

«Help, my boss is a narcissist!»

Narcissists seem to be very trendy. Countless articles and books discuss the supposed epidemic on the carpet floors. In my counselling sessions, too, clients - all of them psychological laypersons - repeatedly diagnose the mental health of their superiors. Even if certain managers deserve to be labelled «narcissists», the whole debate would benefit from more moderation and humility.

Peter Näf

A client approached me with a request to develop strategies for dealing with his narcissistic superior. What should I make of this? As the coachee had diagnosed his line manager as being ill, it was clear who was solely responsible for the problematic working relationship - the line manager. He would have to be cured. My client was therefore in the position of the victim.

The first thing we did was to make room for the possibility that the line manager had self-confidence and a pronounced self-will - both strengths - and might tend to exaggerate these characteristics under stress. The behaviour in question could then be described as narcissistic. In any case, it is a burden for those around him or her and can be criticised.

We all have our weak moments

All people have strengths that turn into weaknesses under pressure. As a result, many people sometimes behave inappropriately. For example, as a structured person, I tend to behave in a controlling way under stress and develop tics that

disappear by themselves. As I don't have any employees, it's mainly me who suffers from this. You could describe my behaviour in these phases as slightly obsessive. Calling me an obsessive-compulsive or treating me as such would not only be inappropriate, but also detrimental to good cooperation.

Express your needs

We have finally taken the line manager out of the firing line. To solve the problem, we focussed instead on what my coachee needs to be able to do his job well. However, formulating his personal needs was more difficult than expected - which is why he had never addressed them with his superiors before.

In the end, my client went to talk to his line manager. He explained to him how he functioned and what he needed to work successfully. To his surprise, his boss showed understanding, and they renegotiated their working relationship. As a result of the conversation, my client's emotions calmed down and the working relationship improved.

He did not even need to address his superior's behaviour. If he later wants to give his boss feedback on his sometimes-difficult behaviour, he can do so according to the well-known rule: respect the person and criticise the specific behaviour that is also visible to neutral observers.

[#coaching](#) [#executivecoaching](#) [#responsibility](#)

Please find further articles on career topics on my homepage
<https://karrierecoaching.ch/en/articles/>

