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Jacket design by Kurt Wahner
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It isn't uncommon for a sense of entitlement to crop up in "great" companies. *People People* arms individuals at work and at home with the tools they need to change "what have you done for me lately?" to "what more can I do to contribute?"



PEOPLE PEOPLE

Scott Christopher

GIBBS
SMITH

WHO they are.
WHY they win.
HOW to be one.



Scott Christopher
BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF
THE LEVITY EFFECT

PEOPLE PEOPLE
Scott Christopher

In an increasingly impersonal world, where texts, tweets and e-mails have replaced warm-blooded, face-to-face interactions, People People have become rarer and, significantly, more valuable than ever before. At work, those with the "human touch" foster stronger professional associations, get promoted faster and make more money than their colder counterparts; and in their personal lives, People People do better socially, enjoy more lasting relationships and live longer, healthier lives than the "unenlightened."

What makes a People Person? Using case studies, research, interviews and observations from a lifetime of paying attention, work culture expert and humorist Scott Christopher identifies four basic qualities that redefine the notion of being a People Person. At its core, it's less about being good *with* people than it is about being good *to* people.

CHAPTER THREE

What Is a People Person and Why Should I CARE?

Part Two

It is typically at this juncture in my speeches or workshops when the question is raised, “Don’t ‘nice guys’ finish last?” This is often followed by its first cousin: “There sure are a lot of Jerks out there doing pretty well for themselves!”

Nice Guys and Jerks

A study published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* concluded that people who break the rules, flaunt societal norms or act rudely (i.e., Jerks) are perceived as more powerful than their more civil counterparts. When people have power—either formal or informal, depending on their title, position, resources or politics—they act the part. Powerful people smile less, interrupt others and speak in a louder voice. Curiously, the study found that even people *without* power, but who don’t respect the basic rules of social behavior, actually lead others to believe that they *do* have power.

The Jerk-esque examples used in the research included a traveler ignoring an “Employees Only” sign near a coffeepot and boldly helping himself to a cup; a man behaving rudely at a restaurant—putting his feet up on a chair and flicking his cigarette ashes on the floor; a bookkeeper bending certain accounting rules as a shortcut; and a student arriving late, throwing his bag down and putting his feet up on the table. The rule breakers were perceived by observers as more in control and more powerful compared to people who didn’t steal the coffee or didn’t break accounting rules. Participants viewed these people as more likely to “get to make decisions” and able to “get people to listen to what [they say].” They are viewed as having a stronger will and greater sense of liberation to do what they please because they seem to have more power.¹

What makes people rise to power has long been a question in social science. Previous research has found predictors of power such as personality traits like extroversion and dominance, or demographic characteristics like gender or ethnicity, or nonverbal behaviors. This study now adds “violating norms” to the list of predictors. In People People terms, Jerks gain power by violating norms and seemingly get ahead.

Great. So nice guys *do* finish last? Don’t let it keep you up at nights. The logic is flawed. A rude person’s perceived power is a product of Jerky behavior and ultimately nets them nothing. Continued rudeness and norm violations are sure to end ugly. Here’s how the scientists explained it:

Because power leads to behavioral dis-inhibition, the powerful are more likely to violate norms. Doing so in turn leads other people to perceive them as powerful, as we have demonstrated. As individuals thus gain power, their behavior becomes even more liberated, possibly leading to more norm violations, and thus evoking a self-reinforcing process. This vicious cycle of norm violations and power affordance may play a role in the emergence and perpetuation of a multitude of undesirable social and organizational behaviors such as fraud, sexual harassment, and violence.²

I believe the adage “What goes around comes around” is a fitting phrase here.

How often we see full-on rude, gasbag Jerks that fraudulently Type I their way into an organization, many times in a leadership position. I am reminded of a company I worked for years ago where this happened. They were looking to replace an outgoing manager with a new hire, rather than promote from within, to stimulate a sense of new blood and fresh ideas. This flawed and all-too-common practice usually fails more than it succeeds. The candidate blew into the building with an easy breeziness, charming the ladies and impressing the gents. His comfortable smile and affable spontaneity made other applicants forgettable. The team was taken by his quick and insightful answers, his instant connection to others and his playful sense of humor. He was experienced, smart and capable. Of course he was hired. (No, it wasn’t me. But I’m flattered you thought so.)

In short order, this charming “People Person” that everyone swooned over switched off the façade and became a rude, belittling power player. It’s nothing new; it happens all the time. The bait and switch. The minute the contract was signed and while the ink on the ID badge photo was still drying, the show was over. He began playing his Jerk card to the fullest and, true to the research, was perceived as a powerful person. His brusque, succinct orders or put-downs were often mixed with an unsettling wry grin, leaving everyone to wonder if he was only kidding. He was not. He was a Jerk, grinning because he was pleased to be fulfilling his life’s mission of terrorizing innocent peers and subordinates. His rudeness-power cycle continued at an accelerated pace until it evolved into charges of abuse and sexual harassment leveled by his staff.

Jerks may enjoy their power and successes for a season, but in the long run People People, “nice guys” if you will, finish first, laugh last and laugh best.

Why “Nice” Is Best

1. Jerks burn out. Self-serving actions, insincerity, superficial back-patting and shallow, showy gregariousness all have a very short shelf life. Anything of real value at work or home is a long-term proposition that requires authentic business and personal relationships. Short-term successes or temporary victories are the rewards of Jerks and even many T1s, but People People try to nurture relationships that bear lasting results. A skilled Jerk might fool some for a while, but will eventually be discovered and will require serious rehabilitation and conversion to the light side, or implosion is inevitable.

2. People People endure. They enjoy much greater levels of job security, tenure and even longer lives. Studies show that some of the eldest of elders are “nice guys.” “When I started working with centenarians, I thought we’d find that they survived so long in part because they were mean and ornery,” researcher Nir Barzilai said. His pessimistic instincts were a bit off. “When we assessed the personalities of . . . 243 centenarians, we found qualities that clearly reflect a positive attitude towards life. Most were outgoing, optimistic and easygoing. They considered laughter an important part of life and had a large social network. They expressed emotions openly rather than bottling them up.”³ In other words, these old-timers were People People: positive, outgoing, optimistic, easygoing, laughers and open with emotions.

3. Nice guys (and girls) aren’t doormats and pushovers. People People are not, by definition, wimpy. Just because some of them do not possess the outspoken manner or debate skills

of a Type I trial lawyer in open court does not mean they are weak or will submissively defer to a loudmouth, hothead or smooth talker. Sure, some Type IIs might not hold a listener’s attention, but it doesn’t mean they can’t hold their own in a serious debate or discussion. Warren Buffett has a reputation of being a down-to-earth guy, despite being one of the wealthiest people in the world. He lives in the same home he bought years ago for \$31,000. He answers his own phone and wears clothes off the rack. His philanthropic efforts are legendary and he plans to leave 99 percent of his wealth to charity. You don’t become a billionaire by letting others walk all over you, but it doesn’t require walking all over others. Using intellect, hard work and ambition, Buffett has proven that nice guys can finish first.

4. Laughing all the way to the bank. *Harvard Business Review* published a study that found that people with a sense of humor make more money and move up the corporate ladder faster than their peers. Humor is a hallmark of People People, but is also one of a handful of characteristics common to Jerks as well. A People Person’s sense of humor will typically be appropriate to the time, place and audience, whereas a Jerk’s sense of humor, by definition, will be obnoxious, arrogant, crass or demeaning. A case can be made for a handful of hurtful, derisive, vulgar comics that have made obscene amounts of money being obscene—George Carlin, Andrew Dice Clay, Chelsea Handler, to name a few—but these are professional entertainers who’ve found their niche, not supervisors in the Finance Department at IBM. By the way, the wealthiest humorists ever? Jerry Seinfeld, Jay Leno, David Letterman, George Lopez, Bill Cosby, Johnny Carson. All have been celebrated

for their “good guy” comedy images. Though Carson’s professional success relied heavily on the ease with which he engaged thousands of celebrity guests night after night for thirty years on *The Tonight Show* (T1), off the air he was a notorious recluse. He preferred privacy and solitude over socializing and doing the “LA thing.” He supported many charities with his wealth throughout his life (T2) and even left \$156 million after his death to hospitals, clinics and other charities. T1 + T2 = T3.

5. The happiness factor. From a work perspective, the happiest people are those in jobs that serve, help, lift, inspire, teach, aid and heal other people. More on that later. People People are far more likely to be happy in their *personal* lives as well. Putting people first means placing others’ comfort, pleasure and needs before one’s own. Can anything be more truly gratifying than selfless service to someone else? A transcendent piece of wisdom teaches that when you’re feeling blue the quickest path to joy is to forget yourself and do something for another person. Some call it karma, others the law of the harvest. You reap what you sow. People People that truly get it and put others’ happiness first inevitably are happier themselves.

Chances are excellent that you know plenty of T1s, T2s and even a few T3s. You can probably rattle off a quick list of three or four within seconds. You bump into them each day at work, at play, at home, in the boardroom, in the game room or in the family room.

You may already be a People Person yourself. A champion of the cause. You’ll find bits and pieces of yourself in the pages ahead. Case studies, stories and truths shared here will encourage you and validate your existing efforts. Maybe by now you’ve identified yourself as a Type I or Type II and are feeling the not-so-subtle invitation to start acquiring what you lack.