

How do I love me? Let me count the ways - and excel in a job interview

April 3 2012, By Steve Smith

(PhysOrg.com) -- The secret to excelling in a job interview may not hinge on how much your interviewers like you, but in how much you like yourself.

Narcissism, a trait considered obnoxious in most circumstances, actually pays off big-time in the short-term context of a [job interview](#), according to a new study to be published in the [Journal of Applied Social Psychology](#).

Narcissists scored much higher in simulated job interviews than non-narcissists, researchers found. They pointed to narcissists' innate tendency to promote themselves, in part by engaging and speaking at length, which implied confidence and expertise even when they were held to account by expert interviewers.

“This is one setting where it’s OK to say nice things about yourself and there are no ramifications. In fact, it’s expected,” said Peter Harms, assistant professor of management at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a co-author of the study. “Simply put, those who are comfortable doing this tend to do much better than those who aren’t.”

The two-part study examined the effectiveness of the types of behaviors that narcissists exhibit – which would be typically seen as maladjusted – in the narrow context of an interview. In the first part, 72 participants were videotaped in a simulated job-applicant setting. As expected narcissists were more likely to self-promote; however, it was when

expert interviewers challenged applicants that narcissists started behaving in unexpected ways, Harms said.

While normal individuals backed off of their self-promotion tactics when held accountable, narcissists actually increased their attempts to make themselves look better.

“When feeling challenged, they tend to double down,” Harms said. “It’s as if they say ‘Oh, you’re going to challenge me? Then I’m not just great, I’m fantastic.’ And in this setting, it tended to work.”

In the study’s second part, 222 raters evaluated videos of applicants with similar job skills and varying levels of narcissism. The raters consistently awarded chronic self-promoters – who spoke quickly and at length and who used ingratiation tactics such as smiling, gesturing and complimenting others – far more positive evaluations.

Meanwhile, equally qualified applicants who tended to rely on tactical modesty scored lower, according to the study.

“This shows that what is getting (narcissists) the win is the delivery,” Harms said. “These results show just how hard it is to effectively interview, and how fallible we can be when making interview judgments. We don’t necessarily want to hire narcissists, but might end up doing so because they come off as being self-confident and capable.”

For interviewers, the study’s findings mean they must become aware of the tactics used by narcissists, Harms said – and, if necessary, avoid selecting people who chronically use self-promotion and ingratiation, unless those behaviors are appropriate for the position.

“On the whole, we find very little evidence that [narcissists](#) are more or less effective workers. But what we do know is that they can be very

disruptive and destructive when dealing with other people on a regular basis. If everything else is equal, it probably is best to avoid hiring them.”

In addition to UNL’s Harms, the study was authored by Delroy L. Paulhus, Bryce G. Westlake and Stryker S. Calvez of the University of British Columbia.

Provided by University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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