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# Escape the Grip of Greed and Envy



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## **Six steps to overcome the twin terrors of greed and envy and embrace being “good enough”.**

Healthy competition is natural, but when taken to extremes, it can transform into a dangerous obsession. Those fixated on being the best are often driven by insatiable greed and envy, perceiving the world as a battleground where only winners and losers exist.

A clear example of this destructive pursuit can be found in the tale of Roman general Marcus Crassus, often hailed as “the richest man in Rome”. Despite amassing immense wealth and power, Crassus was consumed by a thirst for more. His greed led him to attempt the conquest of Parthia in 53 BC, a campaign that ultimately cost him his life. [Legend has it](#) that when he was executed, the Parthians poured molten gold into his mouth, symbolically mocking his relentless thirst for wealth.

The combination of [greed](#) and envy, two of the seven deadly sins, often leads to catastrophic consequences. Greed, the constant desire to surpass and accumulate at all costs, is frequently linked to a sense of entitlement. It

is also a bottomless pit. **Greedy individuals** may be temporarily satisfied by their latest accomplishment, but soon return to feelings of dissatisfaction and emptiness. This relentless and vicious cycle means that they can never achieve the sense of fulfilment and enjoyment they seek.

Envy, on the other hand, is characterised by discontent and resentment towards those who possess what the envious desire. These individuals constantly compare themselves to others and begrudge their success, beauty, fortune or wealth. They perceive any threat to their status or accomplishments as a narcissistic injury. Not having what others have amplifies their feelings of low self-esteem and self-pity, often leading to behaviours aimed at undermining those they envy.

### **Greed and envy: The twin terrors**

Greed and envy are like identical twins in many ways. Both are complex human emotions with severe negative psychological effects. They are also closely connected to the desire to acquire, whether it's wealth, possessions, status or recognition.

Both also stem from social comparisons. Greed emerges when people compare themselves to others who have more, leading to a desire to match or surpass them. Envy arises when individuals compare themselves to those who possess what they desire, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and resentment.

From a psychological perspective, greed often originates from emotional trauma and unmet needs. Greedy people often use objects or possessions as a substitute for their emptiness. Similarly, this void and sense of inadequacy often sits at the heart of envy.

Individuals driven by greed or envy often lack self-sustaining habits, relying on external sources of praise and affirmation to maintain psychological equilibrium. Despite this, they remain perpetually dissatisfied, blinded by their desires.

In moderation, the desire for wealth, power and status can drive positive ambitions and propel people towards their goals. However, when these desires become all-consuming, as seen in Crassus' story, they lead to ruthless and harmful actions. In today's materialistic and capitalistic world, where entitlement and self-centeredness are encouraged, these traits can

hinder the pursuit of a meaningful life.

## **Six steps to conquer greed and envy**

Tackling these troublesome behavioural patterns requires adjusting your focus away from excessive self-centeredness and the relentless desire for material possessions. It involves changing your mindset and priorities to achieve a healthier balance in your life.

### **1. Understand the roots of your emotions**

The first step is acknowledging the presence of these emotions within you. Only then can you take the time to introspect and explore what is triggering your feelings of greed and envy.

Reflect on your core identity, the values that guide your actions and the beliefs that shape your perspectives. Probing your motivations and desires, both apparent and hidden, will help you understand what fuels these negative emotions.

### **2. Focus on what matters**

Identify what makes you feel content and good about yourself. Having a clear purpose will help you focus on what truly matters and avoid unnecessary desires. Above all, recognise that accumulating possessions or comparing yourself to others will not bring the satisfaction you crave. This need for more will only intensify feelings of inadequacy.

### **3. Concentrate on progress and personal growth**

Just as greed and envy are intertwined, so are compassion, empathy and a sense of social responsibility. Whenever negative feelings arise, reflect on what is triggering them. Understanding your motivations enables you to make more conscious decisions.

Shift your focus from greed and envy to your own progress and personal growth. Acknowledge your positive qualities and accomplishments instead of getting stuck on what's missing or wrong.

### **4. Practice gratitude and humility**

Try to appreciate the good things you already have. Cultivating a sense of gratitude for these positive aspects in your life, both big and small, can counter the desire for more. As the Greek philosopher Epicurus once said, "He who is not satisfied with a little is satisfied with nothing." Developing true empathy for others by trying to understand their perspectives and

experiences can help shift your focus from selfish desires and excessive competition to personal growth and self-improvement.

Humility is another way to temper feelings of grandiosity and the constant need for more. Showing empathy and generosity towards those who are less fortunate can bring you greater satisfaction.

### **5. Find fulfilment through helping others**

Engaging in activities that are more community-centered, such as volunteering or helping those in need, shifts your attention away from personal greed and envy. Spending time with people who are less needy and greedy may provide positive reinforcement for different kinds of behaviour.

You might also discover satisfaction in the achievements of others. By sharing your resources and supporting others, you can experience a sense of vicarious gratification and fulfilment.

### **6. Ask for help**

If managing greed and envy becomes overwhelming, seek support from therapists, coaches or support groups. Sharing dark feelings with trusted individuals can offer perspective and assistance in managing your desires.

Addressing feelings of greed and envy is an ongoing process. Changing ingrained thought patterns and habits takes time. As you begin to embrace the feeling of being “good enough”, you may attain the satisfaction you fundamentally seek. More isn't always better, and true fulfilment comes from within.

#### **Find article at**

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-organisations/escape-grip-greed-and-envy>

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