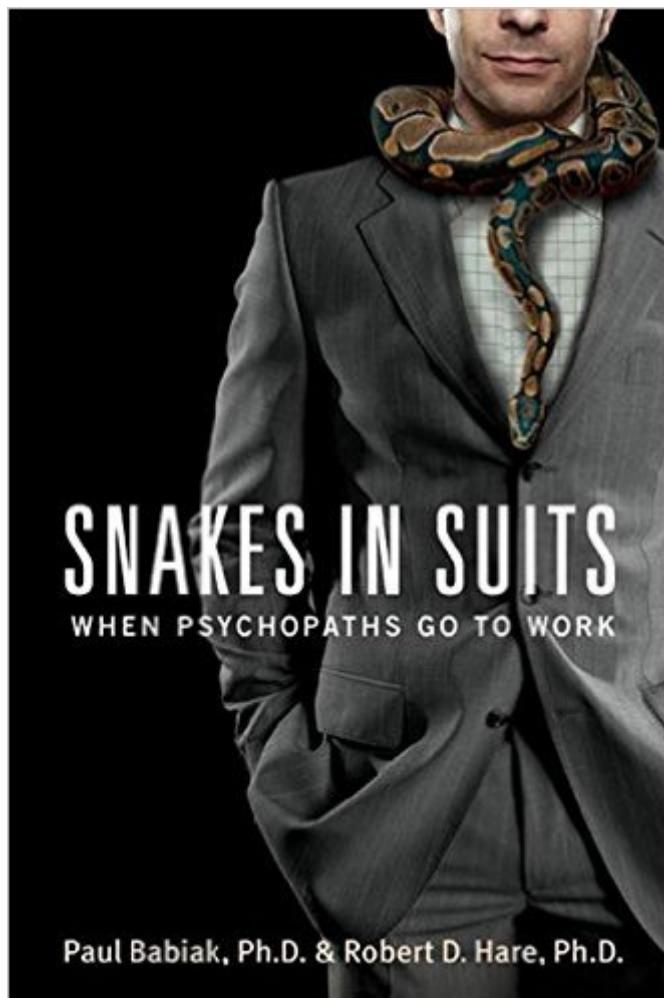


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Snakes In Suits: When Psychopaths Go To Work



Synopsis

Let's say you're about to hire somebody for a position in your company. Your corporation wants someone who's fearless, charismatic, and full of new ideas. Candidate X is charming, smart, and has all the right answers to your questions. Problem solved, right? Maybe not. We'd like to think that if we met someone who was completely without conscience -- someone who was capable of doing anything at all if it served his or her purposes -- we would recognize it. In popular culture, the image of the psychopath is of someone like Hannibal Lecter or the BTK Killer. But in reality, many psychopaths just want money, or power, or fame, or simply a nice car. Where do these psychopaths go? Often, it's to the corporate world. Researchers Paul Babiak and Robert Hare have long studied psychopaths. Hare, the author of *Without Conscience*, is a world-renowned expert on psychopathy, and Babiak is an industrial-organizational psychologist. Recently the two came together to study how psychopaths operate in corporations, and the results were surprising. They found that it's exactly the modern, open, more flexible corporate world, in which high risks can equal high profits, that attracts psychopaths. They may enter as rising stars and corporate saviors, but all too soon they're abusing the trust of colleagues, manipulating supervisors, and leaving the workplace in shambles. *Snakes in Suits* is a compelling, frightening, and scientifically sound look at exactly how psychopaths work in the corporate environment: what kind of companies attract them, how they negotiate the hiring process, and how they function day by day. You'll learn how they apply their "instinctive" manipulation techniques -- assessing potential targets, controlling influential victims, and abandoning those no longer useful -- to business processes such as hiring, political command and control, and executive succession, all while hiding within the corporate culture. It's a must read for anyone in the business world, because whatever level you're at, you'll learn the subtle warning signs of psychopathic behavior and be able to protect yourself and your company -- before it's too late.

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Customer Reviews

The work of psychopath researchers Babiak & Hare has been reviewed in several periodicals over the past year, including Business 2.0, New York Times: Year In Ideas, Harvard Business Review and Fast Company, among others. Babiak is an Industrial-Organizational Psychologist with years of experience in the business world--he was the first to identify the "corporate psychopath"---and Hare is the world renowned author of Without Conscience, a seminal work on psychopaths. Their long awaited book, Snakes In Suits, has finally come out and it was well worth the wait. Snakes In Suits is a page turner, written in an engaging and entertaining style, all the while conveying lots of new information on the topic. The book is structured in a somewhat unique way, as well, making it both a good book for the general reader as well as a must-have for the business reader. The fact that it is also well indexed is a plus, making it easier to refer back to topics in the future. The authors make the point early on that "serial killer" psychopaths, those who make the headlines and crime show plot lines, make up only a small percentage of those in society who actually have a psychopathic personality. And, the rest of these people are living and working in the cubicle right next to us. To their credit, the authors carefully avoid the sensationalism that often characterizes books and articles on this topic. Their approach is even handed, balancing scientific evidence with an easy-reading style. Each chapter begins with a case---drawn from the authors' real-life experience, no doubt---that includes dialog among the players (psychopath and victim alike). The reader becomes the "fly on the wall" watching and listening to what is going on.

I don't usually recommend books that fall into the "Business," "Popular Psychology" or "Self-help" categories, but I believe this book is a must-read for anyone in business. (Read it before you start any new job, and remember its lessons.) I'm not a mental health professional or scholar, so I can't say whether the characterization of "psychopath" is accurate; in my understanding, the more accurate term is "sociopath," unless actual physical violence or criminality is involved, but the definition is for those in the field to dispute or determine. Besides, in the absence of conscience, I would guess it's a slippery slope from the one to the other. What I like most about this book is that it

isn't merely focused on case studies, or on the havoc these personalities can wreak on their individual victims. Yes, the Ah-ha! moments when you finally recognize the manipulator and his/her tactics can be comforting, and it's great to finally see through these snakes' distortions of reality. However, the real contribution of this book, I contend, is that it addresses the collateral damage these monsters can do within an organization: crushing overall employee morale, eroding confidence in the company's internal ethics, and ultimately diminishing employee performance and retention of good "talent." (HR professionals, take note.) I also appreciated that the authors don't give "band-aid" solutions to the victims. In my own case, after reading this book and assessing the damage done me by a snake in my sphere at a corporation I had loved working for, I sadly realized that the time had come to cut my losses and reinvent my professional life elsewhere.

I read *Without Conscience* first, and then this book, and consider them to be useful complements to each other. Contrary to what another reviewer remarked - the first book is essentially a primer, and *Snakes in Suits* is a more advanced text dealing with the organizational environment. The authors give plenty of examples, and plenty of tell-tales of psychopaths. Sure, you may see one or two signs here and there of others around you - but as they point out - you need to see a repeated pattern of many of the signs to be sure that you're dealing with the real thing. Therein lies the real benefit of this book - to give you the tools to make the assessment in advance or as the situation unfolds - not after the fact. Armed with that, you can protect yourself from the machinations of the corporate psychopath. Being a little distrustful of everyone also doesn't hurt - until proven otherwise of a long period of time. Over the years, I've observed that one mistake people tend to make (which makes them vulnerable to the psychopath) is that they look to have 'friends' at work. Find your friends elsewhere - and go to work for the paycheck and career advancement. I take issue with some of the conclusions of the authors (personal opinion - I'm not in a position to professionally disagree) - that the psychopath can ingratiate themselves with senior management to the extent that all criticism of them is brushed off. Sure, in some cases that maybe true. But in most cases, some dark hints or FUD (fear, uncertainty, doubt) can work both ways - both for and against the psychopath. The key, as they point out - is to establish your own reputation and relationships throughout the organization and steer clear of the psychopath.

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