

Etc. The Stack

If only Richard Nixon, Kenneth Lay, and Dennis Kozlowski had taken the PCL-R test



The Sociopath Network

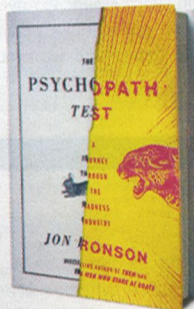
Why are so many CEOs jerks?
Because they're psychopaths.

Seriously. *By Bryant Urstadt*

The very first thing to know about psychopaths, at least according to Jon Ronson, is that they're very charming. They're also usually smart, easily bored, and ruthless power mongers who watch suffering with interest, have an inflated sense of self-worth, lie compulsively, and rarely take blame for their mistakes. For those reasons and others they tend to congregate in places such as London and New York. And a relatively high percentage end up running big companies.

Ronson, the author of *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, wraps *The Psychopath Test* around the research of Robert Hare, a Canadian psychologist who is the authority on psychopaths and co-author of *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work*. Hare is also the author of the definitive psychopath test—Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)—which has become the SAT for diagnosing nutjob behavior. Throughout decades

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The Psychopath Test: A Journey Through the Madness Industry
By Jon Ronson
Riverhead
288pp; \$25.95



of research, he's found that many corporate leaders score way above average.

Actually, alarmingly high. While studies suggest that about 1 percent of the general population qualifies as genuinely psychopathic, Hare believes that about 4 percent of people with substantial decision-making power can be classified as such, and their influence is outsized. Hare even tells Ronson he wishes he'd spent less time studying psychopaths in prison and more time studying those who work in the markets. "Serial killers ruin families," Hare says. "Corporate and political and religious psychopaths ruin economies. They ruin societies." Although Ronson leans heavily on Hare's research, he explains that other psychologists feel the same way. "The higher you go up the ladder," says Martha Stout, a former Harvard Medical School professor and author of *The Sociopath Next Door*, "the greater the number of sociopaths you'll find there." (Ronson uses the terms socio- and psychopath interchangeably.)

To test the thesis, Ronson visits "Chainsaw" Al Dunlap, former chief executive officer of Sunbeam and author of *Mean Business*, who is both celebrated and reviled for his ability to fire people in large numbers. Ronson finds him at his Florida mansion,



which is decorated with sharks and lions and panthers and eagles and hawks, and a lot of gold. Naturally, Ronson brings with him a copy of the PCL-R. Dunlap scores pretty high.

The history of psychotherapy also has its low points. Ronson spends a fair amount of time milking them—from Walter Freeman lobotomizing patients with ice picks to Elliott Barker's efforts to cure psychopaths in the 1960s at a Canadian hospital for the criminally insane. Freeman thought it would be a good idea to lock them in a room naked and dose them with government-grade LSD. It wasn't.

As wardens have long known, Ronson explains, psychopaths are incurable. Their deformity is physical—a temporal lobe of their brains does not seem to transmit or respond to normal emotional cues, such as fear or a terrible product launch. It's almost a relief to know there is a physical difference that allows so many CEOs to stare into a camera and say they won't be cutting the dividend, right before they cut the dividend.

Psychopaths have other advantages, too. According to Ronson, they learn to mimic emotion to manipulate their victims. "Try to teach them empathy and they'll cunningly use it," he writes. To such monsters, therapy is grist and workplace harassment videos are little more than training tools. There is nothing to do, really, but lock them up, or put them in charge.

This makes perfect sense. Agonized intellectuals full of sympathy for the common man aren't meant for the corner office. Such persons would be useless making repetitive decisions about whom to fire and whom to give raises and how much to spend on marketing to children. Human resources executives have known this for a long time, especially those who sat through management courses in business school. As they probably learned, psychologist and management guru David McClelland divided workers' personalities into three categories: those who need power, those who need to achieve, and those who want to be liked. He developed his own test and found that those with a high need to achieve and a high need for affiliation—in other words, really great people—made excellent customer service reps. Those who thirst for power—and couldn't care less about what people think of them—end up running things.

Perhaps those who never make it to the top may be reassured to know they weren't born with a horrifying emotional deformity. Those who have what it takes may consider *The Psychopath Test* a career guide. Given the proliferation of counterintuitive advice books offering such models as warriors and zombies, Ronson's book may spark its own follow-up title: *The Psychopath CEO: Empowering Tools and Career-Changing Lessons from the Insane Asylum*. **E**

The Psychopath Test



Recruiters might want to employ the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised test. Each trait should be scored from 0 to 2, with 2 representing the strongest correlation. Go ahead, try this at home!



I. Superficial charm

0 1 2

2. Grandiose sense of self-worth

0 1 2

3. Need for stimulation/ prone to boredom

0 1 2

4. Pathological lying

0 1 2

5. Conning/manipulative

0 1 2

6. Lack of remorse or guilt

0 1 2

7. Shallow affect

0 1 2

8. Callous/lack of empathy

0 1 2

9. Parasitic lifestyle

0 1 2

10. Poor behavioral controls

0 1 2

II. Promiscuous sexual behavior

0 1 2

12. Early behavior problems

0 1 2

13. Lack of realistic long- term goals

0 1 2

14. Impulsivity

0 1 2

15. Irresponsibility

0 1 2

16. Failure to accept responsibility for own actions

0 1 2

17. Many short-term marital relationships

0 1 2

18. Juvenile delinquency

0 1 2

19. Revocation of conditional release*

0 1 2

20. Criminal versatility

0 1 2

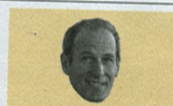
*from an asylum or jail

What your score may say about you



1-5:

Member, Adopt-A-Mouse Campaign



6-10:

Member, Michael Bolton Fan Club



11-15:

Bangalore call center HR manager



16-20:

Knife collector



21-25:

SoulCycle instructor



26-30:

CEO of payday loan company



31-35:

Latin American strongman



36-40:

CEO of a blue-chip company

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