidal thoughts.

On the organisational level, these “black hole” bosses or co-workers often create conflict, eroding team morale, disrupting collaboration, and rusting trust. This negativity can become a breeding ground for gossip and finger-pointing, turning the workplace into a minefield. Productivity takes a nosedive, engagement levels drop faster than a lead balloon, and overall results suffer.

In extreme cases, a toxic boss or colleague might actively sabotage your career opportunities or growth potential, throwing a wrench into your professional development and leaving you feeling like you have been sucked into a black hole of despair.

However, it is critical that employees who suffer from toxicity recognise that the finger of blame should not be pointed at themselves, and for those who witness toxicity to step forward to help the victims develop awareness of their situation.



*“In extreme cases, a toxic boss or colleague might actively sabotage your career opportunities or growth potential, throwing a wrench into your professional development.” – Avi Liran*

For that to happen and for victims to receive the support they need, the first step is to be able to identify the symptoms of toxic behaviours in the workplace.

Is anyone in your workplace exhibiting these character traits?

**The Narcissist:** Look for signs of self-obsession, (they behave like the sun and you should orbit them), condescending behaviour, a need for constant praise, and a lack of empathy for others.

**The Bully:** Uses intimidation, threats, and verbal abuse to control others. They target the vulnerable and exploit insecurities, enjoy public humiliation, and constantly criticise with sarcasm or harsh language. Bullies shift blame, isolate people, and might even use physical aggression. They manipulate situations and spread rumours to undermine others.

**The Fault Finder:** They can spot a flaw in everything from a mile away and love to point it out, belittling others as if they are competing for a gold medal in nitpicking.

**The Victim:** The “BMW” guys who always *Blame, Moan and Whine*. They are pros at finger-pointing and constantly dodge accountability. Their endless complaints about misfortune could drain the energy from a power plant. They always seek sympathy and attention, often throwing a tantrum to get what they want.

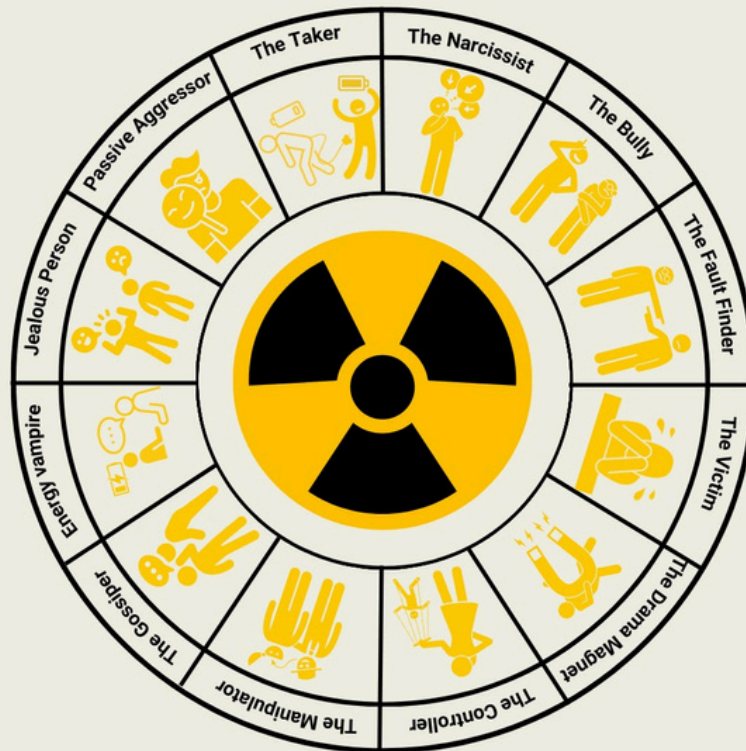
**The Manipulator:** Watch for their ability to twist facts, expertly milk your empathy or guilt, and spin deceit for personal gain. Their stories often read like a novel with more plot holes than Swiss cheese. If you leave a conversation wondering how you got roped into something absurd, you have been outfoxed by a real-life trickster.

**The Drama Magnet:** Notice their consistent involvement in conflicts or their tendency to exaggerate situations, turning minor issues into major crises to stay in the spotlight. They often share personal problems with others in a very emotional manner, seeking attention or sympathy. Their social media presence is usually marked by emotionally charged posts that often polarise their audience. They might also have a pattern of falling out with friends and maybe quick to assign blame to others while portraying themselves as the victim.

**The Controller:** The master of micromanagement and the sworn enemy of delegation. With their eagle eyes, they watch over your shoulder, craving updates like squirrel hoards acorns. They guard information like a dragon hoards treasure, believing knowledge is their superpower. If you feel like you are under surveillance and cannot make a move without their approval, you have found a classic Controller.



# BEWARE OF **TOXIC** people!



**Avi Liran**  
Contagious Positivity



**The Energy Vampire:** They turn trivial tales into emotional epics. Their “quick catch-up” spirals into a monologue marathon, leaving you feeling like you have binge-watched a drama series. They make every minor hiccup seem like a season finale cliffhanger. If your energy dips faster than your phone battery at 1%, you have likely encountered one.

**The Jealous Person:** Watch how they downplay others’ successes with dismissive comments or backhanded compliments. They might sabotage others with rumours or sneaky obstacles and often redirect praise to themselves. Their body language betrays them: crossed arms, eye rolls, or forced smiles at others’ good news. They avoid celebrating others’ wins and thrive on negative gossip. Constant comparisons and delight in others’ misfortunes are big red flags.

**The Gossiper:** Representing the office news network, they are always buzzing with the latest scoop, regardless of validity. They eagerly share speculations about others, turning whispers into full-blown sagas and weaving intricate narratives from thin air. Their stories come with a dramatic flair, often shared in hushed tones or behind closed doors. They float from group to group, leaving a trail of stirred-up drama and friction. If you want your news broadcasted, just ask them to swear not to share it.

**The Passive Aggressor:** Passive-aggressive behaviour involves expressing negative feelings indirectly rather than addressing them openly. Look out for signs such as denial of anger, sarcasm, backhanded compliments, hinting instead of direct communication, sulking, and intentional inefficiency. They tend to avoid responsibility with excuses, complain about you to others, sabotage efforts, and withhold important information.

**The Taker (leech):** Beware of the one-way drain disguised as a friend. They rarely offer help when you need them. They will disappear with excuses and have the nerve to come and ask for more. They charm you with requests for help, bestow on you guilt trips, and a never-ending series of crises are their go-to tactics. They seldom show genuine appreciation, ignore your boundaries, and are selectively friendly based on their needs. Watch for conversations dominated by their problems, leaving no space for yours.

Now that you have learn how to identify toxic behaviours in the workplace, the next step is to develop strategies that can help you handle toxic people.

---

*About the author: Avi Liran is an author, writer, C-level mentor and one of the top motivational and inspirational keynote speakers in Asia. Avi is a thought leader and expert in creating delightful customer and employee experiences, fostering appreciation, and building authentic resilience.*

*In the second of this two-part article, Liran will share some useful tools that can help identify the symptoms of toxic behaviour in the workplace so you can address and overcome the challenges and avoid the mental and physical toll of toxicity.*