

# Machiavellianism Personality Traits

Machiavellian personalities often manipulate others to get what they want. Here are some tips to help you cope with them.

Ever meet someone manipulative? What about someone who likes to plot or scheme? Maybe who thinks others are there only to serve their advancement?

Whether you know someone directly who fits the bill, chances are these personality traits aren't altogether unfamiliar.

In the 16th century, political adviser and philosopher Niccoló Machiavelli wrote "The Prince," a manifesto of sorts that emphasized deception, wickedness, and cunning as being more important to politics than virtue and morality.

"It is more important to be feared than loved," he wrote.

From there, the word "Machiavellian" was born, which describes anyone who's scheming, unscrupulous, or cunning.

In 1970, psychologists Richard Christie and Florence Geiss identified Machiavellianism as a personality trait involving manipulateness, deceit, and a cold, calculating, cynical view of others.

"A Machiavellian personality is manipulative and strategic," says [Aimee Daramus](#), a clinical psychologist in Chicago. "When they have a goal, they think through how to achieve it very skillfully, but without any consideration for the feelings of other people involved."

They might also use manipulative behaviors to get what they want, as well as deception or exploitation. They often come off as unemotional.

Machiavellianism tends to be [more common](#) [Trusted Source](#) in men, but it [can affect](#) [Trusted Source](#) anyone and at any age.

"When interacting with them, you might find their behavior charming and engaging, and yet you never really feel 'close' to them," says clinical psychologist [Dr. Bethany Cook](#). "They lack empathy."

Unlike a narcissist, they will seek to gain their goals without becoming the center of attention. "They tend to enjoy being the person pulling the strings, rather than the puppet on the stage," Cook says.

Machiavellianism is part of what psychologists call the "[dark triad](#)" of personality. The "[dark triad](#)," coined in 2002, consists of [three personality disorders](#):

Machiavellianism

[narcissism](#)

[psychopathy](#)

“All of these personality disorders have overlapping traits, including a blatant disregard for others and an obvious obsession with self,” says Cook.

In general, someone with a Machiavellian personality will have a cold, calculating, and cynical view of others.

“They use people for their advantage,” says [Thomas G. Plante](#), psychology professor and a licensed psychologist at Santa Clara University and Stanford University of Medicine. “They can easily manipulate others for their advantage and don’t care about the consequences of doing so.”

As a result, they tend to have a shallow emotional experience.

“They might be capable of some emotional attachments, but those relationships would be dysfunctional and often abusive,” Daramus says.

They also tend to find it relatively easy to walk away from someone who no longer benefits them.

Many of them are out of touch with their emotions or have [alexithymia](#), which is problems feeling emotions.

Because these folks don’t experience or feel emotions, they tend not to understand other people’s feelings either.

As a result, they generally feel [little to no empathy](#) for others and pay little attention to how their actions might impact others.

Sometimes, this makes them appear like they have no morals.

“One of the hallmarks of this personality trait is how easily and carelessly they can ‘throw you under the bus’ if they think it will help them advance in the long run,” Cook says.

What matters most to someone with a Machiavellian personality is their fulfillment, whether that’s power, praise, or another form of glory, as they define it.

They are often willing to do anything — including lie or manipulate others — to get what they need, without caring about morals, rules, or hurt feelings.

“If someone attacks you physically or wants to steal your food or burn down your town, that’s usually no time to be nice,” says Daramus.

“In nature, you see a lot of kindness, nurturing, and family among animals, but if they want to survive, they still have to eat other animals unless they’re herbivores,” Daramus adds.

Someone with a Machiavellian personality will ascribe to this way of life — even when it's not a life or death situation, but merely to their advantage.

Not all Machiavellian personalities are equally as good at manipulating others for their advantage or plotting their way to success.

“Some are smart and some are not,” Plante says. “Successful ones will climb the corporate ladder while the unsuccessful ones will land in jail or an early grave.”

“Sometimes they use people so much that they make too many enemies,” says Daramus. “Being Machiavellian all the time, neglecting to build cooperative relationships, isn't great strategy. The more skilled strategist would know how to use cooperation.

“If you're so Machiavellian that you have no close relationships, you've got no one to help when you need it,” she adds.

Also, some people with Machiavellian personalities are not successful because they spend too much time thinking or plotting and not enough time doing things to get where they want.

Unlike a psychopath who might get violent or a narcissist who will demand others' attention, a Machiavellian personality might be a little more withdrawn, spending their time plotting rather than acting out.

## PSYCH CENTRAL RESOURCES

Setting better boundaries starts here

Learn more about defining boundaries in your relationships, practicing consistency, and living with intention with our limited series.

It can be difficult to deal with someone who has a Machiavellian personality. Here are some tips to consider that might help you cope with them:

Their behavior isn't about you. “Many times being in a relationship with someone with Machiavellian personality disorder means your own needs have not been met in a long time,” says Cook. “You have more than likely also been a victim of [gaslighting](#) behavior and therefore have lost trust in your own intuition and ‘gut.’”

Prioritize your own [self-care](#) and [self-compassion](#).

Try to stay on good terms with them. Try not to double cross them or stand in their way on purpose, especially if it's over something small and trivial. Don't try to outplay them.

Avoid relying on them and instead trust other people.

The best predictor of their future behavior is their past behavior. If you've seen them manipulate others, they'll likely try to manipulate or use you, too.

If you're in a romantic relationship with someone with a Machiavellian personality, consider leaving them or, at least, setting firm and clear boundaries.

If your boss has this personality, consider looking for a new job because they might hold you back in your professional career to advance their own.

If you work with someone with a Machiavellian personality, try to keep your conversations about work.

If they exhibit all three dark triad personalities, try to keep your distance from them.

If you suspect a colleague, boss, family member, or loved one has a Machiavellian personality, their behavior can take a toll on you. It's essential to take care of yourself and your well-being.

If you recognize Machiavellian personality traits in yourself, and it bothers you, consider reaching out for support to a therapist specializing in personality traits and disorders. They can help you develop adequate coping mechanisms.