PSYCHOLOGY & HUMAN NATURE

The H Factor of Personality

by Kibeom Lee and Michael C. Ashton

One trait few people know - honesty-humility - quietly decides who plays fair and who takes advantage.

BEST POINTS FROM THE BOOK

01 **Personality runs on six big traits, not five.**

Word studies across many languages kept surfacing a sixth factor the Big Five missed - Honesty-Humility. Lee and Ashton built the six-factor HEXACO model around it.

02 **One trait decides whether you exploit people or play fair.**

H bundles four facets: sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, and modesty. High-H people won't manipulate or cheat even when it is safe; low-H people flatter, bend rules, and chase status.

03 **Low H predicts cheating the moment nobody is watching.**

In lab games, low-H players cheat for cash far more readily - and frequent thieves score lower in H than 80 to 90 percent of the population.

04 **Agreeable is not the same as honest.**

In HEXACO, Agreeableness is patience and forgiveness when you are crossed - anger lives at its low end. H answers a different question: will you take advantage when you could? A person can be smooth and patient, and still quietly selfish.

05 **Low H wears different masks depending on the rest of the personality.**

The book's field guide: low H with low Emotionality becomes greed without fear - or pity. With high Extraversion, narcissism run wild. With high Conscientiousness, selfish ambition. With high Agreeableness, a flatterer who seems harmless.

06 **Honesty-Humility is the last thing you learn about a person.**

Charm exposes itself in minutes, but H hides. Coworkers' guesses about each other's H are barely better than chance - only long acquaintance, across many situations, reveals it.

07 **Power does not just corrupt. It attracts the corruptible.**

More than 80 percent of people who strongly crave power over others score below average in H, and wanting to be a CEO or president is the career interest most tied to low H. Screen for fairness before you hand anyone authority.

08 **Watch what people do about money and sex - H shows there first.**

Low H tracks with deceptive selling, tax games, and corner-cutting for money - and with infidelity, partner poaching, and faked affection for sex. These are the arenas where exploiting others pays fastest.

09 **Respectability is not evidence of honesty.**

Piety, public generosity, championing underdogs, and blunt talk are all fake signs - bluntness is really low Agreeableness. The real tells: bragging about beating the system, flattering only the useful, name-dropping, and an 'above the law' attitude.

10 **Friends and partners match on H - so choose your flock on purpose.**

Couples and close friends are more alike in H than in almost any other trait, and high-H circles reinforce fair dealing. With a low-H person you cannot avoid, don't preach fairness - arrange things so honesty is in their interest too.

11 **Your H level is a leaning, not a life sentence.**

The book closes on becoming a high-H person: your natural setting may stay put, but deliberately acting straightforward, unentitled, and fair raises your actual H - and everyone around you can tell the difference.

THE BOOK, IN SHORT

For decades, personality science ran on the Big Five. Then psychologists Kibeom Lee and Michael C. Ashton, studying the trait words of language after language - beginning with Korean - kept finding a sixth factor that earlier research had overlooked. They named it Honesty-Humility, built the six-factor HEXACO model around it, and wrote this book as its plain-language tour: why some people are manipulative, self-entitled, materialistic, and exploitive, and why it matters for everyone.

The H factor bundles four facets. Sincerity: no manipulating people to get your way. Fairness: no cheating or stealing. Greed avoidance: little hunger for lavish wealth and status. Modesty: no sense of entitlement to special treatment. High-H people stay straight even when dishonesty would pay and no one would know. Low-H people run the opposite calculation. HEXACO also redraws two familiar traits - Emotionality means fearfulness, anxiety, dependence, and sentimentality, while anger moves to the low end of Agreeableness: patience and forgiveness when others cross you.

Low H rarely travels alone. The book's field guide shows how it mutates with the other traits - greed without fear or pity, narcissism run wild, selfish ambition, the pleasant-but-insincere flatterer. Worse, H is the hardest trait to detect: first impressions expose charm, not character, and coworkers' judgments of each other's H are barely better than chance. One surprise from the research: on anonymous questionnaires, low-H people describe themselves quite frankly - they lie when it pays, not as a reflex.

The research then walks H through the rest of life. Friends and spouses match on H more than on nearly any other trait. In politics, low H feeds the desire for hierarchy and inequality, while low Openness feeds authoritarianism. In religion, H shapes why people practice - devotion, or status and connections - which is why piety itself proves nothing. And in the chapters on money, power, and sex, the stakes turn concrete: cheating and theft for money, a hunger for power that is itself a low-H warning sign, and infidelity and partner poaching in relationships.

The closing chapters turn defensive and practical at once. Respectability, public generosity, and blunt talk are unreliable signs of high H; bragging about beating the system, flattering the useful, and living 'above the law' are reliable signs of low H. Around low-H people, the advice is to limit your exposure - or align interests so honesty pays them too. The epilogue turns the lens home: by deliberately acting as a high-H person would, you can raise your actual level of H, the one trait in this book you are invited to change.

DO THIS WEEK

Take the book's own test. The appendix prints the HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised, and a free version sits at hexaco.org: score yourself and find your lowest H facet - sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, or modesty. Then, for the rest of the week, watch for the moments nobody would check - the expense claim, the shared credit, the promise you could quietly drop - and act the way that facet demands. It is the epilogue's method in miniature: raise your actual H by behaving like it.

By Kibeom Lee and Michael C. Ashton, first published 2012. Read it if you hire, partner, manage, or vote - it gives you a sharper, tested map of human character.