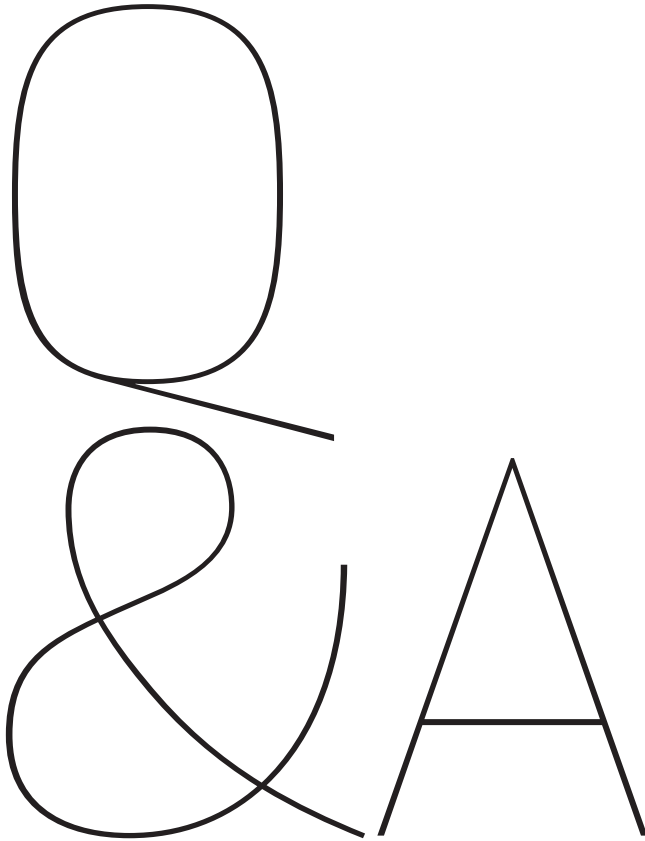


//// Questions for:
Katherine Crowley



The psychotherapist and author discusses **what it means to get 'hooked'** and how to get un-hooked.

Interview by Karen Christensen

Despite the fact that emotion is discouraged in business, if you scratch the surface of any organization, you find people feeling anxious, angry and misunderstood. What is the result of this paradox?

Unfortunately, the result is interpersonal warfare that quietly goes on behind the scenes and that employees and bosses find very difficult to address directly, because it's not recognized as a valid part of the work experience. Employees can find themselves caught up in turf wars, power grabs and e-mail battles – yet by and large, they don't possess the tools and tactics to address these problems.

What does it mean to be 'hooked' by something or someone?

This term describes what happens when someone or something triggers a strong negative internal reaction in you. It could be as simple as getting irritated by the chronic throat clearer who sits next to you; maybe that sound just gets under your skin and drives you crazy, making it hard for you to concentrate on your work. Or it could be something as scary as an abusive authority figure whose personality disorder is making your life a living hell. The key to being hooked is that you are plunged into a state of emotional turmoil that causes you to function in a much less productive manner. The sooner you recognize that someone's behaviour is hooking you, the sooner you can do something about it. I advise people, during the course of a work week, to notice which people and circumstances are eliciting positive internal responses in them and which ones are leaving them feeling tense, churned up or defeated.

What are the first signs that you've been hooked?

The alarm usually goes off in one of three ways. It can be *physical*, in which case you might experience tight shoulders, heart palpitations, stomach churning or back pain. Somehow your body is telling you that something is very wrong. The second way the alarm goes off is *mentally*. You might find yourself obsessing, spacing out or having revenge fantasies. Maybe you imagine this person getting hit by a car or somehow disappearing; or you might have escape fantasies, where you get to leave or they get fired. Last but not least are the *emotional* hooks that people feel. You might notice that you're feeling angry or anxious all of the time, or that you're depressed. Maybe as you start to prepare for a presentation you have a panic attack, or in the latter stages of being severely hooked, you might just feel generalized despair.

You have said, “If you can change your reaction, you will change your life.” Please discuss.

I’ve been working with business people for more than 20 years now, and what I’ve found is that as hard as people try, it is usually not possible to change the other person’s behaviour. The one thing you *can* change is your *reaction* to that person’s behaviour, and by doing so, the relationship can literally be transformed. For example, you may not be able to change that lazy co-worker who always tries to dump work onto your desk, but you *can* change the way you respond to her. Normally, if someone does this, we either take the work on and are quietly resentful, or we get mad and yell at her. Changing your reaction can be as simple as saying, ‘Sorry, but I really can’t help you with that; I’m rushing to meet my own deadline.’ In doing so, you are also setting a boundary, which eventually this person will either respect or reject (and move on to someone else.)

‘Unhooking’ has four steps. Please summarize them.

First, let me say that these should always be done in order. The first step – unhooking physically – involves doing something physical to release the negative energy and calm your system. I highly recommend rigorous exercise like running or working out. If you’re less severely hooked, you might take a walk, or if you can’t leave the office, splash some cold water on your face. Sometimes just breathing – deep, gentle, consistent breathing – can unhook you physically in the moment. That’s the first step.

The second step is to unhook mentally by asking yourself some important questions. First, ‘What is really happening here?’ Your description will likely be pretty vivid – ‘This idiot is interrupting me again!’ The next question is, ‘What are the facts of the situation?’ Here, you have to look at the scenario more objectively; ‘This person clearly has a hard time understanding that I’m working and that I don’t like to be interrupted’. Next you ask, ‘What is *their* part in this scenario?’ Their part is that they seem to be oblivious to what you’re doing and unable to read your cues. The fourth question is, ‘What’s *my* part in this?’ Your part may be that you keep allowing it to happen and that you aren’t being clear about it being a problem. The final question is, ‘What are my options?’ If you can answer the first four questions – especially ‘what is *my* part in this’ – then you will begin to see options emerge. For example, with the chronic interrupter, you might need to sit down with this person and tell him, ‘Consistently being interrupted by you is not working for me; we have to devise a system where I can hear what you need to say, respect you, and still get my work done.’

Has one of your work relationships turned into your worst nightmare? See if any of these apply:

- You constantly rehearse what you want to say to this person in your mind, in your car, and in your sleep.
- You find yourself talking about the relationship with friends, family – anyone who will listen.
- When you anticipate any interaction with this person you feel anxious, worried or uneasy.
- Conversations with this individual leave you feeling jittery, wound up, overheated or otherwise unhinged.
- You feel trapped in a no-win situation.

Unhooking verbally is the third step. Now that you’ve unhooked physically and mentally, you can say something to move the situation forward. I always advise taking the high road, which means taking responsibility for the situation and suggesting some kind of constructive action. The fourth and final step is to unhook with a business tool, which is any business procedure that can improve the situation. This could mean documenting what’s been happening, sending an e-mail to the person’s supervisor, having an evaluation done or drawing on company policies.

How do you define ‘high-road communication’ ?

The key to the high road is that you take responsibility for your experience and offer a solution rather than going down the road of blame and accusation. This means using ‘I’ rather than ‘you’ when communicating about the situation. The temptation is to say, “You keep doing this; you never cooperate” or “I’m sick of you doing X or Y.” The high road entails sticking to a script of “I need...,” “I would prefer...,” or “I’d like you to...” and then following that with a request that sets a new boundary.

You have defined seven roles or personas in the workplace (see page 94). Which one tends to ‘hook’ the most people?

There are two that cause the most controversy. The first is the *rebel*, because these people really do delight in getting a reaction from the people around them. They can be very entertaining, and they might even see themselves as advocates for everyone else; but there comes a time where you just want to say, ‘Put the mantle down, we’ve had enough.’ It’s easy to get tired of them

Seven Workplace Personas

There are two sides to any role: taking on the part by unconsciously enacting a certain set of behaviours; and becoming 'branded' as this type of person when the people around you only see you through a specific lens.

The Hero: The need to be idolized compels this individual to produce more and perform better than everyone else.

The Caretaker: feels responsible for and tries to solve everyone else's personal problems.

The Rebel/Scapegoat: Bends the rules and goes against the grain – even when it jeopardizes his or her career.

The Martyr: Wants recognition and praise for sacrifice and suffering on behalf of the company.

The Entertainer: Uses jokes and humor to break the tension and keep others happy.

The Peacemaker: Does whatever it takes to keep the peace.

The Invisible One: Stays out of trouble by staying out of the spotlight.

always having to raise that controversial question, challenging authority, or wanting to revise everything. The second role that is usually quietly resented by a lot of people is the *office martyr*. Martyrs want to be recognized for their extreme self-sacrifice; and yet what they end up doing is kind of hogging the show by taking work from everyone else, and taking credit for the results. Over time, this can become a real source of irritation.

What are 'boundary busters,' and how can we protect ourselves from them?

These are people who continue to invade our personal territory in one way or another, and most of them are completely oblivious to what they're doing. They might include the colleague who always takes your stapler, or the guy who shares way too much about what he did on Saturday night, but what they have in common is *obliviousness*. It's very important to address this because you need to set boundaries with these people. The most important thing about boundaries is to know what yours are: you might have time boundaries, personal space boundaries, personal information boundaries, keeping-your-word boundaries, to name just a few. The more you are aware of yours, the more clearly you can communicate them.

Describe some of the benefits of 'managing up' vs. 'managing down.'

Managing down, of course, is when you're managing staff that report to you. So if you're in a management position, hopefully

Four Steps to Unhooking

As Susan and Tracy sit at their weekly team meeting, Tracy proudly takes credit for Susan's brilliant promotion idea. Susan feels herself reacting – the surge of heat through her body, her face reddening. She realizes, 'I just got hooked'. What Susan needs to do is unhook – to change her reaction to Tracy's behaviour:

- 1. Unhook physically:** Susan breathes deeply to calm herself down, release her anger and check back into the meeting.
- 2. Unhook mentally:** Susan tells herself not to be intimidated by Tracy's behaviour: she can find a way to be heard.
- 3. Unhook verbally:** Susan speaks up: "When I first ran this idea by Tracy, we both got excited about it."
- 4. Unhook with a business tool:** Susan writes and distributes an e-mail summarizing the results of the meeting and clarifying the fact that the idea originated with her: "I'm glad my promotion idea received such a positive response from the rest of the team. I look forward to working with everyone to develop it further."

you are already thinking about doing this well. *Managing up* involves managing the people above you, and people don't intuitively know how to do this. Instead, they wait around for the boss to know how to optimally manage them – and often, it just doesn't happen. That's why managing up can be the most important skill for anyone who wants to move their career forward. One of my favourite tools is very simple: meeting with your boss on a regular basis. It might be for only 15 minutes, but you need to have that meeting weekly *and* bring an agenda with you – with a copy for your boss – so you can go over the most important issues you are facing. If you do this regularly, I predict that you will see remarkable improvements in your communication with your boss. Managing up allows you to be proactive in your work and take charge of your career. The main take-away from our discussion today is that when you take charge of a situation, you will experience real relief. **R**

Katherine Crowley is a Harvard-trained psychotherapist and the co-author of *Working For You Isn't Working for Me: The Ultimate Guide to Managing Your Boss* (Portfolio Trade, 2010) and the best-seller *Working With You Is Killing Me: Freeing Yourself From Emotional Traps at Work* (Hachette, 2006). She is a co-founder of Manhattan-based K-Squared Enterprises.