

## TOXIC BEHAVIOURS



# AND POLAR BEARS AND PENGUINS

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse is a metaphor depicting the end of times in the New Testament. They describe conquest, war, hunger, and death respectively. Dr. Gottman uses this metaphor to describe communication styles that can predict the end of a relationship.

The first horseman of the apocalypse is **criticism**. Criticising your colleague is different than offering a critique or voicing a complaint! The latter two are about specific issues, whereas the former is a personal attack: it is an attack on your colleague at the core. In effect, you are dismantling his or her whole being when you criticise. E.g. “you are selfish”.

The second horseman is **defensiveness**. We’ve all been defensive. When we feel accused unjustly, we fish for excuses or justifications so that our colleague will back off. Unfortunately, this strategy is almost never successful.

The third horseman is **contempt**. When we communicate in this state, we are truly mean—treating others with disrespect, mocking them with sarcasm, ridicule, name-calling, mimicking, and/or body language such as eye-rolling. The target of contempt is made to feel despised and worthless.

The fourth horseman is **stonewalling**. Stonewalling occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction. In other words, stonewalling is when one person shuts down and closes himself/herself off from the other. It is a lack of responsiveness to your colleague and the interaction between the two of you. Rather than confronting the POOP™ (which tends to accumulate!) with our colleagues, we make evasive manoeuvres such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy, or engaging in obsessive behaviours. It takes time for the negativity created by the first three horsemen to become overwhelming enough that stonewalling becomes an understandable “out,” but when it does, it frequently becomes a habit.

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## DON'T BE TOXIC!

Articulate what is going on:

1. Without judgement and/or interpretation
2. Comes from a place of genuine curiosity
3. Speak in the first person e.g. "I"
4. Typically starts with...
  - a. what I sense is...
  - b. what I see is...
  - c. what I hear is...
  - d. what I feel is...
5. And followed with powerful questions to gain clarity on what's going on.

## NOW IT'S TIME TO DISPOSE OF THE POOP™!

### Stages To Dispose Of The POOP™

1. Clarify the need.
2. Brainstorm solutions.
3. Agree to the solution.
4. Identify who is taking ownership of the disposal.
5. Identify if cascading communications are required.
6. Set a deadline.
7. Follow-up to ensure successful disposal.

### EXAMPLES:

- *I'm sensing...frustration right now.*
  - > *What are your thoughts?*
  - > *What do you see is going on?*
  - > *How does this impact you?*
  - > *What's not being said?*
- *What I see...is people getting distracted.*
  - > *I'm curious what that is about?*
  - > *What's behind ### that?*
  - > *What's not being said?*
- *I hear you say...that nothing is working.*
  - > *What do you mean by that?*
  - > *What is leading you to say/ believe that?*
  - > *How does that impact you?*
- *What I feel is #####...*
  - > *Where is that coming from?*
  - > *What contributed that?*
  - > *What triggered that?*
  - > *How does that make you feel?*