Machiavellianism: Using Others to Get Ahead

In 1513, the Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli published a book entitled The Prince. In it, he outlined a ruthless strategy for seizing and holding political power. The essence of his approach was expediency: Do whatever is required to defeat others or gain an advantage over them. Among the guiding principles he recommended were the following:

- Never show humility; arrogance is far more effective when dealing with others.
- Morality and ethics are for the weak; powerful people feel free to lie, cheat, and deceive whenever it suits their purpose.
- It is much better to be feared than loved.

In short, Machiavelli urged those who desired power to adopt an approach based totally on expediency or usefulness. Let others be swayed by friendship, loyalty, or beliefs about decency and fair play; a truly successful leader, he suggested, should always be above those factors. He or she should be willing to do whatever it takes to win.

Measuring Machiavellianism

The items listed here are similar to those included in one of the most widely used measures of Machiavellianism.

Directions: In the space next to each item, enter a number that characterizes your own feelings about that statement. If you disagree strongly, enter 1; if you disagree, enter 2; if you neither agree nor disagree, enter 3; if you agree, enter 4; if you strongly agree, enter 5.

1. The best way to handle people is telling them what they want to hear.
2. When you ask someone to do something for you, it is best to give the real reasons for wanting it rather than giving reasons that might carry more weight.
3. Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.
4. It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners and bending the rules.
5. It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak—and that it will come out when given a chance.
6. It is never right to lie to someone else.
7. Most people are basically good and kind.
8. Most people work hard only when they are forced to do so.
**Scoring:** One's score on this scale reflects the willingness to manipulate others in order to get ahead. Add your responses to items 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8. To this number add the sum of 2, 6, and 7 after scoring them in reverse (so, if you responded with a 5, add 1 point; if you responded with a 4, add 2 points; if you responded with a 3, add 3 points; if you responded with a 2, add 4 points; and if you responded with a 1, add 5 points). Then, add your scores. The higher your score, the more Machiavellian you tend to be.