

'Untouchables': The teflon types who can do no wrong | The New Daily

- 4

They're often highly functional individuals, but their self-belief can damage those around them creating a traumatic environment for workmates.



Minister for Immigration Peter Dutton is the highest profile MP under threat. *Photo: AAP*

The halls of politics are filled with them and most workplaces have them. 'Untouchables', or individuals who appear to get away with inappropriate behaviour, no matter what.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton is in danger of becoming one. Last year, he made headlines when he was overheard joking about the plight of Pacific Island nations facing rising seas from climate change.

After surviving that gaffe, he was back in the headlines for firing off an insulting text message in relation to a female journalist, again emerging unscathed.

Labor leader Bill Shorten is another well-insulated individual. After recent allegations, Mr Shorten was cleared by the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption over payments made to the AWU when he was boss. Even with record low polls, personal drama and the knifing of former PM Julia Gillard, he's still enjoying the support of his party.



Too much self-confidence can be intimidating.

People skills expert and University of Sydney lecturer Eleanor Shakiba said untouchables are adept at managing their profiles and there is a mismatch between the way they see themselves and how others see them.

“They don’t worry and they operate in a ways that involve taking risks. They’re able to walk away from shameful situations and remain resilient,” she said.

“It can be incredibly frustrating as (those around them) expect consequences for this type of inappropriate behaviour.

“For example in a workplace scenario, such as bullying – the bully can be fantastic at managing upwards and keeping their profile clean. Yet, when working at the colleague-to-colleague level they operate in a totally different way.”

Dr Suzy Green, psychologist and founder of the Positivity Institute, said the term ‘untouchable’ within the scientific psychological literature, is often referred to as the capacity to be robust, hardy or mentally tough.

The upside of untouchables

Those falling into the ‘mentally tough’ category often display the following:

- The capability to withstand a significant amount of pressure.
- Confidence in their abilities to succeed and willingness to take on demanding tasks.
- The ability to shrug off criticism and not take others’ comments to heart.
- A willingness to speak their mind when working in groups and to be comfortable in many different social and work contexts.
- An ability to deal with unforeseen circumstances without undue stress.

When problems arise, they are determined and view challenges as opportunities for personal development, rather than threats to their security.



Untouchables can come across as bullies.

Untouchables tend to be in control of their emotions which keeps them calm and stable under pressure.

However, there are some potential downsides to being too mentally tough. Such people often lack empathy and awareness of the impact of their behaviour on those around them. They need to work on increasing effectiveness through dealing with others more sensitively.

The downside of untouchables

- Being perceived as mentally or emotionally insensitive.
- Unawareness of their impact on others can cause offence and leave people feeling trampled.
- Intolerance of those who are not like them but are effective in their own ways.
- An inability to deal effectively with others who may challenge them in some way.

To date there is no hard evidence as to whether this type of behaviour is on the increase as these individuals have always existed. A notable untouchable was American gangster Al Capone, who was eventually convicted of tax evasion in the early 1930s.

“There is probably the same proportion in the population through time,” said Ms Shakiba. “The reason we are seeing more is that social media has made this more visible.

“However, narcissism is on the rise within the general population. This leads to a style of behaviour where the individual will promote positive impressions of themselves and will do anything, at any cost to have this image promoted.”



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