

Commentary

The No Asshole Rule by Robert I. Sutton, PHD

Just like haemorrhoids, we know they around all of the time but no one wants to talk about it for fear of appearing weak or simply just wanting to suffer our embarrassment in silence. But finally someone has shone a very public light on a serious issue in all industries but particularly in professional services firms.



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Robert Sutton, PHD is a professor of management science and engineering at Stanford University. Folks might remember that he authored an article on this subject several years ago the response to which led him to write this book which was just released in February 2007 (ISBN-13:978-0-446-52656-2).

The book is a self described “..definitive guide to working with – and surviving – Bullies, Creeps, Jerks, Tyrants, Tormentors, Despots, Backstabbers, Egomaniacs and all the other assholes who do their best to destroy you at work”. In my opinion, this is one of those increasingly rare books which delivers on its claims.

Not only is it a short easy read (186 pages) for those of us with increasing difficulty in staying focused if we are not instantly gratified by the first few pages, I found myself bobbing my head and unconsciously going “un huh” as I read the examples and impact of the actions of others. Unfortunately I also found myself losing my holier than thou empathy with his insights in the chapter titled – “How to Stop Your Inner “Jerk” from getting Out”. Hopefully it is true what they say that recognizing the problem is half the cure!

It is this latter section that makes me wonder if we didn’t answer the following two questions posed by Mr. Sutton in the book of ourselves more often, for determining whether one is acting like an asshole, that at least the spread / creation of future generations of assholes might be seriously mitigated:

1. After talking to the alleged asshole, does the “target” feel oppressed, humiliated, deenergized, or belittled by the person? In particular does the target feel worse about him or herself?
2. Does the alleged asshole aim his or her venom at people who are less powerful rather than at those people who are more powerful?

The book does towards the end hold out some hope for everyone that has suffered from a uncontrolled asshole but describing some practical ways in which to fight the good fight and win (at least small victories).

This is definitely worth adding to your short list of books to read.

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