



“EN-TÊTE” campaign on mental health

PERSONALITY DISORDERS

By Rose-Marie Charest, psychologist

Today, as part of your “En-Tête” campaign, the topic is personality disorders. Perhaps not yours, but those of others.

Personality disorders most likely to be found in the legal profession are narcissistic, borderline and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders. You should know that about 8% of the general population has a personality disorder. It is therefore completely normal to find these disorders among lawyers, and among your clients or your colleagues, although 8% of the population means that it will still be quite rare.

The narcissistic personality

What is a narcissistic personality? It’s someone who likes to be thought highly of. Everyone likes having others think highly of them, but a narcissistic personality takes it to a new level, putting all their energy into being appreciated. And it does not even have to be true, just as long as it appears to be so. You can certainly find this type of personality among some of your clients: someone who has been hurt by an attack on his or her self-esteem.

A lawyer who loses a case has to be able to get over it. If he or she takes it personally and feels slighted, perhaps that is going too far. For some clients, the sole fact of being prosecuted damages their image, which they cannot bear.

People with a narcissistic personality do not complain of having this disorder, but rather of the consequences. When you are narcissistic, for instance, you may possibly not show any empathy or respect for people, because you cannot put yourself in their place or get out of your own comfort zone. This will lead to conflict and rejection. It is precisely the consequences that will be hurtful, namely, being rejected.

Borderline disorders

Borderline disorders are being increasingly discussed in society. A borderline personality is characterized by instability: emotional instability and behavioural instability. These are people who find it hard to get along with others, whose attitude changes from idealizing someone to tearing them down. As a result, when they experience conflict, they often choose to sever ties. In the legal community, these are the people who change lawyers, who have an ever-increasing number of lawyers. Borderline personalities certainly include querulous people, people who are never

satisfied, who always have the impression that others have not done well by them, who get angry and look for help elsewhere.

Dealing with someone who has a personality disorder

How do you deal with a person who has a personality disorder? Let's take, for example, an obsessive-compulsive personality. You should be aware that it is already very demanding for a person to be obsessive-compulsive. Someone might say: "You are really obsessive-compulsive, and you just have to change." However, that's not the way it works. You can't say to someone that they are narcissistic, or for that matter, borderline or obsessive-compulsive.

What you have to do is identify the behaviour that you want to see changed and ask that the behaviour be changed. At all times, you must preserve self-esteem by recognizing and pointing out what is good in the individual. First and foremost, the person must be genuinely valued. Then, a specific change in behaviour may be requested. People cannot change their personality and you are not their therapist, but people can change their behaviour for everyone's well-being, including theirs and your own.

If you ask them to change and it does not work, you can then escalate the matter, but try this method first. You'll see that it often works!