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# Nice guys finish last

By Kate Spicer

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THEY'RE the colleague who came in as your junior and just keeps getting promoted, despite being a complete and utter idiot.

They're the highly caffeinated female boss who manages her team like a Serbian warlord, but thinks of herself as a really sweet person.

They're the overly confident, sports-car-driving guy who has had sex with all the women and mocks all the men.

In case you hadn't noticed, "assholes", as Americans call them, are everywhere and, what's more, they're doing really well.

### Ruined by niceness

The first line of Marty Kihns book, *A\$\$hole: How I Got Rich and Happy by Not Giving a Shit About You*, is: "I was the nicest guy in the world and it was killing me."

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His wife, colleagues, boss and neighbour, the staff in his local coffee shop, the people he bumped into in parks, even his dog and cat - everyone was taking the P, says Mr Kihn, who works for a marketing company.

The final straw came when his boss told him that, unless he started playing hardball, they were going to demote him to a less aggressive part of the organisation - the humiliatingly termed "soft track" - and upgrade a colleague Mr Kihn calls The Nemesis to a window office.

Philosopher Jung says everyone has an opposite they want to be, a shadow self. In Mr Kihn's case, that opposite was an asshole. He decided to turn himself into one - and, in telling his story, he describes exactly how you can do it, too.

### **Turn that smile upside down**

For all the humour in his mission, the truth is, it really worked. By finding the balls to act like an asshole, he crushes The Nemesis, gets a promotion, then nets a bundle of cash, and a second home into the bargain, by selling the book to Hollywood for a six-figure sum - all this despite clearly being a big pussycat.

"In corporate America," he says, "if you are ambitious, or if you just want to go for the big money, it more than helps to be an asshole."

Mr Kihn built a serious team - acting coach, life coach and both personal and dog trainer - to help master the art of assholism.

"You've got to try on a character for size," he says. "The acting coach had me dress up in a bear suit, stand on Broadway and have people stare at me to remove self-consciousness."

This was just the start. He also stood in a mall, giving a dollar to anybody who would insult him, to try to stop caring what people thought.

He practised aggressive sports such as boxing. He repeated asshole mantras and affirmations: "Clear your mind of all nice, helpful, self-defeating thoughts and replace them with mean, selfish, ass-kicking patterns."

Don't pray to God, pray to a higher power in you, wishing every ill, including bad haircuts, on all your adversaries. The use of eye contact is also important.

"If you stare at people hard enough, you can make them walk backwards," he says.

"I studied Al Pacino's body language in *Scarface*: no smiling, his eye contact is constant. He doesn't blink - Pacino's eyeballs must have felt like sandpaper."

An asshole never listens to anybody. Tony Montana from *Scarface*, and The Nemesis from work, were his key role models.

"A true asshole is someone who lacks empathy and has clear goals," Mr Kihn says. "Someone who unthinkingly takes credit for another person's actions."

He found inspiration everywhere he looked. He reels off some assholes: Donald Trump, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, Martha Stewart, David Letterman.

And Hollywood clearly is not short of assholes. "God, no," he says. "Nicole Kidman. I've been around her, observed her. I've never seen anybody with a more powerful sense of self."

### **Experts agree**

Chris Jackson, business psychology professor at the Australian School of Business, agreed being mean and ruthless at work sometimes had benefits, but warned they often didn't last.

"When you behave badly and negotiate hard and you treat people poorly, you're likely to get other people's resources," Mr Jackson said.

"So there's definitely a short-term benefit."

But when it comes to needing someone to do something for you, you're going to find it very difficult to persuade them, he said.

"You'll probably have to continue to be coercive, which only builds up more resistance and negativity and encourages people to leave.

"So instead of acquiring a network of colleagues who work together to solve problems, you acquire a network of people who are resistant to you and will try to bring you down."

### **Be a role model**

Inspiring people through good leadership, acting as a role model or by encouraging them to have your goals and values will leave workers more motivated to achieve what you want them to achieve, Mr Jackson said.

"But I want to make it clear that assertiveness and authority aren't necessarily bad characteristics," he said.


"Just because you know what you're talking about and negotiating strongly doesn't make you an asshole."

[Read full interview with Marty Kihns at \*The Australian\*.](#)

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Think mean ... the only way to get ahead at work - and in life - is to be a bastard, according to a businessman.

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