

The Hidden Face of Male Depression in Business



By Karen Meager

If you are a Coach or you work with people using NLP in a business capacity, you will have come across the hidden face of male depression in your work, but you may not know it. Depression in men is hidden because depression presents in men differently to women in most cases. Often men are unaware they are depressed and may even exhibit destructive behaviours in the workplace. There is a reason for this.

My interest in male depression was originally sparked by my work with women's groups. I work with a lot of women's business groups and with survivors of domestic abuse and have always been fascinated by the other side of the coin.

In this article, I will explain why depression in men is different and how to spot it, why it impacts us all and what NLP Coaches can do to support men they suspect may be depressed.

One in 3 of us will have a mental health issue in our lives. Only 25 per cent of people who seek help for depression in the UK are men and yet recent studies conclude that the actual number of depressed men is nearer 50 per cent. Why the discrepancy?

The DSM IV diagnostic criteria for a major depressive disorder

is: 'Five (or more) of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2 week period and represent a change from previous functioning.'

- 1 Depressed mood – most of the day, nearly every day.
- 2 Markedly diminished interest and pleasure in all or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day.
- 3 Significant weight loss or gain.
- 4 Insomnia.
- 5 Agitation nearly every day.
- 6 Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
- 7 Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day.
- 8 Diminished ability to think or concentrate or indecisiveness, nearly every day.
- 9 Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying) with or without a specific plan.

If a doctor was assessing someone against this criteria, he or she would depend on self disclosure which highlights the main



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problem for men with depression – their upbringing and the shame associated with talking about or expressing feelings. Many boys are raised to be tough, remember ‘big boys don’t cry’? It’s ok for boys to be assertive, strong, rough and tumble. It’s not ok for boys to be vulnerable, show signs of weakness or not being able to cope. We only have to watch a playground reaction to a boy bursting into tears to see this in evidence even today. Be a Hollywood hero is the message.

So deep-seated is the shame of expressing emotion that many men, and I see this most in men aged 35–55 in senior positions in organisations, repress their feelings so much that even with the best will in the world, they would be unable to answer a doctor’s questions related to the DSM criteria above. This is the reason why suicide is the number one cause of death in men under 50, it’s a sad state of affairs that some men chose this course of action rather than get help.

It’s not just a man’s problem

Men tend to act out their emotional issues rather than express them. In depressed men, these behaviours can range from unhelpful to destructive. Women tend to go inward whereas men, unable to handle any more repressed emotion, do things that they hope will help them feel better – even if just for a moment. They act out.

Men who are depressed are more likely to experience it in the form of:

- *Addictive behaviour* – alcohol problems, affairs, gambling, eating, not eating and also addictive behaviour that can be viewed as acceptable like exercise or working. When these become obsessions it can be an indication of a deeper problem.
- *‘Leaking’ of inappropriate behaviour* – this could be sexually inappropriate behaviour, inappropriate banter, teasing or bullying, outbursts, even stealing or criminal behaviour. The key difference between an indication of depressive tendencies and other issues, is that a depressed man will feel bad about them afterwards, and it will just add to his feelings of worthlessness. They may go to some lengths to cover this up so that their behaviour stays hidden.

We can see how this all links together from a workplace, societal and relationship perspective? I should add that these behaviours are not always a sign of depression and they could also be symptomatic of other issues but if we add them to the DSM list we will get a better overall picture. If we can help men rather than demonise them, the impact on business, relationships and the world could be huge.

You can make a difference

This is where NLP and those of you coaching in organisations comes in. In an ideal world they should seek help via a doctor, counselling or psychotherapy, but that would be to admit they need help. Men won’t always seek help but they may be happy to have some coaching as part of their work, and with a bit of knowledge we can support men who feel depressed without forcing them to do something they don’t want to.

Importantly, armed with this knowledge we will not unintentionally make their condition worse. Depressed men may seek to feel better, more powerful, invincible even – for a depressed client giving them an anchor to these resources

will just make things worse for them and other people. These are key indicators that we might be working with a man who is depressed:

- Problems identifying emotions like sadness, fear, shame or guilt. They could find Timeline work difficult or we may not be convinced that an emotion has cleared (because they can’t access it but are too ashamed to admit it to us).
- Presenting issues are that they want more power, to feel more confident, to be more assertive – but we feel as if they already project these qualities.
- Having relationship issues at home or finding the concept of love hard to grasp unless it is to do with providing and protecting.
- Expressing concern that they can’t feel the full range of emotions.
- Talking about a ‘dullness’ and expressing apathy, lack of motivation or a ‘can’t be bothered’ attitude.

These are not definitive, some of these tendencies are also present in psychopaths so it’s important not to jump to conclusions or imply to someone they might be depressed.

My key tips for working with a man we suspect may have depressive tendencies are:

- Don’t get sucked into doing the most obvious intervention, take time to explore their construct using all the great modelling methodologies we know in NLP. This will enable us to work safely in their construct without ‘labelling’ them or doing anything that could be unintentionally harmful to themselves or other people.
- Check ecology very carefully, spend more time checking out

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the consequences of any intervention than you would do normally.

- Pace them more slowly than we would a normal coaching client, give them space to talk, use metaphors and stories even share stories that might, over time, give them permission to open up. The single most powerful intervention for a man who is depressed is for him to be able to express his feelings and feel validated.
- If their behaviours appear to be addictive (even those that seem to be acceptable like fitness or work) do not add to their motivation to do these things more. If possible encourage them to improve their behavioural flexibility by doing less of the activity.

Progress can feel slow and frustrating, but trust that you are making a difference. If you feel out of your depth, or you feel they would be open to and benefit from counselling or therapeutic work, you can find a list of psychotherapists trained in NLP on www.nlptca.com and on UKCP.org. ●

