

Abuse by Proxy

By Joel Patterson

An effective technique that's often deployed by the sadist is what is known as abuse by proxy. This is when the perpetrator of the abuse recruits Lieutenants to, sometimes unwittingly, do his bidding. The benefits of this strategy is that it allows the abuser to enjoy the sick pleasure he finds in the pain of his target, while simultaneously feeling the gratification that comes from getting away with cleverly manipulating others into doing his dirty work. For these kinds of people, power trips like this are irresistible. It again, keeps the abuser further and further away from the target's sight and keeps the target's focus on the second in command rather than the source of the abuse. When I worked at a local grocery store in the year 2013, this was my manager's weapon of choice.

Into the void

It was a beautiful morning in Huntsville, Alabama. The sun's soft gleam was magnificent. It produced just the right glow to enhance the visual quality of everything it touched, making the plants and flowers in my backyard even more difficult to look away from. And because it was mid May, the temperature was made even more comfortable by the earth's stirring breeze. I was in my goldilocks zone, everything was just right.

Still, I was deeply unsatisfied. The reason was because I knew that in less than 48 hours, I would have to return to my night shift job. I had been working night shift for about about 8 months up to that point and regardless, I still wasn't use to it. No matter how much sleep I had, I still felt tired all the time. Not only that, but I had just moved to this fabulous new city, that was at least ten times as large as the city I had moved from, filled with parks, mountains, trails, and more. Yet, since living there, I got to see so little of it. With an unsatisfying shift, unsatisfying work, and unsatisfying off days, something had to change.

So, on that same day, I decided to touch up my resume, iron my job hunting clothes, put on my job hunting clothes, and embark on a new journey to find a job. Less than a week later, I got a call back from a local grocery store, which was just a few blocks away from where I lived, and was asked if I would be interested in an interview for a produce clerk position.

That First Feeling

The interview was surprisingly short. After answering only two questions, the store manager exclaimed,

"I like him!"

And I was offered the job. After the giddy rush of excitement wore off by the time I got home, I remember thinking, "That was rather odd. What does it mean about the person who just hired me that he spends so little time

evaluating potential new hires. What exactly did he like about me?" Foolishly, I turned a blind eye to these thoughts by telling myself that, "This job is going to be better than the night shift." I got what I wanted and that was that. This was the first omen I missed. If only I had just listened.

I was hired during a time of transition. Doug, the store manager, had just recently promoted my immediate boss, David, to his current position as Produce Manager.

During my first few days of training, I liked David. He was pretty laid back, he invited me to share break time with him when he needed a smoke, and initially, he was even quite patient with me while I was at my clumsiest learning new things. However, this comfort I had around him gradually declined because the more we made small talk the more David, usually for no apparent reason, would expound information about himself, Doug, and the reason he was hired.

"The last manager didn't do shit."

"I was promoted because of hard work"

"There are rumors that Doug and I are dating."

Sometimes he'd even repeat himself the next day, but in a slightly different way. I was also surprised by some of the outlandish claims he would make about himself. When I asked him if he was into films, for example, his answer was that, "Yes, I'd consider myself an expert."

Even more shocking was the extraordinary lack of concern and sometimes unabashed hostility he expressed towards customers.

I recall one morning when an elderly woman asked if we had a particular vegetable in stock, which she hadn't been able to find on display. With sincere concern for this lady, I asked if she wouldn't mind if I looked in the backroom. David and I hadn't finished unloading the truck, so it seemed likely that this commonly purchased plant would have been there.

Luckily, my gut feeling served me well. I was able to find exactly what our customer came all the way from her house to purchase. It was really satisfying seeing the smile on her face as well as receiving warm thanks for my excellent customer service.

Much to my surprise, David did not see it that way. In fact, he was even quite irritated. "Don't do that for people.", he grumbled. "If it's not out then we don't have it. We've got work to do."

"Was that not what I was doing?", I asked myself rhetorically out of irritation. "This is just basic customer service 101 stuff.", I continued. A lot of my frustration had to do with the fact that this selfish incompetence was coming from a manager, who should have known better. I also felt resentment towards the fact that this man was getting paid far more than me, but clearly wasn't earning his paycheck.

David's cold disregard was not only aimed towards customers. I remember one morning the produce truck was running a few hours late, which was very unusual. Once the truck arrived, we were greeted by a driver who we had both never seen before. The first thing this man did was to make it a priority to apologize to us for the delay and explain that with little notice the regular delivery man was unable to make it due to illness.

While the late truck was surely an inconvenience, I understood the circumstances and was ready to put my chagrin aside to keep things

moving. Once again, David and I didn't quite see eye to eye. David's attitude was more along the lines of "let no bad deed go unpunished ."

David, as he strolled by the truck driver, who was at the time pulling large produce pallets into the building, made sure to vocalize his frustrations loud enough so the driver could hear him. "Boy, they really screwed up!" he said slowly and clearly. By the time David completed the sentence he had reached the far end of the room and was out of site. But, as I could tell by the truck driver's angry facial expression, his words still lingered in the man's mind.

After a while, I began to feel creeped out by David's behavior as well as suspicious about what he was telling me. I remember thinking, "Why else would David be telling me these things unless it was a lie he needed to reinforce and make sure I bought into?"

Projection

Eventually, the truth began to reveal itself and as a result, I started feeling more and more uneasy about work. My job, as it was explained to me during my interview was to help the manager unload the truck. However, as time passed, David's participation gradually diminished. It got to the point where he even stopped coming into work half the time, which left me with most if not all the work for myself. He did give reasons for why he couldn't work or arrived so late, which at first, I believed this to be genuine. "My mother's in the hospital!", he pleaded, which would then be followed by assurances that his absences were a deviation from the norm.

Instead, his absences became more and more frequent. He eventually began to contradict himself by making different kinds of excuses like, "my

manager made me do the same thing” as if his absences were normal. I remember thinking, “but, if you said the last manager was horrible, why would you model his behavior?”

The facts became even clearer when I had over five employees from different departments of the store tell me that the previous manager did indeed do most of the truck by himself and that David was lying.

To add insult to injury, David then began to incessantly badger me and nit-pick my work. For example, I could be hard at work, diligently stocking one area of the department only to have my efforts minimized by David who, after arriving to work nearly 4 hours late, would lurch over to an area I hadn’t started and complain about its “flaws.”

It’s an impossible situation because you can interrupt virtually any process halfway through to point out how the other half isn’t finished. Imagine, both of your shoes are untied. You’re tying the strings on the right foot and then here I come marching along wearing my Captain Obvious uniform to point out to you that the left shoe isn’t done. Would you not think I was the just the most square minded derptard?

It was an insult not only because I was highly regarded at my previous jobs for my performance, but mainly because in every case the simplest solution to his “problems” was for him to just do his job by showing up to work and helping! So, in David’s mind, having a single red onion shaving in the white onion basket was worse than lying to your employees and skipping work while on a salary. In David’s mind, I was the bad employee, not him.

Pro tip: If you are considering the business of being a full time conjurer, be sure to have an abundance of techniques in your bag of tricks to misdirect your foolish audience’s attention. As the the world famous teacher of magicians Harlan Tarbell put it, “Nearly the whole art of sleight of hand

depends on this art of misdirection". Projection is the narcissist's stock-in-trade.

David knew this all too well. It wasn't enough to convince himself that I was an awful employee. He needed to convince others that I was a bad employee. All propaganda needs to be reinforced. In other words, projection not only served the purpose of distracting David's corruption from himself, but also to distract others from David's corruption by steering their attention towards me. Point to the other guys, and people will be more blind to you. Now, that I was destabilized, phase two of my re-education would begin. It was here that I realized that I was truly dealing with an incredibly sick individual.

PHASE 2

I was four hours into my shift with over half of the work finished. David was nowhere to be found, but I was getting used to that. I found that the better I became at the job, the less I needed his help and also, due to David's obnoxious personality, I preferred working alone. Unfortunately, the relief was not as long lasting as I would have hoped. Five hours after his scheduled arrival time, he came moseying on into the department, where I was stocking bagged salads at the time. I turned around and asked how he was doing. Much to my surprise, he simply answered my question and walked away.

"What? No nagging?", I asked myself. I stood there, puzzled and tried make sense out of what just happened.

"I must have been doing something right.", I pondered. "Maybe since I've improved he's beginning to lay off. After all, I've been finishing more work quicker than ever." I was even beginning to feel confident.

Whatever the case might have been, I was just happy to have a moment of peace. So, I suspended my disbelief, relaxed, and continued my work.

Moments later, Doug approached me. "Joel", he said ruefully. "I try to give at least 9 compliments for every 1 criticism."

I was on the edge of my seat. Doug hadn't complimented me since I started the job one month prior. On top of that, I was being more productive than ever, so my hopes were beginning to raise for that rightfully earned compliment. Maybe even all nine of them!

My expectations were shot down as quick as they were raised, "But, I'm really disappointed in your performance today." he revealed. He then shook his head and walked away.

I was astonished, flabbergasted...amazed! It was as if out of the blue, the jolly green giant had grabbed me by the ankle, held me upside down, and shook me like a snowglobe, leaving my thoughts turbulently crashing back and forth from one end of my skull to the other.

It was disorienting. My thoughts were racing. Time began to slow down. I felt unreal, like I was in a bad dream. And I wanted to wake up.

Things got weirder. Within a few minutes, David, who looked to be in a lot of grief, rushed by me without saying a word and fled out the back door.

After taking a few moments to mentally dust myself off and regroup myself emotionally, I again spent a moment to ponder and tried make sense of what just happened. Within seconds this train of thought was interrupted by the store's intercom

"Joel to the office, please. Joel to the office.", the voice droned.

"What now!", I cried. This day was relentless.

Once I got to the office, I was relieved to have my worst fears proven false. There was no Doug, no write-up form awaiting my signature, and I wasn't getting fired personally by the store owner himself.

It was just a phone call.

"Hello", I answered. My voice shook a little. I still feared for something terrible. An angry customer, perhaps? Was I about to be cursed or yelled out?

No. Even worse.

It was David.

"Hey, Bud. How's it going?", he inquired as if he could sense my distress through the phone.

"Uh" I hesitated, "I'm okay."

Nothing could have been further from the truth. Honesty wasn't really important to me at that moment. I was more focused on figuring out where this conversation was going.

"Yeah, sorry about earlier. You know, rushing out like that. I got a call about my mother. She's...in the hospital again."

A jolt of irritation electrocuted my body's center. That story was really starting to lose its sentimental value. It definitely was not worth being interrupted for.

"It's okay." I kept my responses as short as possible. Again, this was not at all true. I wasn't okay. I hadn't the courage to tell him how I really felt. I was just saying anything to get him off the phone as soon as possible.

He wasn't going to let go control over the conversation that easy.

"Oh, by the way, I heard Doug got on to you earlier. What was all that about?"

"Yeah..", I paused. I felt an ominous chill cut through my vertebra. It was as if I was in the presence of something menacing.

"...he did"

"Yeah, you know, sometimes he's like that. I don't get him either. Anyways, we can talk about it, later. "

With my anxiety rising higher and higher, I could feel my brain locking up. I was on autopilot. I barely managed to respond with an

"Okay."

He left me with one last question.

"Oh, and could you stay a few hours late to finish the truck?"

I only agreed to one hour later.

Once again, I was left dizzy and off balance. In order to regain stability, I again stood there puzzled and tried make sense out of what just happened. Except this time, something clicked.

It wasn't until David arrived at work that Doug started to berate me. Before that, Doug had paid little to no attention to me.

So, the question then became, "What is David saying during his conversations with Doug that allows Doug to feel like he can disrespect me?"

Also, how else could David had heard about Doug berating me, especially since nobody was around to see Doug and I's interaction. Besides, he wasn't in the store for very long and it didn't look like he had the time to stop and catch up on rumors given that his poor mother was in the hospital.

Finally, I experienced a moment of clarity. David couldn't just sense my distress through the phone earlier, he was anticipating it, creating it, and dare I say feeding off it.

Only seconds later my heartbeat began to quicken, my face began to tighten and my jaw clenched. My anger was rising.

I felt like I had the kind of adrenaline filled fury that, without conscious restraint, could allow me slam my fist into a person's stomach and blow a hole through their back.

Having never been physically violent towards anyone in my life or the desire to experiment with such cruelty, this never happened. What did happen though was a conversation. And a very revealing one at that.

Before I clocked out to go home, I approached Doug and offered a request to speak with him in private, to which he accepted.

Surprisingly, I found out everything I needed to know during that conversation with little effort. Part of me thinks this had something to do with the way in which I approached Doug. Consciously, I knew that this man wouldn't be the person to have a rational and objective discussion with about David if he was indeed dating him. And if it were indeed true that Doug was dating him, then that would indicate that Doug is no less emotionally volatile, manipulative, and dishonest than David. On top of that,

if Doug is dishonest and manipulative then, most likely Doug would just end up lying to and manipulating me during the conversation. And that surely did happen, however I was prepared for that.

Having the misfortune of acquiring years of experience with interacting these kinds of people, I instinctively knew not to approach Doug in a confrontational manner. This would have undoubtedly provoked the narcissistic rage and since we were about to be alone in an office room together, there was no spectators that might put pressure on Doug to maintain his image as a professional. Image, afterall, is all a Narcissist has.

So, when I brought up the fact that the majority of the employees were saying that David should be working more, I positioned this as if I was confused, concern, and needed clarification. That way it appeared as though I was asking him a favor and that I needed him for help. These kinds of vain people love to be needed and to be put into the role of a wise consultant. A narcissist is not going to pass off that opportunity to reap that sort of attention.

Then he started talking, alot. And I didn't interrupt, "Yes, there are indeed a lot of *rumors* going on about David and I.."

I was confused at first until I remembered what David had blathered about earlier regarding how , "people think Doug and I are dating!"

Once again I'm being told to discard a rumor I might hear from others, yet the only two times its ever been brought to my attention were from Doug

and David. So, this pretty much confirmed that the two were dating.

He went on

“But, I don’t give a damn. I’ll bite their fucking heads off!”

He said this flippantly, like it was a joke, but I couldn’t help but feel like there was a lot of truth in what he was saying or at least in the sense that he really is indeed quite vicious.

He continued.

“They just want to see him fail! Besides David doesn’t need to do the truck. He needs to think about promotions and truck orders.”

He then flipped the conversation so that I would be on the defensive. It back fired, “Anyway, what was going on today. David told me you were performing well at all.”

I had every I needed to know.

I seized the opportunity to push back, “That’s interesting because when I talked to David on the phone earlier he had no idea why you got on to me.”

I could see Doug’s brain short-circuit. Another thing I learned about Doug was that he wasn’t a very witty guy. The way in which he attempted to misdirect my attention was rather pathetic.

“Well you know, uh, David does have a nurturing side though. He might be rough sometimes, but look, he really does care about you, Joel. He does say good things about you.”

I felt like I had been dipped into a bucket of slime. There's nothing quite as nauseating as when somebody who is aggressive and disrespectful towards also attempts to convince you that they care. It's such an insult to the concept of caring. But, when you're in the reality distorted fantasy world of the Narcissist, wherein people like David are great workers, everything is bass ackwards.

At this point, I didn't persist. I knew that resistance would be futile. And while I did leave the conversation feeling gross, I also took with me the sweet satisfaction that comes with having one's gut feeling validated. I wasn't crazy. These people really were nuts. As a result, my next off day I took advantage of the extra amount of time by using it to fill out other job applications. Luckily for me, the pressure to run for dear life was lifted only weeks after Doug and I's interaction when I got a text from David informing me that he was fired by Doug's boss. The reason was due to somebody calling in and saying David had been coming into work high. David did indeed smoke weed, so when he was asked he take a drug test which resulted in his termination. Apparently, I wasn't the only one who was sick of David.

About a week later I met the old manager who held the position prior to David, who David so harshly criticized. This meant I had a chance to see if this guy was really the lazy jerk David had claimed he was. Sure enough, David was wrong. In fact there was absolutely not even the tiniest hint of truth to what David had told me. This manager was great! He was warm, friendly and worked really hard. When I asked him how often David had to unload the truck his reply was, "I always unloaded the truck. I only made David cut melons and make Salads."

Post Mortem

(I am not a victim)

After I finally reached the end of what felt like an infinite maze-like gauntlet of hellacious psychological torture, I was still in a wretched state for some time. Long after the abusive episodes had ended, I experienced nightmares, insomnia, and obsessive thoughts that circled back around the painful memories like moths being attracted to a bug zapper.

Perhaps the most tragic thing about being psychologically tortured for many years is that the abuser(or abusers) becomes internalized. Internalization is the process by which the attitudes, values, standards and opinions of others is integrated into one's own sense of identity. It happens automatically and undoing this can take many years. When these introjects become activated it feels nearly as unpleasant as if the abuser were present. The healing process has been long and arduous, but I have made

great strides. I often experience my mind as quite, calm and peaceful. Overall, I'd say I'm doing quite well.

At the end of it all, I also had many questions answered. With all of David and Doug's lies being exposed, my gut feelings were validated, which reminded me to take my internal alarm system more seriously. However there was one question that still remained, one that I may never be able to answer...

Did I Encounter a Sociopath?

It's a question that occasionally appears in my mind when I recall these dreadful memories. It often is coupled with other questions such as, given the fact that I'm not a mental health professional how could I know? How do you figure out if one is a sociopath? What kind of behavior would give a this man away?

Would it be his blatant hostility and selfishness he displayed towards customers and vendors? Would it be his grandiose and deranged self image as was displayed when declaring himself as a movie expert? Would it be his willingness to steal company money by choosing to skip work the majority of the time while on a salary? His willingness to manipulate people? Was it his sadism? Would it be his chronic lying, which were not just mild lies, but lies which had absolute no grounding in reality or plausibility whatsoever? Mind you, I'm being generous by omitting other examples just for the sake of brevity.

In my amateur opinion, I would like to make the case that actually, none of these examples would be sufficient. This opinion is informed by a book I read on the subject entitled “The Sociopath Next” by Martha Stout.

According to Martha stout the number one way to tell if someone is a sociopath or untrustworthy, is not a facial expression or an odd subtlety in the way they look at you, but rather it is repeatedly doing egregious things followed by an appeal to sympathy.

This was precisely the very tactic which was deployed when David used the story of his “poor Mother in the hospital” directly after the incident wherein he influenced Doug to scold me and left the building. Not to mention the ominous creeped out feeling I experienced around the man. I personally think that it’s extremely likely this man was a sociopath and I’m not exaggerating for effect in the way some people do simply because they’re upset.

But again, I’ll never know for sure, so whatever the case may be, all there’s room for is speculation. And because of this, it will never be an urgent priority of mine to explore this line of thinking any further. There are too many wonders and opportunities that my future holds to focus my attention on anything less. I’m worth it.