

INTELLIGENCE

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/WORKING LIFE/

From the Bully Pulpit

Many workers describe their workplaces as living hells; do you?

By Josephine Rossi

IF YOU'VE BEEN in the workforce a while, chances are you have personally experienced or heard about company bullies. They threaten, humiliate, and intimidate staff, and their pushy and boastful voices are constantly heard around the office. They also have seniority and make money for the organization, so their employers regard their behavior as good management style.

Headlines about aggression in the workplace are nothing new. And with such publicity, the problem should be on the lips of every manager and human resource professional. But it's not. In fact, aggression and bullying are endemic to not only high-pressure businesses, but also small offices, not-for-profits, and even public institutions.

Rachel Smith, who fears giving her real name, knows what it's like to work for a bully. At 27, she has already been forced to leave a job because of a hostile work environment.

Shortly after graduating from college, she landed a job writing for a public university's publications department. While her immediate supervisors were pleas-

ant and professional, their boss—the vice chancellor of the department—made life miserable. And when one of her supervisors quit, Smith lost a buffer.

"After she left, (the vice chancellor) held a four-hour meeting in which he berated a writer in front of the staff. And when others tried to defend the guy, he dismissed them," said Smith who claims that in another meeting, he told staff he valued personal loyalty above creative and quality work.

According to the most recent report by The Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute, that kind of behavior is typical. Sixty-six percent of male bullies "yell, scream, or throw tantrums in front of others" to humiliate a worker. Some also flaunt their status within the organization to intimidate their targets.

Smith's volatile situation came to a head when the vice chancellor hired a new supervisor to carry out his demands—a typical tactic of office bullies. Many even go so far as to encourage co-workers to isolate and criticize victims. In Smith's case, she had the support of co-workers because some of them were being mistreated, too. Instead, her new supervisor accused her of making mis-

takes on an almost daily basis, and her performance reviews suddenly went from stellar to substandard.

More perplexing, Smith said her workload increased, while her supervisor took the credit. "If I was performing so poorly, why did she give me more and more of her work to do?"

The WBTI also says that the vast majority of workplace bullies—71 percent—outrank their targets, and only 23 percent do the tormenting themselves.

Many bullying targets say that their productivity bottoms out under the stress. Eventually, they succumb to the physical effects of working in the negative environment. Smith said that at some point she stopped helping out others and taking on additional work. Waking up in the mornings became an impossible task, and she rarely got to work on time. Even worse, she said she spent the majority of her time defending her work against the relentless accusations instead of tackling new tasks.

Seventy percent of targets ultimately leave their jobs, and 33 percent of those targets do so because of their health. Smith stuck it out for four years before she quit to work as a freelancer six

months ago. During her time with the university, she said that she often was sick with nausea, and even with intestinal bleeding. She also had to be medicated for depression. Like many bullying victims, she says that she still can't shake the memories of the harassment: "I still have nightmares about working in that place."

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/COOL TOOL/

Bully Training

Online learning provider, SkillSoft, is making free courses available to help employees tackle bullying, harassment, and aggression at work.

Because of the web-based nature of the course delivery, managers and employees can access the three online SkillSoft courses at work or at home by visiting the company's website. The free courses will be available until the end of July 2006.

"The issue of bullying at work is a serious matter and the extent of harassment in the workplace appears to be widespread," says Kevin Young, managing director of SkillSoft. "Even worse, new research emerges constantly that suggests that the problem is escalating. This situation has to be addressed, not only to help employees who are at the receiving end of such destructive behavior, but for the sake of productivity, which is adversely affected as a result."

MORE/www.skillssoft.com/bullying

Profile of a Target

The average bully target is a 43-year-old woman. She's college educated, has been in the workforce for 21 years, and has worked almost seven years for the employer where the bullying occurs. Chances are, she will stay with the organization for almost two years before quitting.

When exposing the bully...

Decided to fight back? Gary and Ruth Namie, founders of the WBTI, offer these suggestions to stand your ground:

- **Make the *business* case that the bully is "too expensive to keep."** Gather data about the economic impact the bully has had on your employer in terms such as replacement costs, absenteeism, and lost productivity.
- **Give your employers a chance to make it right. They may be looking for a reason to purge the bully. You may not be the only one speaking up.**
- **Talk about it. Don't be ashamed to talk about your experience. The longer you suffer in silence, the longer it takes to rebound.**

SOURCE/The Workplace Bullying & Trauma Institute/www.bullyinginstitute.org

/YOUR HEALTH/

New Research for the Forgetful

CAN'T REMEMBER the details of the last staff meeting? Lost an important file? New medical school research suggests that if you recall memories related to the lost information, you may remember.

Using functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University have provided evidence that the act of recalling a memory is like mental time travel. Their study demonstrates that the same areas of the brain that are active during an event are activated when a person attempts to recall that event seconds before the memory surfaces.

"An everyday strategy for getting at lost memories involves using a part of a memory to pull out the entire thought, much like when you try remember where you put your keys last night," said Sean Polyn, a post-doctoral fellow at the Computational Memory Lab in Penn's psychology department. "If you recall that you were washing dishes, then that might trigger associated memories, leading you to remember that your keys are next to the sink."

The researchers also studied how brain activity changes from second to second. They could see how the portions of the brain that stored memories of, for example, celebrity faces, activated several seconds before the participant began to name the celebrities. According to Polyn, objects, faces, and locations are all stored differently in the brain. When the participants moved from one category to another, the researchers noted a corresponding shift in brain activity.

"The results of this experiment suggest that when we think back to the past, each detail we remember triggers another, until the memory returns completely," Polyn said. "In that sense, memory retrieval is like revisiting the past; brain patterns that are long gone can be revived by the memory system."

/NEWS FLASH/

Bill May Allow More Spiritual Workplace

There is still no word on the Workplace Religious Freedom Act since its Capitol Hill hearing in November.

An amendment to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the bill would establish provisions for religious accommodation in the workplace. Title VII requires employers to provide reasonable accommodation for the religious beliefs of their employees, so long as it doesn't impose an undue hardship. However, because "reasonable accommodation" is loosely defined, the courts have allegedly ruled that any hardship is "undue," resulting in little or no legal protection for employees.

U.S. Representative Mark Souder, a Republican from Indiana who wrote the bill, has bipartisan support from 18 co-sponsors. His intent is to ensure that employees don't have to choose between their work and their religious beliefs. But not everyone in Congress agrees that the proposed legislation will help.

Opponents fear that the bill will force employers to provide requested accommodations—even if they're unreasonable to the employer—to avoid potential legal action. They also say it will be difficult for employers to define the "identifiable costs" of allowing employees to practice their beliefs in specific terms such as lost productivity or financial loss.

/HOW TO DEAL/

Workplace Deal Breakers

The most frequent way bosses break trust with their employees is by jumping to conclusions before checking facts, according to a recent Badbossology.com survey sponsored by Development Dimensions International.

"Trust is a critical component of building a successful team," said Rich Wellins, senior vice president of DDI. "Bosses need to open the lines of communication and understand what is breaking down trust on their team."

Of the 700 people who completed the Badbossology.com survey, 30 percent said jumping to conclusions before checking facts was the most unforgivable thing a boss could do to break their trust. Other answers included betraying their confidence or secrets, taking credit for others' work, showing favoritism, and ignoring poor performance.

[MORE/www.badbossology.com](http://www.badbossology.com)

/FAST FACT/

The Working Sick

Did you go to work with the flu this winter? You're not alone. Thirty-five percent of U.S. workers felt pressured to go to work with the flu, even though 47 percent of their co-workers were annoyed or angry because of it. Employees who go to work sick not only risk infecting their co-workers, but also may cost employers as much as \$10 billion in lost productivity.

Crisis Strategies: Do you have them?

Looks like Vice President Dick Cheney's hunting mishap could teach us more than how not to pepper our friends with birdshot. The backlash for his slow public response to the situation is a good lesson for organizations: Have a response plan.

The good news is that The International Association of Business Communicators say that about two-thirds

of companies are prepared to manage and respond to the next crisis that affects them.

The bad news? IABC also reports that more than 40 percent of those organizations without a plan still take no action after experiencing a crisis. Even worse, more than half say that's because senior management doesn't support the idea.

/HOW TO DEAL/

10 Burnout Busters

Are you one urgent email away from a meltdown? You're not alone. Consultant and Staver Group CEO Mike Staver offers these simple techniques for preventing burnout.

1. Start your day with powerful high-energy music.
2. Set aside blocks of time to complete various tasks, and do not allow interruptions.
3. Fix your problems, then forget about them. Do not dwell on past mistakes.
4. Get an accountability partner to help you stay focused. You should meet with this person at least once a week to talk about your goals, progress, setbacks, and thoughts on your personal and professional life.
5. Use humor to ease stress and bring mountains back down to molehills.
6. Take a nonworking lunch now and then.
7. Take a power nap.
8. Exercise.
9. Take a vacation.
10. Say no. "When you have all the commitments you can handle, say no to anyone who asks you to take on even more work or social obligations," says Staver.

MORE/www.thestavergroup.com

/IDEA/

Create a Goal-Oriented Culture

Do your employees know where they are going? You may assume that they are working toward goals that advance your corporate vision. But blind assumptions are rarely correct. Joanne G. Sujansky, CEO of KEYGroup, says if goal setting is not a priority, employees are left to wonder what they should do next.

This is not a mere supposition on Sujansky's part. A recent survey commissioned by KEYGroup found that almost half of the respondents aren't working toward clear-cut goals. And it's not that they don't want to—it's that leaders aren't asking them.

"Many companies are dropping the ball in regard to helping their employees set and work toward well-defined goals," she notes. "When employees don't have crystal clear goals to work toward, they're going to waste time and resources."

Sujansky offers these tips: **Share the "big picture" with employees.** You must run a completely transparent operation. "When employees have a clear picture of your mission and vision," says Sujansky, "the goals you help them set will make sense to them. They'll be more likely to buy into and achieve those goals." **Work with employees to set goals.** Don't impose goals on your employees. Remember, you're looking for buy-in. "Sit down with employees and hammer out goals together," Sujansky suggests.

Give them a voice in the company's fu-

ture. Don't just let employees set their own goals, collaborate with them. Take their advice and run with it. If you don't trust your employees enough to help shape your company's future, why did you hire them in the first place? asks Sujansky.

Make their work meaningful. No one likes busywork or routine, mind-numbing tasks. Give your employees challenging assignments and goals that stimulate their minds and that have a real impact on your organization.

Tell employees risk taking is expected. Without risk there can be no significant gain. This is the real reason you need to keep the "big picture" in front of employees at all times—it helps them take calculated risks aimed at advancing not only their own goals but also your corporate vision.

Measure productivity. The whole point of goal setting is to help employees become more productive. That's why you must be sure not to confuse activity with progress. Put systems in place for measuring productivity and live by them.

Give feedback. Establish ongoing evaluative processes so people can get feedback on how well they're meeting their goals. Also, tell people in "real time" how they are performing. "Spontaneous coaching...is the pathway to productivity. [It] refines the processes by which they meet their goals today, and paves the way for them to meet ever-more-ambitious goals in the future."

Networking...from home?

By Amy Glass and Marjorie Brody

IT SHOULD HARDLY COME as a surprise that networking with colleagues and other businesspeople has gone virtual.

The Internet offers computer-savvy professionals (and those who fear face-to-face social events) yet another medium for networking.

Whether it's news groups, blogs, bulletin boards, web publications, or chat rooms, there are many opportunities to meet other professionals in your field, cultivate mutually rewarding relationships, and add those people to your permanent business network.

E-networking is not about whom you know, but who knows you. One of the best ways to find out what is known about you online is to Google yourself. You'll be amazed at what you find.

Just about anything is available and archived online. Belong to a trade group? Then there's a good chance that the minutes to your last meeting are on its website. And if you contributed, your comments are likely featured.

Consider what a potential employer, colleague, or client might find if she were to do a Google search of your name. Are you pleased with the results? If not, consider how you can use email, discussion lists, or web publications to expand your network and improve your on-line presence.

There are many official networking sites that offer membership and the chance to cyber-mingle with other professionals. Most are free, while some charge a monthly fee for expanded services.

Some sites are more social than others. If you're considering a career change, remember that many human resource professionals and recruiters frequent these sites—making them perfect places to network for a new job.

Craig's List is one of the most user-friendly, free websites. Sorted by major cities across the globe, the site allows visitors to click on a city name, and then go to

the pages featuring discussion forums on a myriad of diverse topics. Free job listings and résumé posting services are another attractive feature of the site.

Another great free cyber networking spot that offers many opportunities to meet and mingle with other like-minded professionals is Friendster. According to the site, it has more than 20 million members, and is "the best way to stay in touch with your friends...the fastest way to discover the people and things that matter to you most. Friendster aims to make the world a smaller place by bringing the power of social networking to every aspect of life, one friend at a time." Visitors can click on the "events" link and learn about gatherings happening in various cities.

And, don't forget that most of your professional associations have websites for their members to visit, post, search for jobs, and participate in related bulletin boards and online events.

One fee-based online networking service is LinkedIn. This site claims to "strengthen and extend your existing network of trusted contacts....Through LinkedIn, you can accelerate your business effectiveness and career success by leveraging the network you already have."

The LinkedIn site says it's an online network of "more than 4.2 million experienced professionals from around the world, representing 130 industries." Members create a profile that summarizes their professional accomplishments, which helps them find or be found by former colleagues, clients, and partners. Users can add more connections by inviting others to join LinkedIn and connect to them.

In addition to sites offering varying levels of membership, there are bulletin boards at the websites of alumni organizations, professional societies, and trade groups. Many universities and associations are sponsoring these forums as a benefit of membership. So if your classmate is the new CEO of the leading com-

pany in your industry, this may be a good way to connect with her.

There are also countless discussion boards at virtual communities, including Yahoo!, GeoCities, Tripod, Angelfire, and Xoom. These sites provide free email, home pages, and online conversation, but require users to complete a personal profile, which is used to target marketing messages while they are on the site.

Even with cyber networking, it's important to remember that it isn't what your contacts can do for you; it's what you can do for them. The best way to become a rainmaker is to use these business networking websites to offer fellow members help.

Why not belong to more than one networking site? While some overlap may exist, each group offers opportunities to network with different types of people. If you intend to invite some of your colleagues to join your cyber networks, however, time your memberships. Invite these professionals to join you only one site at a time—you don't want to overwhelm them with spam email invitations.

Through networking, people obtain connections, opportunities, and information that can propel them from the ranks of average, to the realm of super.

If you haven't started, it's time to expand your networking efforts into cyberspace. Just open your web browser and surf to a networking website or bulletin board. Your next client or invaluable contact could just be a mouse click away.

Amy Glass is senior facilitator and **Marjorie Brody** is the founder of Brody Communications. They are the authors of the new book, *You Can't Do It Alone*. This article features excerpts from that book; www.BrodyCommunications.com.

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