

Who Are Your True Hardnosed Problematic Workers?

part 1 of *Breaking Through the Barrier of Hardnosed Workers*

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by Ron Newton

Summary: A hardnosed worker is a self-destructive, emotionally self-centered, uncontrollable person who would rather cut-and-run than commit.

The tone of the general manager's phone call to me revealed the deep defiance to authority that he sensed in his workers.

"Are you the camp ministry that helps troubled kids?" he asked gruffly.

"Yes," I replied.

"Good. I have some for you — they're my employees."

The manager was desperate enough to ask help from my wilderness camp ministry that rehabilitated troubled youth. But he was also sincere in the belief that the hardnosed behavior of his employees closely resembled that of juvenile delinquents.

He proceeded to state that most of the drivers in his transportation company were acting irresponsibly, dragging morale down to a level that affected safety performance and caused high rates of personnel turnover. Nothing he had tried seemed to stop their dangerous immature behavior. He needed help, and he needed it soon, before one of his truckers precipitated more than a crisis of immaturity.

The complaint sounded familiar to me. Hundreds of juvenile authorities, unable to control their charges, sought to place troubled youth in my "tough love" camp ministry. Each sounded as desperate as the manager.

But was the manager simply a grump who was reaping the just 'rewards' of his poor employee management skills? Or when he placed the call to me in 1992, was he in the vanguard of recognizing a disturbing trend sweeping through the labor force?

To find out, I agreed to help the manager. What I uncovered, and what we should do about it, forms the body of this presentation.

A Hardnosed Sub-Culture

'Hardnosed' may be too kind of a term for those workers whose uncompromising obstructionism often place people, property and the environment at unacceptable risk.

Safety and risk control managers use a more crude expression — jerks. Even cruder? Unprintable here.

Politely, they are labeled stubborn or change-resistant. Universally, they are acknowledged as the single greatest threat to the success of risk and safety management programs. Their leverage is powerful according to Gregory Pena, Sr. Vice President at Risk Strategies Company.

"If an employer can't effectively engage the sub-culture (of resistance) that exists in most companies," he says, "then their best safety efforts are doomed from the start."

Despite widespread recognition of the problem, until now its cause has largely remained debated.

Veteran HSE manager Jim Hall views it as a decades-old struggle. "There are many older workers who are hardnosed and probably have been that way for decades," he says. To Hall, the real problem is "how do we convert those that have had the hardnosed attitude for years?" He

mentions the reluctance of such workers to give up the enjoyment they seem to get out of confrontation and “trying to push around supervisors, management, and the HSE persons.”

Others agree with Jack T. Moorman, CSP, Director of Health and Safety at Lee & Ryan, who states that “the most frustrating problem we have is the new employee with experience gained from another firm.” Moorman believes that new workers bring a prior attitude of non-compliance with them — what he calls “safety baggage” — making it difficult to address their behavior.

Some even blame the gains made in modern safety management for a resistance to further improvement. One safety manager says that she “frequently struggles with improving safety, not because our workers are outwardly resistant, but more because they feel they have already evolved so far from the days when safety was not a common part of the culture.”

Each explanation carries weight in describing the genesis of the hardnosed mindset. But until we define the hardnosed temperament accurately and scientifically, its correct cure can not be prescribed.

Such clarity is presented here in answer to the pertinent question, *what is a hardnosed worker?*

Without an accurate answer to this question, any solution to problems caused by resistant workers is speculative.

What Is A Hardnosed Worker?

A search for the definition of a hardnosed worker reveals that there has been little research into the personality traits and behavioral tendencies of change-resistant workers. The result is that the declaration of who is (is not) a hardnosed worker has been left to individual stereotype. A worker may be a jerk in the opinion of one manager, an earnest laborer in another’s.

Fortunately, I have been afforded the opportunity to conduct personality assessments on 676 supervisors and managers representing several industry sectors that arguably contain a high percentage of traditionally change-resistant workers — maritime, oil and gas, passenger airline, ship building and repair, construction and manufacturing. My collective findings are reported below, providing an identifiable profile — a recognizable ‘snapshot’ — of a change-resistant worker.

And, fortunately, the temperament of supervisors and managers in these industries is generally representative of that of the line-level workers from which they frequently ascend. As Joseph K. Johnson, ARM, V-P (ret.) at Brown & Brown of Louisiana describes, “Nearly all managers and supervisory personnel come up through the ranks of most organizations.” To know the supervisor or manager is to know the characteristics of his general labor force. By defining the change-resistant supervisor and manager, we define the hardnosed workforce.

The Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis™

The inventory I used to measure the personality traits (temperament) is the widely-used Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis™ (T-JTA) published by Psychological Publications Inc.

The T-JTA is intended to serve as a quick and convenient method of measuring a number of important and comparatively independent personality variables. It serves as an aid to those who must ascertain and evaluate the significance of certain personality traits that influence personal, social and vocational adjustment.

The core of the T-JTA is 180 questions that measure nine different personality traits in terms of their opposites — nervous versus composed, objective versus subjective, etc.

An individual’s T-JTA results are measured against national standards, or norms, that are revised periodically, then translated onto a shaded profile graph which indicates whether the results for a particular trait are, best to worst, “excellent”, “acceptable”, “improvement desirable”, or “improvement needed”.

Perhaps the strongest feature of the T-JTA is the ability to utilize it as a measure of how the person taking the analysis views himself, providing a “snapshot” of the respondent’s personality and projected behavior.

Sample Population

The collective findings for the 676 managers and supervisors inventoried is reflective of the following breakout.

Participants:

126 – managers (example: project managers, superintendents, port officers)

550 - supervisors (example: foreman, lead man, vessel officers)

Description:

Managers are those whose job function includes determination of the overall process of job completion. Managers typically oversee a number of supervisors. Supervisors are those who directly oversee the completion of job tasks as undertaken by various line-level laborers; the supervisor may participate with laborers in completion of the task.

Findings

The results of the administration of the T-JTA indicate that on average the 550 supervisors scored themselves in the “improvement desirable” area of the profile graph in 5 of the 9 personality traits measured by the T-JTA. Four of the 9 traits were scored as “acceptable”.

The five traits in which the supervisors rated themselves as “improvement desirable” indicate that they feel their personality is more closely identified with the first description (italicized below) of that trait than the second description.

trait A - more *Nervous* than Composed

trait B - more *Depressed* than Light-hearted

trait D - more *Inhibited* than Expressive-Responsive

trait E - more *Indifferent* than Sympathetic

trait H - more *Hostile* than Tolerant

As detailed on the T-JTA profile (Figure 1), these “improvement desirable” traits are found in the lightest of the gray shaded areas of the profile.

Similarly, the four traits in which the participants rated themselves as “acceptable” indicate that they feel their personality is more closely identified with the first description (italicized below) of that trait than the second description.

trait C - more *Active-Social* than Quiet

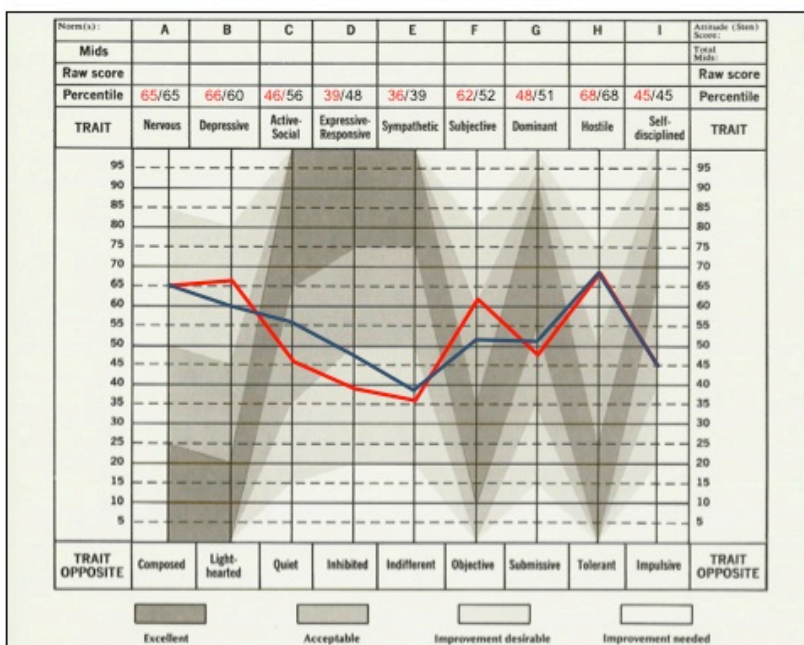
trait F - more *Objective* than Subjective

trait G - more *Dominant* than Submissive

trait I - more *Self-disciplined* than Impulsive

Figure 1
T-JTA Profile For Managers & Supervisors

— Line representing 550 supervisors
— Line representing 126 managers



9 Traits

- A - Nervous vs Composed
- B - Depressive vs Light-hearted
- C - Active-social vs Quiet
- D - Expressive vs Inhibited
- E - Sympathetic vs Indifferent
- F - Subjective vs Objective
- G - Dominant vs Submissive
- H - Hostile vs Tolerant
- I - Self-disciplined vs Impulsive

The findings for the 126 managers are nearly identical to those of supervisors, including scores of “improvement desirable” in the same 5 traits listed above and “acceptable” in the other 4 traits. Three of the five trait scores for managers are numerically identical to those of supervisors. The variance between manager and supervisor scores is only 3 percentage points (out of a possible 100) in 4 out of the 9 traits. The variance never exceeds 10 points on any trait, indicating that the conclusions for managers can be considered the same as those for supervisors.

Interpretation

What the findings from the T-JTA tell us about the personality profile of a hardnosed manager or supervisor, and, collectively, a change-resistant workforce, is the following.

- *A stereotype may be accurately assumed.*
A change-resistant workforce is marked by nearly identical personality profiles of its managers and supervisors — in other words, it is inbred in its personality patterns.
- *The ability to command is a strength.*
The “acceptable” personality trait scores are those that support behavioral tendencies which indicate the practice of strong command skills. In particular traits F (objective), G (dominant) and I (self-disciplined) would be expected to be strong in those who displayed good command capabilities.
- *The ability to communicate on a positive basis is a weakness.*
The “improvement desirable” personality trait scores are those that support behavioral tendencies which foster inward feelings and communication which is either consistently critical, argumentative, or absent. In particular traits D (inhibited), E (indifferent) and H (hostile) would be expected to be weak in those who suffered the inability to communicate on an open, friendly or non-hostile basis.

- *A tendency to emotionally withdraw creates masking (emotional honesty) concerns.*
The change-resistant worker may have a tendency to mask his feelings and thus give verbal feedback which is either intentionally or unintentionally not indicative of his true feelings. Psychological Publications, Inc., publishers of the T-JTA, include several of the “improvement desirable” scores common to change-resistant workers in a behavioral category termed the Emotionally Repressed Pattern. According to Psychological Publications, this pattern “indicates actual suppression of feelings or emotional repression. This score combination describes a deeper and more complete form of emotional withdrawal (than inhibition). In this instance, possibly for fear of being hurt or rejected, or out of defensiveness, the individual does not allow inner feelings either to exist or to find expression.”
- *A strong-willed nature may work against teamwork.*
Change-resistant workers may frequently exhibit a self-centered, strongly prejudiced behavior which could hamper their ability to function cohesively in a team. When the presence of their high trait H (hostile) score is added to their low E (indifferent) score another behavioral consideration of change-resistant workers appears. Again, according to Psychological Publications, “Self-centered and prejudiced persons often score low on trait E (indifferent), whether or not they score low on trait D (inhibited). In such cases, a high score on trait H (hostile) is usually present.”
- *A tendency to ‘fight back’ against authority exists.*
The non-communicative tendencies of the change-resistant worker, when combined with a strong command presence, make his work environment a breeding ground for passive-aggressive behavior. Since both managers and supervisors operate within the same organizational structure and have the same temperament pattern, the presence of passive-aggressive behavior is wide spread. This type of behavior is as likely seen in the manager’s office as it is in the production workplace and is evident in interaction between supervisors and managers.

The AWOL Factor

A final ingredient of the definition of the hardnosed worker must be added, thanks to the United States Army. During the Vietnam War, the Army experienced a higher than acceptable rate of AWOL (absent without leave) cases. Soldiers chose to run away rather than serve.

To better identify potential AWOL candidates, the Army’s chaplain corps conducted a study of the personality traits of recruits and draftees, eventually narrowing the definition of a potential AWOL candidate to an easily recognizable personality profile. The personality analysis used by the Army is the T-JTA.

The U.S. Army concluded that soldiers who registered a combination of “improvement desirable” or “improvement needed” scores in at least 4 out of the following 6 personality traits warrant attention as “likely AWOL” candidates. The 6 traits on the T-JTA profile are A, B, C, D, H, and I. As described above, hardnosed workers score “improvement desirable” in five traits. Four of these traits — A, B, D, and H — fall within the “likely AWOL” profile determined by the Army.

According to Uncle Sam, a hardnosed worker is a high-risk runaway threat; he is more likely than others to quit the job unexpectedly. In human resource parlance, he demonstrates little employee attachment or engagement. Old-timers might call him disloyal.

The ‘Snapshot’ Of A Hardnosed Worker

In summary, my research indicates that the profile of a hardnosed worker includes four key identifiers.

1. They give strong commands but cannot communicate their orders in an acceptable manner;
2. They repress their emotions to the point of masking the truth about how they really feel;

3. They possess a destructively high ego that stifles teamwork; and,
4. They exhibit 'fight back' passive-aggressive behavioral tendencies against authority.

The U.S. Army adds another element, the propensity to impulsively shirk duty, to run away from commitment.

Hardnosed workers are not skilled in people interaction; they do not possess trustworthy interrelation capabilities. Fighting back against authority is a basic part of their emotional DNA. Running away from responsibility is an equal component of their character.

Reality is harsh. So is the definition of a hardnosed worker.

A hardnosed worker is a self-destructive, emotionally self-centered, uncontrollable person who would rather cut-and-run than commit.

"That's Not My Guys"

There is a good-hearted tendency of executive level managers to excuse their workers, en masse, from such a stark definition. Or at the most, they limit the description to a few employees. This was the case when an executive vice-president of a large offshore marine support company said to me, "That's not my guys," then apologized a year later when research demonstrated that his employees, on average, did fit the profile.

The same is true of the senior consultant for a large utility company who, having witnessed the rancor of the above referenced marine company employees, said that his utility employees were "better than that." He, too, later admitted that he was wrong.

It Is Your 'Guys'

But what if, as the data suggests, it is your employees, or a past employer's workers, or the employees of someone you know and care about. How do you correct the problem?

Contact me if you need help.

Ron Newton, President

[iWORK—Integrity at Work](http://www.integrityatwork.us)

Author, *No Jerks On The Job*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A change-resistant workforce is marked by nearly identical personality profiles of its managers and supervisors — in other words, it is inbred in its personality patterns.
- Hardnosed workers give strong commands but cannot communicate their orders in an acceptable manner.
- Hardnosed workers repress their emotions to the point of masking the truth about how they really feel.
- Hardnosed workers possess a destructively high ego that stifles teamwork.
- Hardnosed workers exhibit "fight back" passive-aggressive behavioral tendencies against authority.