

Professional Envy

John Hanks, DC

I have a confession: I have experienced envy. I have also experienced the sin of sloth, but that is a topic for a different article. Envy can be a negative emotion and not one that is easily defined. *Webster's* says envy is "a painful or resentful awareness of an advantage of another, and wanting to have that advantage." It is pervasive in the human condition, and according to some folks, a driver of capitalism. We all "want."

Recently, a show on the History Channel fell right in my lap, since I had been thinking about this topic for a while. The show was about envy and jealousy. It reported on a survey of people's attitude about salaries. The responses indicated that most workers would be happier making \$50,000 per year if everyone around them was earning an average of \$25,000. However, if a worker were making a better salary of \$100,000 a year, and yet this worker's colleagues were making \$200,000 a year, dissatisfaction or "envy" was common. Making more money was not the issue; the issue was envy.

The [documentary](#) continued with a report about monkey behavior. An experiment showed that monkeys getting rewards of cucumber slices did not demonstrate competitive behavior. They enjoyed their slices as a treat, pushed the correct "monkey bar" when required, and everyone seemed satisfied. But as soon as one group of monkeys was rewarded with grapes instead of cucumbers, which the "control" group was not getting, the "grape deprived" monkeys quit eating the cucumbers. They knew from experience that grapes tasted better than cucumbers. I can't speak for the monkeys, but perhaps the cucumbers became less valued, so why continue to eat them?

During my final year at chiropractic college, I had the unique opportunity to work in the office of a prominent DC. I learned a great deal, gained confidence, and grew to admire my mentor and the way he did business. Looking back now, what I thought was admiration might have been a "soft" envy without the "resentment" part, since some day I wanted what he had: a great family, a nice car, a busy practice and a presence in the community. I was inspired to succeed.

Then I went into practice, first with a partner and then on my own. I struggled to pay the bills and finally moved to a new location. In the middle of all this drama, I craved advice. I remembered the invitation of a new chiropractic "superstar," not much older than myself, who was "on fire for chiropractic," as some might put it. I needed at least a spark, if not a bonfire, so I went to visit him.

I could try to detail many of the memories of the visit to Dr. B's office, but after all these years, I'm not sure if they would be valid. I remember the office manager with her huge smile, and the assistants moving patients in and out of therapy rooms. Dr. B welcomed me warmly and we were able to spend quite a bit of time in his office talking, since he had two DCs working for him, treating most of the patients. Dr. B's job seemed to be "selling" treatment plans. I figured he must have been good at it since the office appeared so prosperous. But Dr. B seemed distracted, and he was surprisingly candid about why.

"John, I'm up to my eyeballs in debt," he confided as he stared out the window. "But I got my young

neck into this noose, and I'm going to cut my way out!" Months later, I heard that he had just left his Mercedes on the side of the road and walked away. He didn't want the neighbors to witness the finance company's tow truck repossessing it in his own driveway.

Dr. B wasn't doing anything illegal. He just spent more than he made and went broke. I didn't envy that. I had evolved from naïve admiration to a better understanding of unfounded envy.

There is nothing that will annoy, irritate, and finally infuriate a doctor more than a competing doctor [advertising](#) that they are superior. In my state, the chiropractic statute actually forbids such advertising, unless the education, certification or method is valid and proven. The surgeons I know can be the most touchy.

"It's a war of lasers and hardware," one orthopedist complained to me. "Some of these hotshots insinuate that they are super-tech Michelangelos, and the rest of us are no more skilled than drywall hangers!"

I understood. For instance, the minute a DC runs an ad for a "special deal" or "space-age technology" of any kind, the first 10 callers will be other chiropractors. That's because if the deal is a "bait and switch" or an out-and-out scam, it's not fair. I know that sounds a bit sophomoric, but fairness is the issue, not envy and not even jealousy, which has been defined as "intolerance to a rival." Doctors can be intolerant, all right, whenever a colleague's ethics go decidedly "rogue." That's why there are regulators - state boards of examiners - instead of vigilante packs of orthopedists chasing rivals with bone saws and percussion hammers.

I have forgiven myself for feeling envious. A "painful or resentful awareness" is not an emotion I want. Instead, "admiration" for hard-working, conscientious and talented practitioners feels much better.

But I occasionally learn of the antics of unscrupulous braggarts. What about them? After much deliberation, I have identified the proper emotion: indignation. (*Webster's* definition: "anger aroused by something unjust, unworthy or mean.")

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