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the ego: its defenses and its assets

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You know it when you see it. When we see someone full of themselves, we say, "He's got an ego," but the truth be known, we all have egos. It is the part of our self that we share with the world.

The advertising industry is always looking for catchphrases or words that will sit in our minds. Freud found three little words: id, ego and superego, with which we all are familiar but few really understand.

Some people with big egos are absolutely obnoxious, such as the woman who argues with the postal clerk screaming, "I pay your salary and I demand you do this..." The man who wants special favors from the hotel clerk may say, "Do you know who I am?" These folks may never learn until someone mentally bigger than they are puts them in their place.

One youngster said to me the other day, "My father has too much of an ego and can't apologize." Here the ego is constructing a wall between the child and his father that may remain forever. Unfortunately, Dad will never understand it.

We can get so caught up into our ego that we become self-centered. It is not uncommon in my practice to hear a frustrated spouse demean their partner. Sometimes they can be vicious.

Think of the ego as what we present to others, but we are bombarded by rules coming from our conscience (superego) and desires or aggressions coming from our id. The daily balance continues throughout our lives. Sometimes we act out, which means that our infrastructure to hold back our raw emotion has failed. It is at this time when we punch someone in the nose, engage in road rage, give in to sexual desires, go off a diet or lose self-control. Our defenses are gone, victimized by increasing stress or fatigue.

Oftentimes, we know when our defenses are getting weak. Sometimes we say, "What the hell!" and give in to our raw emotion or desire. Unfortunately, as we cross our conscience, most of us non-psychopaths feel a twinge of guilt. This may stop our evil pursuit, but sometimes it doesn't as we take a flight into hell.

The emotions can become so intense that we may eat that chocolate cake, punch our neighbor or get to the point of murder. The best of us are vulnerable to doing things that we never thought imaginable. The key is to manage our defenses and situations so our ego remains intact.

Assets are valuable because they can offer security and comfort. The ego has assets, which enable it to get through those tough times. Intelligence is one type of asset. It helps us to plan our behavior, think through our options, and avoid trouble.

A sense of humor is another asset that helps us assuage the pain from



a stressful event. If we can laugh at ourselves, we minimize the intensity of stress.

Altruism is another asset. Some individuals I see give to others to feel good about themselves and reduce depression. Those who give to others engender emotional support so they are not alone in tough times. They have an asset to be social and engage others, not as a burden, but as an appreciative friend ready to return the kindness as soon as they are able.

Humility is an asset that I have found in the most successful people, be they in business or academia. Those with humility are not stressed to impress others but are motivated to relate and empathize. These people listen to others with interest and make the best conversationalists.

When I meet you, I will see the ego you present. Think of how that may come across. In the right presentation, others may be instinctively drawn to you or repelled. I hope there are, as the Beach Boys say, "good vibrations."

HLM