

A**hole No More

UPDATED
2010

The Original Self-Help Guide
For Recovering A**holes—
And Their Victims

Xavier Crement, M.D.

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2011

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For Recovering A**holes—
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*This copy of
Asshole No More is lovingly presented to:*

Asshole No More

by :

“The two great wonders of the world are not the Sphinx and the Pyramids; they are 1) why assholes presume the right to behave obnoxiously, and 2) why they are offended when you catch them at it.”

in the hope that it will lead to the road of recovery

—St. Erculius
Early Christian Martyr
(or at least he thought he was)

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Asshole No More

A Self-Help Guide For Recovering Assholes— And Their Victims

None of the names used in this book are the names of actual living people. Any resemblance between a person in this book and one in physical life is purely serendipitous and unintentional.

If you are offended by this book, there are three things you can do:

- 1) Ask the Iranian government to condemn the author and the book. (This will increase our sales tremendously.)*
- 2) Organize a book burning party. This will attract the news media, and give us more free publicity.*
- 3) Write a letter of protest to your congressman. Then he will know you are an asshole, too.*

by Xavier Crement, M.D.

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ASSHOLE NO MORE

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Table of Contents

Introduction 7

Part One: What's An Asshole and Why
Would Anyone Want to Become One? 17

1. Fred's Story 19
2. Other Stories 28
3. Defining Assholism 39
4. The Essence of Assholism 48

5. Intensities of Assholism 68

For helping make this book possible, I thank—

Part Two: Varieties of Assholes 77

6. The RunoftheMill Asshole 79
7. The ThreePiece Asshole 84
8. The Liberated Asshole 88
9. The Holy Asshole 93
10. The New Age Asshole 98
11. The Bureaucractic Asshole 103
12. The “Helpless” Asshole 107
13. The Litigious Asshole 111

Everyone who ever called me “asshole,” But never tried to help me.

You know who you are.

This book is dedicated to you.

Part Three: When Society Becomes An Asshole 115

14. Business as an Asshole 117

15. Morassholism 122

16. Religion as an Asshole 128

17. Reading, Writing, & Assholism 133

18. Assholism in the Media: The True Epidemic 138

Part Four: Living With Assholes 143

19. Working with Assholes 145

20. When A Friend is an Asshole 151

21. Married to an Asshole 155

22. The Born Asshole 159

23. Adult Children of Asshole Parents 164

Part Five: The Road to Recovery 171

24. Stages of Recovery 173

25. Tools for Recovery 179

26. Epilogue 188

Introduction

Like almost everyone else, I have been dealing with assholes all of my life. For most of this time, however, I have been, like most of society, trapped in our age-old concepts of assholism. Failing to recognize it as a disease, I simply accepted it as a character flaw that could be modified or eliminated at will.

I have now come to understand the true nature of assholism. It is an addiction as bad as alcoholism, chemical dependency, or codependency. It afflicts major portions of the population—yet most assholes are not the least bit aware that they are assholes! This was certainly true in my own case—in my personal struggle to deal with being an asshole myself.

It is never easy to unveil one's own mistakes and flaws for all to see. For a long time, I hesitated to write this book, or even speak out on the topic that inspires it. I didn't want the whole world to know that I was an asshole! But finally my conscience, friends, and patients convinced me that the whole world already knew I was an asshole, and I could make a contribution by telling my story, so that others like me could understand assholism and embark on the road to recovery. It is therefore with the utmost humility that I have decided to share the story of my painful addiction to assholism—and the arduous path of recovery from its clutches.

At this point, I can look back with clarity and insight at the many years I was an asshole. I understand as only an asshole can the grief, pain, and struggle of the recovery process. It is not a process I would ever wish to go through again. But once you have become an asshole, you have no choice. Sooner or later, Life rears up before you and stops you in your tracks. It tells you, "You are an asshole." You will deny it, flail at it, damn it, scream at it, kick it, plead with it, try to ignore it, and curse it. But Life will not go away. Either you must humble yourself before it, or it will humble you.

It is therefore with great contrition and sorrow that I confess: I was a flaming asshole for more than twenty years! My friends and family suffered as much from my assholism as I did. In many cases, I simply drove them away. Even my patients suffered from my ingrained rudeness and outsized ego. I now recognize that all of this pain and suffering was avoidable—if I had just recognized the truth earlier and had begun my recovery at a younger age.

Take it from me—it is never too early or too late to recognize the telltale signs of being an asshole. Nor is it ever too early or too late to begin changing the destructive habits which have repelled your friends, sabotaged business and professional relationships, and brought years of unnecessary insult and offense to countless others.

In my case, I did not have the slightest clue that I was an asshole until I was nearly forty. Like most assholes, I took pride in the fact that I was a strong person who was always able to get what he wanted. I was still in high school when I first learned how to turn off my conscience and neutralize any sense or feeling of guilt. While I was in residency, I learned I could get what I wanted by intimidating people—in fact, I could usually make people do exactly what I wanted them to do. As I settled into my professional career, I further refined my skills of being cunning and aggressive.

It is important to understand that I thought all of these attributes were positive strengths. As part of my medical training, I took a barrage of psychological and psychiatric tests. They invariably rated me

as a very strong person, reporting that I had “high self-esteem” and that I could take care of myself. I scored high in ego strength, I was well focused, I was self-determined, self-directing, and self-evaluating. In other words, no one could put me down, and if they tried, I could give them back as good as I got. I took pride in being able to “do it to them before they did it to me.”

These attributes of character served me well. I became a successful and prosperous doctor specializing in proctology. I married a very attractive woman and we had two wonderful children. I was respected by my colleagues and held major positions in my hospital and local medical society. In my community, I was considered a professional with both affluence and influence. My life seemed charmed. I was content with life and content with myself.

But all was not well in the empire of Dr. X. Crement. At times, I had the eerie feeling that my colleagues had more fear than respect for me—but I figured it didn’t make much difference, so long as it was some shade of awe. Some of my colleagues would seem to break off conversations and quickly walk away as I approached them at the hospital, and certain friends seemed to have a growing number of excuses for not being able to get together with me. At meetings, some people would stare at the floor or the ceiling with a blank expression, fidgeting while I talked. Afterwards, it was as though they had not heard a word I had said. But I figured that was their problem. They were probably worried about personal difficulties.

One time, my wife gave a surprise birthday party for me, but the biggest surprise was that only six people showed up, and three of them were my wife and kids. But I just assumed that my friends were becoming jealous of my brilliant success. I thought it was unfortunate that they would alienate themselves from me over something so petty as their own inferiority and inadequacy, but I just chalked it up to human nature. Being a thoughtful, sensitive person—or so I believed—I regarded these social lapses and snubs with compassion and forgiveness.

Then one day, my self-delusion began to unravel. After arguing with me for hours, my only son announced that he was not going to enter college; he was determined to enlist in the Navy. My only son was going to defy me! I couldn’t believe it! No one had dared defy me in at least twenty years, and the last one who had had long since regretted it.

I wanted my son to be a successful professional just like myself, but he was obstinate. This solidified my resolve as well, and I forbade him to join the Navy. He told me to perform an operation which would not be all that difficult for a proctologist, although distinctly undesirable, and stormed out of the house. He told my wife that he was determined to get as far away from me as possible, and he was right. He signed up for astronaut training.

I was deeply confused and hurt by the acts of my only son. In my anguish, I asked my wife and my daughter what they thought about this turn of events. I was looking for them to validate that I was a good father, and that it was my son who was acting foolishly.

“I love that boy,” I said tearfully. “What did I do to deserve such rebellion?”

I was certainly not prepared for the response I received. My daughter spoke first. “The only person you’ve ever loved,” she said smoothly, “is yourself.”

I was stunned. Finally, I turned to my wife as my last hope for support.

“She’s right,” my wife confirmed. “In fact, our marriage and home life has been dead for at least five years. I want you out of the house tonight.”

I could not believe what was happening to me. Within just a few hours, my personal world had come tumbling down.

I spent a number of days reviewing this turn of events. In my heart, I knew I was right—as I often had been over the years, despite ferocious opposition. Someone had been alienating my loved ones and had turned them against me. When I found out who it was, I resolved to smash his face in.

Many times before, I had had to face those who were united in opposing my beliefs and behavior. Only the pure force of will had helped me preserve my dignity and self-respect. Finally, I decided that this situation was no different than the others. Winning back my family would be my greatest triumph of all. But everything I did to win them back failed. They would not see me. They would not speak to me. We became more and more estranged. In desperation, I began to realize that I needed outside help!

So I consulted with a psychiatric colleague of mine. I explained what had been happening and asked him what was wrong. What had come over my family? Were they sick? I pleaded with him to tell me the unvarnished truth; I was a strong man and could handle it, whatever it was.

My friend paused, then looked directly at me. “They are not sick; they’re normal.”

It took awhile for the implication to sink in. It was almost too much for me to handle.

“Yyyou mean, I’m the one who’s sick?”

“No, you’re not sick, either. You’re just an asshole.”

I was shocked and angered by this flippant response. “I didn’t come here to be insulted! If you can’t take my problems seriously, I’m leaving!” So I left.

The next six months were as close to hell on earth, or at least hell in a proctologist’s office, as you can imagine. I felt sorry for myself and saw myself as the victim of unknown forces—misunderstood and neglected by those I loved and mistreated by those I had consulted for professional help. I would be angry one day and sorrowful the next—but I was never happy or even contented. I did not sleep well. I was on edge all the time. I saw every interruption, delay, or complication as a mysterious vendetta against me. I do not know how the nurses on my staff—or my patients, for that matter—put up with me during that time. I was a monster.

Finally, one evening—alone—I realized that I had lost control of my life. I then also realized that I had never actually had control of my life—I had just arrogantly assumed that I did. Somehow, this revelation comforted me, and I slept better that night than I had in six months.

The next day, while performing a proctoscopic examination, the rest of the pieces of the puzzle suddenly came together. Staring at my patient’s rear end, I suddenly realized that I was confronting the naked truth about myself.

I was an asshole!

My psychiatric colleague had not been insulting me after all; he had been trying to help me! I called him immediately, apologized for my rude behavior, and asked to see him again.

Since he had just had a cancellation, I was able to see him that afternoon.

“You’re right,” I told him breathlessly as soon as I sat down. “I am an asshole.”

He yawned. “Actually, everyone knows it.”

“How are you going to treat it?”

“Treat what?”

“My being an asshole.”

“It’s not a disease,” my colleague said, “it’s just a condition. So there is no treatment.”

“What do you mean, there is no treatment?”

“Look. Lots of people are assholes. Either you are or you are not. It’s like being lefthanded. It can’t be treated.”

I was shocked. “What good is psychiatry if it cannot cure someone of being an asshole?”

“Look. It’s not a disease; it’s a figure of speech. Proctology can’t cure people who have their heads wedged up their asses, and psychiatry can’t cure you of being an asshole. Hell, if it could, do you think so many psychiatrists would still be assholes?”

It was at that moment that I realized that I was on my own. Somehow, deep in my being, I knew that he was wrong. Assholism is not a character disorder. It is a disease—an addiction to crude and rude behavior that leaves us helpless to recognize our own denial of our personal, ingrained arrogance, bigotry, and aggressiveness.

I therefore began an intensive program of introspection, healing, and growth that has lasted for several years. I have proved what my colleague thought was impossible—assholes can recover! As incredible as this may seem to the unredeemed asshole, all it takes is the rediscovery of our own basic humanity. I wish I had started the process of recovery sooner, before I had done so much damage to others. But I have been able to repair much of the injury. My wife has come back to me, and we are enjoying a second honeymoon. My daughter has forgiven me, and she is a junior in college. My son has made a career of being a Navy pilot, and is in the process of teaching me how to fly.

I have given up the practice of proctology, but I am still in the business of seeing assholes. I have become a psychiatrist who specializes in helping assholes identify their problem and embark on the road to recovery. There has not been much support from traditional branches of psychiatry for this pioneering effort, but I have enjoyed a huge surge in business, as my basic message has spread throughout the country: “At last, there is hope for assholes!” I have become a popular speaker on the lecture circuit, and network with other therapists dealing with addictive problems, too.

Asshole No More is more than just my personal story of recovery, however. It is a spark of hope for every addict of assholism. It is a declaration of liberation. No one ever again needs to feel ashamed to be an asshole. It is a legitimate illness that can be treated by legitimate means. There isn’t an asshole alive who cannot follow the same road to recovery that I have—the road that I have now helped thousands of people successfully follow. There is only one requirement—the courage to stop being an asshole. This is often the most elusive ingredient in the whole formula. Calvin Stobbs, a friend of mine who runs a mental health clinic, likes to tell a story that drives home this point. There once was a woman who went to find the meaning of life in the mountains of the Himalayas. After years of searching, she came across a man in a cave. “Ahha!” she thought, “A guru meditating in a cave.” She spoke to the man. “Will you show me the way to enlightenment?” The man said nothing.

So the woman sat down and began tuning in to her innermost self. At the end of the day, she got up to go. “Have I made any progress?” she asked. The man said nothing.

The next day she returned at the crack of dawn and began meditating again. When the sun was setting she rose again to go. Once more, she asked, “Have I made any progress?” The man said nothing.

This pattern went on for weeks and then months. Finally, she got fed up with waiting. At sunset that day, she stood up and began yelling and screaming at the old man:

“You are a fraud! I have been sitting here day after day, waiting for enlightenment, and nothing has happened. I’ve just wasted six months of my life and have nothing to show for it! How dare you call yourself a guru!” And she threw her knapsack, which weighed almost forty pounds, at the old man sitting in the cave.

Dazed by the blow, the man nonetheless was able to get up on his feet. Standing there, he spoke at last. “I am not a guru, and I do not deserve these accusations. If you assumed I was a guru, that is your own mistake, not mine.”

The woman was not to be appeased. “Well, if you are not a guru,” she said, “then who the hell are you and what are you doing in this cave?”

The man pulled himself up proudly. “I am a leper,” he said, “and I am here in this cave as an exile from my community.”

That's what this book is all about: learning what it means to wake up and realize that you are an asshole.

I woke up. You can, too.

Asshole No More:

Part One: What's An Asshole And Why Would Anyone Become One? 1 Fred's Story

All my best friends told me I would love him, and I did. But no one ever told me he was an asshole. Some friends!
—Winifred, dumped by an asshole

This is Fred's story. I'll let him tell it.

* * *

I slumped in my chair at my desk in the office, too tired to face the rest of the day. It was only 9:15 in the morning, but the day was already turning into a disaster. I was on the verge of a complete breakdown. It hadn't taken much to whip me into such a state.

I had felt okay when I awoke. But the tide began to turn as soon as I pulled into my favorite eatery for breakfast. Every morning, I order exactly the same thing: a threeminute egg, bacon, toast, juice, and coffee. And they know that when I order a threeminute egg, I want it cooked exactly three minutes. It was ready as usual for me, but the egg was overdone. They had let it cook at least thirty seconds too long! I couldn't understand why they would deliberately overcook my egg! I called Meg—the waitress—over to my table and pointed out that the egg was overdone. She gave me a dirty look, as though to say, “Here we go again,” and then said in a huffy tone of voice: “So we'll put it back in the pot and uncook it. How underdone would you like your egg?”

I told her if she was going to bark at me, she could forget a tip for today. Five minutes later, after having had to ask her three times to refill my coffee cup, she dumped the whole pot in my lap! She said it was an accident, but I wasn't born yesterday.

If breakfast wasn't bad enough, the rest of the trip to work was worse. A cop stopped me for going 50 in a 35 mileanhour zone, then gave me a second ticket because I wasn't wearing my seat belt. By this time, I was plenty steamed, so I asked him why he wasn't spending his time arresting the asshole that nearly ran me off the road two miles back, instead of me. He added a charge of resisting arrest on top of the other two. Now I will need a small loan just to keep on driving.

When I arrived at work, I pulled into my parking spot as usual. When I got out, I stepped right into a huge pile of horse shit. Somebody must be trying to get even with me, but I haven't had time to figure out who it might be. There are a lot of candidates.

And that wasn't the last of it. On the way up to my office—it's on the top floor—the elevator jammed trapping me between the third and fourth floors. It didn't take all that long to get the elevator running again, but I distinctly heard someone on the fourth floor say, “It's Fred who's stuck. Can't we just leave him there all day?” I must make a note to sack the maintenance crew later on, for letting the elevator get jammed.

I used to thrive on adversity like this, but now it just wears me down. I hate to lose—and I almost never did earlier in my life. But now I seem to be on the losing end a lot. It's making me depressed and fatigued. I'm not sure I still have the cojones to do what has to be done.

I guess it's the winning/losing thing. I have always had to be the winner. When I was a kid, I excelled in all of the usual sports and games. Sometimes I had to cheat to win, but that was part of the fun. I loved to pick arguments with my brothers just so I could win them. My greatest moments of triumph came when I was able to outwit my parents and get them to do exactly what I wanted.

In high school, I went out for the debate team as well as athletics. I learned how to use words to intimidate my opponents and turn ideas inside out so that no one could recognize them anymore. In everything I did, I tried to find the trick that would give me an advantage and enable me to win. I thrived on winning. It was the thrill that I lived for.

During adolescence, the scope of my winning expanded to include girls. I became intoxicated by the thrill of conquest. Sexy girls, shapely girls, tall girls, short girls—the more elusive the girl was, the more I wanted to conquer her. And then I would move on to my next target.

Thinking back on it, I guess the reason why I hated to lose was because of the way my older brothers treated me. They made fun of me because I was younger and smaller, so I always tried to exceed my limits. Nothing was sweeter than being able to outdo my brothers. Of course, as I got older and bigger this began to happen more and more often.

I had promised myself, when I was small and helpless, to get even—and I did! I think my old man got a kick out of it, too, whenever I was able to outdo my brothers, or anyone older than me. More than once I overheard him mumble, in a voice that was barely audible, “One of these days, the little shit is going to be a big pile of shit, just like his old man.”

I went to law school, graduated with honors, and was asked to join a large law firm. Twenty years later, I am now a full partner making six figures every year, while my brothers are only partners in the family business that my father started.

Being a winner has not always been easy. I knew I was entering a dogeatdog world of fierce competition and backstabbing—there's enough of that in law school, let alone the real world. I also knew that I could not dare give anyone else even the slightest break—and I never did. Winning in life depends on learning all of the tricks and in taking advantage of every opening that appears. I trained myself to outdazzle, outdance, and outbullshit everyone!

I dressed for success.

I worked out regularly, to keep myself lean and mean—especially mean.

I took classes in effective communications—in how to put people at ease so that you can manipulate them more readily.

I learned to lie, cheat, and dissemble and yet appear to be the most forthright and honest person around. I learned when to kick ass—and when to kiss it. If I hadn't been an attorney, I think I would have made a good used car salesman.

But I am an attorney, and a damn good one. I soon came to enjoy the power I wielded. I enjoyed it even more when I was able to bend the law to serve my own purposes—the more devious, the better. Any yoyo can use the law for legitimate purposes, but it takes a skilled craftsman to bend it consistently to promote self-serving and sometimes even illegal purposes.

Most of all, I enjoy intimidating all those wimps out there—the sweet, gentle, honest types that were born to lose. I believe my biggest contribution to life is to teach these pathetic creatures what it means to be strong and bold—a winner!

I have never married, but I don't regret it for a minute. I can have companionship any time I want it, and it's cheaper than buying a house and supporting a wife and kids. I never let a woman get to know

me well enough to start nagging me!

~~I spend most of my time at work. I know I am a winner there, because an awful lot of my clients, who walked into the hall of justice guilty as hell, walked out as free men and women. Some of them I have successfully defended seven or eight times.~~

I love to work in front of a jury. There's the ultimate challenge the law provides—to convince eight people that your client is as innocent as a baby's butt, even though he's got the cash he stole in his back pocket.

It's not just me, though—I expect my staff to be winners, too. I keep them on their toes. They know I do not tolerate mistakes. Occasionally, one of them will try to cover up a mistake they've made by suggesting that I made it impossible for them to do anything else. But I do not let any of them blame me for their failings! The one thing I will not tolerate is a smart ass, either working for me or as a client. I am the boss. No one has the right to tell me what to do or criticize my performance.

But I am getting tired of the hassles I get from my staff. Whatever happened to loyalty? I have had to replace the whole office staff several times in the last three years. You just can't find good secretaries and typists anymore. It's gotten to the point where I don't even know the names of the people I'm blaming.

I was able to handle the turnover okay, but recently my partners have begun to bug me about low morale. As if it's *my* fault for wanting the office to run smoothly and efficiently! I'll have to go along with them, though; I don't want the other partners to start prying into my activities too deeply, lest they discover the sizeable sums I have “borrowed” from the partnership account.

And it's not just the staff and my partners giving me flak! In the last month alone, three of my clients have sued me for malpractice. I'll admit I lost their cases, but I just wasn't able to get through to the juries. They were too stupid to be misled by my clever tricks. Some cases go like that.

I'll handle these suits the way I have always handled dissatisfied clients; by the time I am done with them, they'll wish they had never heard of malpractice. But I don't understand why they can't learn to lose gracefully—after all, they've been losers all their lives. Does that give them the right to accuse me of selling them out to the other side? I would never do a thing like that—unless the other side had been willing to pay a whole lot more than they offered.

You can understand why I am tired of it all. I am beginning to think there is a cost to winning at any cost—and I may not be willing to pay it any longer.

* * *

I met Fred at this point. He was about to learn three fundamental truths:

1. He was not really a winner—he was just an asshole. Assholism is an illness that takes over and makes one behave in very antisocial ways. He was not actually tired of life—just tired of being an asshole and getting dumped on by everyone else in retribution.
2. Once a person becomes an asshole, the disease takes on a life of its own and feeds itself. It's like catching a case of herpes—it leads to unpleasant complications. Once you realize you can win by cheating or bullying people, you become caught in a cycle that is hard to break.
3. If you want to get rid of assholism, you have to do something about it yourself. It doesn't matter that other people are nasty and incompetent and out to get you. It doesn't even matter that most other people are also assholes. If you are an asshole, your only real enemy is yourself. *Only you can wipe out assholism!*

Fred was the kind of asshole who is almost incurable—a man with a bulletproof ego. When I first told him he was an asshole, his reply was:

“So's your sister.”

“Yes, that’s absolutely true,” I replied, “although I didn’t realize you knew her.”

“I meant that as an insult,” Fred said.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because you’re as much an asshole as I am.”

“And that’s why I am able to help you,” I said.

Later on, Fred told me that the only reason he decided to start on the road to recovery was because I had confused him more than he had ever been confused before. This illustrates an important point. The actual steps of recovery will probably vary from asshole to asshole. This is not a precise science. Each asshole must determine the nature of the healing process for himself or herself. But always, the first step is to admit that you are an asshole, confess that you have hurt others, and then resolve to become a decent human being—a DHB.

Once this first step has been taken, then it becomes possible to take the other steps of recovery:

- Understanding the complete emptiness of character and humanity that forms the core of your assholism. Some recovering assholes refer to this emptiness as “the abyss.” Others just call it the hole.
- Learning that it is possible to fill this abyss with qualities and types of behavior that will actually attract other people and inspire them to be your friends, instead of leaving piles of horseshit for you to step in.
- Discovering that you can indeed make a difference in this thing we call Life. In fact, every asshole who reforms himself or herself improves the quality of life on earth far more than any of us can imagine.

These changes are not easy ones to make, because they will require a complete turnabout in your thinking and attitudes as a human being. You will be shocked to discover what your friends and family really think about you. You may even become depressed, and start to feel shame and guilt for the first time. These can be painful experiences for the recovering asshole. But hang in there—the payoff is worth it.

I am pleased to report that Fred’s story has a happy ending. He finally discovered that there are more losers in the world than winners, and if he wanted to be liked, he had to get along with them, too. He has married Meg, sold his BMW to the cop who arrested him, and recently gave large raises to everyone in his office, in appreciation for the grief and insults they had suffered at his hands. He then resigned from his practice and joined the Peace Corps in Afghanistan. His farewell party was the largest sendoff in the history of his law firm.

2 Other Stories

When I say I was an asshole, I don't mean a casual asshole. I was an asshole with a capital A. I wasn't content to just be obnoxious. I was a tyrant. I was only happy if I was in the process of destroying the selfrespect and happiness of everyone around me.

—Priscilla, a recovering asshole

You may have recognized something of your own character in the story about Fred in the last chapter. His kind of story is one that I hear often. But the arrogant, pushy, ambitious dickhead is not the only kind of asshole that exists. There are many other varieties of assholes that must be considered as well.

Some of these are illustrated in the following tales.

* * *

Alexis is tall, attractive, and blond. Now in her late thirties, she thinks of herself as a success in her career but a failure in her personal relationships. In this regard, she is like many other assholes: she doesn't know very much about herself.

Alexis has always been popular with the boys— at least those who could afford the steep prices she exacted for her favors. A date with Alexis could easily be rewarding, but it was not like taking candy from a baby. It was more like selling your soul to the devil.

Nonetheless, she always was able to find men who were willing to pay the price. They bought her the best clothing and jewels; they helped her with loans she never had to repay. She always had a hot car to drive and an expensive apartment to live in, even though she was fond of making the statement: “I don't make payments for anything.” To her, that was the reason why men existed: to open the door for her, to accent her natural beauty as they stood next to her, and to pay her bills.

Alexis found her niche in an advertising agency, where adroit maneuvering and the skillful use of other people's ideas helped her advance quickly up the agency's ladder. Alexis was smooth, almost catlike on the job. She never engaged in open combat, but always managed to outwit everyone around her. She knew when to withhold information and hide important memos, thereby making her colleagues look like thumbsucking fools. She was a master at taking credit for triumphs she had nothing to do with, and dodging blame for disasters worse than the Hindenberg.

She used her personal charm and seductiveness to bring many new clients into the agency—and to encourage existing clients to request that they put her in charge of their account. She was the number one account executive in her agency, and she enjoyed the power and perks of her position. Alexis was proud of the fact that so many people envied her. She also knew that if she ever had to work for a living, she would be in big trouble, but what the heck—she was in advertising!

Still, she was uneasy about her personal life. Oh, it was a lot of fun during her twenties and most of the way through her thirties. But as she grew older, something within began to nag her. Was she successful—or just a whore?

She was skillful enough to avoid confronting this dilemma, of course, but it seeped up into her thinking in camouflaged ways, anyway. She became more and more dissatisfied with the men who went out with her. If they were rich enough for her, they were either too old or too fat. If they were handsome and young enough for her, they were either poor or lacked power. If they adored her, she knew they were too dumb to see the real her—the inner phoniness behind all that outer phoniness. If

they pushed her around and insisted on being in charge, she quickly lost interest in them. It was all right for a man to take charge in bed, but if it carried over into the rest of their relationship, she was unable to accept it.

But the growing uneasiness about men was only half of the story. For the truth was that Alexis had no friends. She had only contempt for her coworkers, and they returned the favor with hostility. She fought continuously with her neighbors— about where she could park her car (one common suggestion was anatomically impossible), how loud she could play her stereo system, and her disarming habit of walking down the hall of her apartment building halfnaked. Her male neighbors did not seem to mind this particular habit, but their wives became venomous whenever the subject arose.

She couldn't even turn to her mother for advice and comfort, because she hadn't spoken to her for years—not since the time her mother had scolded her for breaking curfew and grounded her for a week. She refused to accept her phone calls, and returned all her letters unopened.

Poor Alexis. She was talented, rich, and successful, but she was unhappy. Was she a victim of other people's rudeness and envy?

Or was she just an asshole?

When Alexis came to me for counseling, I discovered that her mother had been a tyrannical parent, frequently criticizing her and rarely complimenting her for her successes. Her mother had been jealous of her daughter's talent and beauty, and had tried to sabotage her happiness by inducing guilt and selfdoubt.

The diagnosis was easy. "Your mother," I told Alexis, "is an asshole."

"You're charging me \$100 an hour to tell me what I already know?" she asked. She was starting to become hostile, but I checked her by raising my finger. Perhaps she innately realized I used to be a proctologist; in any event, she let me continue.

"And you are the adult child of an asshole parent," I continued.

"Oh," she said. "Well, that makes sense." I could tell she was relieved to have someone else to blame.

"You have walled yourself off from her tyranny," I added, "but at the price of also walling yourself off from all meaningful human contact."

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"It means you have become an asshole, too."

With counseling and the help of a support group, Alexis has been able to accept her addiction to assholism and to recognize how this had driven her to cheat, lie, and manipulate others in order to stay on top of her life. I took a direct interest in helping her revise her attitudes toward sex, and must say that the therapy has been a rousing success.

Today, she lives in Pittsburgh where she works as a sales clerk at a KMart. She is happily married to an unemployed steel worker. They have one lovely child, with another on the way.

* * *

Hubert came to me as a child of nine. His parents referred to him as "Damien." At school, they labeled him "emotionally disadvantaged." Four therapists had given up on him, and two of them had abandoned psychotherapy to go into less stressful work—lion taming and undercover narcotics investigation. Most people called him a spoiled brat. In actual fact, he was an asshole.

Hubert's story illustrates very plainly that not all assholes are the product of a rotten childhood. That

explanation worked in the case of Alexis, but it won't fly here. Hubert did not have a rotten childhood—~~he was a rotten child!~~

Hubert's basic problem was that he hated to see anyone else having fun. If a group of girls was quietly having a tea party, Hubert was incapable of letting them be. He was apt to go running over to them, like a kamikaze pilot, and divebomb the tea party, sending plates and tea and little girls flying in all directions.

This is the kind of kid who would dump dog turds in a public swimming pool, so that it had to be closed down and everyone sent home.

He did have his strengths, though. Here is one kid who would never cheat in order to pass an exam. He would just show up on the front step of his teacher's home with a loaded rifle and scare the hell out of her.

Hubert's case was a difficult one, largely due to his commitment to malice. When I first told him that he was an asshole, he smiled broadly and said that I was the first adult who had ever said anything nice about him. I knew at that moment that we were in deep doo doo with this one.

I am not without resourcefulness, however. I relied on my former days as an asshole and a proctologist to handle the lad.

"Then let's show you what it feels like to be an asshole," I said. Grabbing him from behind, I pulled down his pants and gave him a threefinger rectal examination. From that moment on, I have enjoyed complete cooperation from young Hubert, and I am happy to report that he will be getting his Eagle badge in Boy Scouts next month.

* * *

Walter is a minister. He was ordained fourteen years ago and has held appointments in twelve churches in that time. He is an ardent student of the Bible and has a special interest in counseling. He considers himself an expert on sin, mental illness, and spiritual martyrdom. In fact, he often thinks of himself as the quintessential martyr, devoting himself selflessly to his work and service.

In his sermons, Walter tells it straight. We have a duty to be perfect in God's eyes, Walter will say, and he who falls short of perfection falls all the way. "If God knows when a sparrow falls," Walter is fond of saying, "then you had better believe that He knows when you or I fall. And He doesn't forget."

At times, Walter's style in the pulpit becomes bellicose, almost belligerent. A sane person might wonder if Walter was starting to come unglued. On more than one occasion, in fact, the church board has called Walter to task for this belligerence, but he has always been prepared for the attack, and has fended off the criticisms with pious poses and phrases. He reminds the board that God's servants have many enemies, and a church board must never let itself be used by those who would undo the work of the Lord.

One Sunday, however, Walter chose to preach on the subject of adultery. In his usual style, he came down hard on the sin, ranting and raving about how God held it as a great abomination. He told the congregation that hell was lined with those who had committed adultery, and held out little hope and

even less mercy for those who had erred in this way.

The very next Sunday, just as Walter was beginning his pastoral prayer, one of the men in the congregation stood up and began waving a gun in the air. “You had better make this prayer a good one,” the gentleman said, “because it may well be your last one. And be sure to ask the Lord to forgive you for adultery and fornication, because if you don’t stay away from my wife and daughters, I’m going to personally escort you to the gates of hell.”

Walter handled the unpleasant situation with great poise and piety. He told the congregation that the gentleman’s accusations were false, but that he, Walter, could forgive him for his outrageous behavior. Many people in the church wept openly, moved by his pious, almost saintly tolerance.

But Walter’s days were numbered. The very next day, an ad hoc committee of cuckolded husbands and irate fathers sent a letter to the presiding bishop, asking that Walter be removed from their church and defrocked as a minister. The bishop called for a private hearing. Walter continued to deny the accusations, but his accusers had come well prepared. They had explicit color photographs of Walter in action, as well as tape recordings of tearful spouses and daughters. Confronted with the evidence, Walter was still unrepentant. He said it was just his way of fulfilling the commandment to love your neighbor. A minister must toil day and night—and sometimes beneath the sheets as well.

Walter was shipped off to his thirteenth church, but the bishop kept the color photographs—just in case.

The final blow came when his wife announced she was taking the children, returning to the home of her parents, and accepting a job with a foundation promoting world atheism. Walter was stunned. He had always assumed that the bishop would protect him and his wife would stand by him, no matter what. He searched and searched for a rationalization or pious phrase to rescue him, but there were none. He was surrounded by enemies and no one was there to save him. It must be the work of the devil, he concluded.

But was it the devil? Or was Walter just an asshole?

It was the bishop who put Walter in touch with me. I helped him see through the veneer of his piety and realize that he was not the kind, considerate, compassionate, and moral person he thought he had been. He was just a pious asshole.

This was not an easy task, for Walter had to confront the fact that he had raised self-deception to an art form. He had convinced himself that everything he had done was not only honorable, but something of a self-sacrifice. He had seen his alliances with the ladies of the church, for instance, as a way of healing their loneliness and helping them cope with insensitive husbands.

Finally, though, he began to realize that he was not God’s greatest gift to womanhood—or anyone. He saw how much he had hurt people and abused his responsibilities. I shall never forget the day he looked up at me and beamed, “Boy, have I been an asshole!” It’s moments like these that make my work as a psychiatrist worthwhile.

After many months of counseling and therapy, Walter consented to the request of his wife for a divorce. He also left the church. His hardest lesson was learning that other people were not put on earth to amuse and serve him. He therefore has had to learn a whole new way of behaving. Walter is now working as a camel driver in Iran, employed by Shiite Moslem holy men. He claims he has found God again—the real God. “If God can forgive militant bomb throwers like these Shiites and assholes like me, He must be the greatest power in the universe!” Walter says. If you ask Walter now for

guidance or help, he cheerfully replies:

“Never take advice from an asshole!”

The evening desert breezes seem to whisper back in a soft murmur: “That’s right.”

* * *

From these few stories, we can learn several things about assholism. It can strike the rich and the poor, men and women, and the young or the old alike. Being intelligent is no safeguard against assholism, but neither is stupidity. Assholism is a disease that can strike anywhere, anytime, without warning.

As a rabbi who has seen more than his share of assholes for one lifetime recently remarked, “Anyone can be rude, given the right circumstances. Once the occasion has passed, an ordinary person will retreat into embarrassment and contrition. An asshole will go looking for another opportunity.”

I chose these stories because they reflect the diversity of ways that assholes behave. No one case of assholism is ever typical, however. People are complex. Assholism is complex. The road to recovery from assholism is likewise complex. It may well take more than a single book to describe it completely. I’ll have to see how well this one sells before I make that decision, though.

There are at least nine million assholes in this country alone, Each case is unique. I could write a lot of books before running out of things to say, couldn’t I?

Yet there are certain characteristics that can be ascribed to the common asshole:

- Blind selfishness.
- Unrestrained obnoxiousness.
- Arrogant righteousness.
- An asbestos-proof conscience (it won’t even burn in hell).
- Contempt for authority.
- The total rejection of basic human decency.
- The merciless exploitation of the innocent.

We will examine these characteristics and others in a couple of chapters. Don’t worry about them at this point. As your therapist will probably tell you, sooner or later, “It’s okay to feel overwhelmed.”

ACTIVITY

1. Did any of these case histories remind you of someone—perhaps the person you first see in the mirror each morning? What specifics made you think of yourself? What obnoxious behavior reminded you of things you have done to others?

2. You may find it helpful to purchase a very large notebook to set down these observations, as well as other insights that come to you, as you continue reading this book.

3 Defining Assholism

The greatest mystery of the world is not why God created life; it is why He named the asshole after such rude and obnoxious people.
Graffiti found on the wall of the men's room in an old Boston church.

So far, I have been using the labels *asshole* and *assholism* without defining them clearly. Yet the terms themselves are rather loose, defying precise definition. Asshole behavior in one situation may be acceptable social conduct in another. I for one would never dream of being defended in court by any kind of lawyer but an asshole. So no one simple definition is apt to do justice to the amazing complexity of assholism.

Still, this is not an insurmountable problem. Most people would agree: "I may not be able to define what an asshole is, but I sure know one when I see one." And this is true. Almost everyone would agree that an asshole is a person who behaves obnoxiously and rudely by choice, delighting in the chaos it produces and the annoyance it causes others.

There will always be nitpickers who will protest that this kind of definition is too loose and casual to be used by professional therapists. My answer to that is: let them pick their own nits!

Others object that the word *asshole* is a lowlife slang word that is used only to condemn and ridicule. It can therefore have no proper use in a clinical setting, lest we hurt some poor asshole's feelings. These folks obviously don't know much about assholism—they are overlooking the fact that assholes have no feelings. An asshole's feelings cannot be hurt until he begins the road to recovery.

Some people complain that the term *assholism* is too subjective—that assholes exist only in the eye of the beholder. Personally, as a former proctologist, I believe this particular notion is going way too far.

I feel I must therefore make a bold statement. There is enormous therapeutic value in retaining the term *asshole*. For one thing, it has a rich depth of association to it that ordinary clinical terms lack—terms such as paranoid, deviate behavior, and so on. Yes, *asshole* is a highly prejudiced term. But assholism is not a prissy disease. It is true that ordinary people are offended to be called assholes. But ordinary people are not assholes. Assholes are rude, obnoxious, and intimidating—and proud of it. They need a label that makes everyone laugh at them.

Many people drink, but no one wants to be called an alcoholic. That is why the first step in the Twelve Step program is to admit that you are an alcoholic. It is also why it is paramount for the asshole to begin his path to recovery by saying: "I am an asshole."

The statement "I am a rude dude" just doesn't carry the same impact.

What these naysayers are failing to realize is that assholism is, in fact, a disease. It is not just the simple lack of politeness. It is not even a habitual tendency to rebel. These are character flaws. Assholism is an addiction to power, a contempt for authority, a neverending craving for approval, and the lust for complete control of others. It ravages the inner stability of its victims, leaving them helpless to act like decent human beings until they confess, "I am an asshole."

These beliefs of mine have been confirmed by people the world over.

"Don't tell me there aren't any assholes in the world," said one angry housewife who heard me speak. "I've had to live with four of them—my husband and three of my kids. Anyone who thinks there aren't any assholes must be an asshole."

"I can spot an asshole a mile away," says a waitress at a MacDonald's in Sacramento. "They're smart

asses—the kind of person who thinks a quarter pounder is a prophylactic.”

“I had no idea how many other people were assholes, too, until I started recovery,” says a recovering asshole. “I soon realized that all my friends were assholes, too. But when I suggested they come to a recovery meeting with me, they just laughed an asshole laugh.”

“I lost my job and my family because I was an asshole,” says another recovering asshole. “I tried to control the whole world, but I couldn’t even control myself. I was a power junkie gone berserk. It was pathetic.”

Some therapists have gone so far as to claim that everyone is an asshole, once you get to know them. For them, it’s probably true. But otherwise, this theory only applies to evangelists and lawyers.

A Brief History of Assholism

There have always been assholes. Now, there are more assholes than ever. This is all anyone needs to know about the history of assholism.

The Real Poop on Assholes

The epidemiology of assholism indicates that there are many “high risk groups” for assholes (see chart on next page). A large number can be found in positions of authority which require no talent—for example, lowlevel bureaucrats, preachers, social workers, and any I’mouttosavetheworldievenifIhavetokillyou types. People who wear “Thank you for not smoking” buttons and organize local recycling programs in their communities are almost sure to be assholes.

The law enforcement profession produces an unusually high ratio of assholes. But the highest percentage is to be found in agents of the Internal Revenue Service, who act as though their motto is: “Asshole is our middle name.”

The statistical findings of these various studies will undoubtedly permit many asshole students to earn doctoral degrees in psychology for generations to come. For a more definitive study of assholes,

HIGH RISK GROUPS OF ASSHOLES

1. Internal Revenue Service agents.
2. Spin doctors and talking heads.
3. Bureaucrats.
4. Lawyers who file class action suits.
5. PETA.
6. AlQaeda.
7. Politicians who welcome illegal aliens as “new voters.”
8. People who drive as if they own the road.
9. People who say, “Have a nice day.”
10. Environmentalists who do not want us to drill for oil, farm the land, or dig up coal.
11. Any Congressman whose name suggests a hot dog.
12. Fans of Al Gore.
13. Multiculturalists.
14. Journalists who don’t think they are biased.
15. Bill collectors.
16. Moral relativists.
17. Marxist college professors.
18. Anyone refusing to use the word “terrorist.”
19. ABC, CBS, NBC, MSNBC, & CNN.
20. People

who write books about assholes. 21. Credit cards charging 29.99% interest. 22. Union organizers. 23. Lesbians who think they speak for all women. 24. Mullahs in the Iranian government. 25. People talking on cell phones while driving. 26. Papers whose name rhymes with “Slimes.” 27. Congressmen who stash bribes in the freezer. 28. Anyone who takes this book seriously. examine *Assholes Among Us*, by H.M. Rhoid, Ph.D. Dr. Rhoid brilliantly builds proof for his thesis that assholes are people who are drawn to assume positions of power. He finds no evidence that any politician, evangelist, or therapist is inherently an asshole—it is their assholism that drives them to go into professions in which they can dominate others and lord it over them with petty power. Like many diseases, assholism can be inherited. Many of today’s assholes are simply the adult children of asshole parents. Some children of assholes are so repulsed by their parents’ example that they shun all traits of assholism as they mature. But most are infected by the asshole virus, and end up being a rude chip off of a crude shoulder. One of the easiest ways to define assholes is to study their dominant characteristics. Most assholes can be spotted by their aggressive behavior and intimidating mannerisms. If they can’t get their way by pushing and shoving others out of it, then they will cheat—or change the rules to suit their needs. In emergency situations, they may even resort to screaming, yelling, foot stomping, and holding their breath. Nikita Khrushchev, when he pounded the desk at the U.N. with his shoe and proclaimed that he would bury the West, was demonstrating worldclass assholism in action. When assholes are caught being assholes, they tend to deny everything and quickly turn the tables, criticizing the person who blew the whistle on them for being so rude as to notice their own dishonesty. If cornered, the asshole will spout and fume and complain that he has been set up or framed, and demand exoneration.

As is the case with all addictions, denial is a special problem of the asshole. Assholes deny the need to be responsible—or even consistent. They deny that they have any problems or faults. Worst of all, they deny that they even have an obligation to act as decent human beings.

This is not to say that they are not guided by a common *modus operandi*, however. There is a set of “silent rules” by which the typical asshole operates. Some of these silent rules are:

- All problems are caused by other people.
- It is never necessary to solve problems; just find someone to blame for them.
- All faults and shortcomings can be hidden behind the mask of rudeness. The more at fault you are, the more rude you should be.
- All rules are made to be broken, but only by you. If someone else breaks a rule, blow the whistle on him immediately.
- If you ever run out of rules to use, invent one to suit your needs—and then break it as soon as it no longer serves your purpose.
- Never doubt your ability to attain whatever you want through bullshit.

My own definition of asshole and assholism builds on these many observations. Assholes are people who think they are a law unto themselves— a new species that has the right to do anything they want. Assholism is the disease that infects the value system of these people and enables them to act in the world without a properly functioning conscience or ability to feel guilt, shame, or contrition.

Is assholism truly a disease? At this point, I think we can definitely state, “Yes!” It is an addiction to rudeness and the exploitation of others. Once it takes hold, the average asshole is at its mercy. An asshole simply can’t let other people alone. He feels impelled to nag and bitch and ridicule others.

Another indication that assholism is a disease and must be treated as such is its progressive nature. If left untreated, the problem of assholism deepens. In business, for instance, middle management

assholes try to become vicepresidential assholes. This is an immense social problem. Suddenly, someone who has the power only to make one hundred people miserable every day of the week may be promoted and given the opportunity to make one thousand people miserable on the same schedule.

The difficulty of treating assholism, of course, is that the typical asshole denies that he is one. Even if he eventually begins to realize that he has been an asshole, he's apt to blame someone else for his behavior. It is not enough just to treat the outer symptoms of rudeness and intimidation, therefore. Such efforts will simply produce a more refined and skillful generation of assholes—assholes who are immune to all criticism and restraints.

No, we must learn to treat the underlying value system; we must reconnect the asshole with his longabandoned conscience. We must jump start his human decency. This can be a long, hard struggle.

The downside of treating assholes is that the disease is highly contagious. Even a therapist with a strong focus in values and ego strength can easily be infected by the defensiveness and rationalizations of the asshole—to a point where he or she begins to act like an asshole, too!

It is for this reason that we must bring assholism out of the dark shadows of taboo and expose it to the light of day. We must not shrink from calling an asshole an asshole, because it is exactly this kind of professional timidity that allows assholes to fester.

For far too long, assholism has been the disease that dare not speak its name! The time has come, at last, to have the courage to accept assholism for what it is, and begin treating it.

If we will not do it for ourselves, then we must do it for all future generations. Asshole No More!

ACTIVITY

1. Have you ever behaved like an asshole?
2. Is there someone you despise and would like to humiliate or destroy? Write a page or two in your notebook about this person. Then, review what you have written. How do you feel about being an asshole?

4 The Essence of Assholism

I'm OK, but you're an asshole. —Cardinal Pushing

Although two recovering assholes may disagree on the definition of assholism—in fact, it's almost guaranteed that they will—they can nevertheless agree that they are both assholes. And so they can discuss ideas, feelings, and issues that they have in common. These are the various factors which go together to comprise the essence of assholism.

It is useful to list these factors, so that we can more readily see what an asshole is. Nonetheless, before I actually present these checklists to you, I want to emphasize a very important point. In reading through these lists, you may discover you are an asshole and didn't know it. This is good. It doesn't mean you are a rotten, worthless person, or that you are defective in some way. It just means you are an asshole. Recognizing this gives you the chance to recover.

Assholes should not be blamed for being assholes, any more than a child with the mumps should be blamed for infecting the whole school. Assholes have contracted a disease from which society recoils, but they can be healed. The sooner the problem is detected, the easier recovery will be.

Some assholes contract the disease from their parents, who were assholes themselves. Others are infected later in life, by asshole bosses and asshole wives or husbands. Some are the victims of bad religion. Others took classes in assertiveness training. Other cases are harder to trace, but often have their origins in listening to punk rock, watching TV soap operas, or tuning into Cspan.

People become assholes because asshole behavior seems to work. Most young journalists start out as decent human beings, for instance. But after they have seen a nationally famous TV journalist shove aside thirty people in order to get to a story first, they, too, become infected. Another asshole is born.

Because society rewards people who get there first, assholes seem to prosper. In business, it is often the person who is best at stealing ideas who gets the promotion. In government, it is usually the person who ignores the needs of the public with the most finesse who rises to the top. New generations see assholes succeeding, and stupidly expose themselves to infection.

The problem is that once you become an asshole, you never know where to draw the line. Shoving people aside becomes an addiction, not just an occasional necessity. Sooner or later, the asshole is going to shove the wrong person aside—like a more experienced asshole—and his carefully constructed empire of matchsticks will come tumbling down.

The sordid truth is that most assholes are barely surviving in their careers and their marriages. It often takes 20 to 30 years for the seeds of destruction to flourish, but they are sown the very first day you cave into pressure and become an asshole. As therapist Ivan Horney puts it, "The asshole takes care of his needs by finding someone else to take care of them for him. But when that person finally wises up and stops propping up the asshole, the entire world caves in on him."

The asshole tries to control his life by controlling the lives of everyone around him. He never solves a problem on his own—he just hides it by raising a big stink about someone else's problems. Eventually, all of these efforts to hide behind a smokescreen fail, and the accumulated problems of two or three decades of being an asshole become apparent.

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