

March 2007

Greetings from bullyland!

- 1./ Don't forget our continuing survey - fill it in, pass it on, talk it up.**
- 2./ Next Vancouver area meeting**
- 3./ New research project avoids blame or the 'quick fix'.**
- 4./ The 'No A**hole rule' - article and a book - (nb: the asterisks are missing below!)**
- 5./ Returning to work - some ideas on gaps, explaining and references**

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1./ Our NBFM Canadian survey on workplace bullying is continuing

Please do all you can to stimulate submissions - colleagues, present or former, and don't forget to send it to your union.

<http://www.nobullyforme.ca/cgi-bin/esurvey.cgi?action=viewSurvey&id=1123717406>

2./ Vancouver Area Meetings - what are you waiting for.....

The next Vancouver area meeting will be on the third Saturday of the month, that is Saturday March 17th.

(Edited: Meeting details only to those who subscribe to our newsletter....)

The meetings are a safe and supportative place to share your story, discuss some of their similarities and even remember how to smile or even laugh.....

For details of other local groups check our local groups (duh) page

<http://www.nobullyforme.ca/local.shtml>

3./ New research project avoids blame or the 'quick fix'.

A new study of interest is available online.

It was created by two researchers at Portsmouth University in England.

Here is a brief quote:

'A key finding for future project work has been the issue of engagement by employees at all levels of the organisation for change to be effective and 'owned'. Thus superficial attempts which do not reach the endemic values and culture of the organisation are unlikely to succeed...'

It seems the research is catching up with what we have been saying since the start of No Bully For Me.....

A PDF of the study is available here:

<http://www.port.ac.uk/research/workplacebullying/filetodownload,52783,en.pdf>

4./ The 'No Ahole rule' - article and a book - (nb: the asterisks are missing below!)**

taken from:

<http://bulliedacademics.blogspot.com/2007/02/no-asshole-rule.html>

The theme is contained in the phrase:

'The rule lives -- or dies -- in the little moments.'

The No-Asshole Rule

Building a civilized workplace and surviving one that isn't.

The first time that I ever heard about a book on assholes was more than 30 years ago. It happened at an Italian restaurant in San Francisco called Little Joe's, where customers sat behind a long counter that faced an open kitchen. Most of us came to see the flamboyant chef, who sang, joked with customers and employees, and entertained us by igniting dramatic flames with olive oil as he cooked. Employees wore T-shirts that said "Rain or shine, there is always a line," and waiting for a seat was good fun because of the constant banter and clowning around.

One day, I waited behind an especially rude customer who was sitting at the counter. He made crude comments, tried to grab the waitress, complained about how his veal parmigiana tasted, and insulted customers who told him to pipe down.

This creep kept spewing his venom until a fellow customer approached him and asked (in a loud voice), "You are just an amazing person. I've been looking everywhere for a person like you. I love how you act. Can you give me your name?" He looked flustered for a moment, but then seemed flattered, offered thanks for the compliment, and provided his name.

Without missing a beat, his questioner wrote it down and said, "Thanks. I appreciate it. You see, I am writing a book on assholes ... and you are absolutely perfect for Chapter 13." The entire place roared, and the asshole looked humiliated, shut his trap, and soon slithered out -- and the waitress beamed with delight.

This story is more than a sweet and funny memory. That incident at Little Joe's reflects seven key lessons about the no-asshole rule.

A few demeaning creeps can overwhelm the warm feelings generated by hordes of civilized people.

The abuse spewed out by just one jerk was ruining the experience for everyone at Little Joe's that day. Remember that if you want to enforce the no-asshole rule in your organization, you'll get more bang for your buck by eliminating those folks who bring people down. Bear in mind that negative interactions have five times the effect on mood as positive interactions -- it takes a lot of good people to make up for the damage done by just a few demeaning jerks. If you want a civilized workplace, take some inspiration from the CEO who made up the equivalent of 25 "asshole wanted" posters and then purged those assholes from the company. So the first things that you need to do are screen out, reform and expel all the assholes in your workplace. It will then become easier to focus on helping people become warmer and more supportive.

Talking about the rule is nice, but following up on it is what really matters.

Announcing a "no jerks allowed" rule, talking about being "warm and friendly," or displaying a "no bozos" poster is nice. But all those words are meaningless or worse if they don't truly guide people in changing their behavior. There were no rules posted at Little Joe's, but almost everyone in the restaurant understood that although the food was good, most customers went there to catch and add to the infectious good cheer. When that aspiring author humiliated the nasty customer, he was enforcing an unwritten rule: You had no business being at Little Joe's if you were spreading asshole poisoning, because it ruined the atmosphere for everyone else.

Talking about or posting the rule isn't necessary if people understand it and act on it. But if you can't

enforce the rule, it is better to say nothing. Otherwise, your organization risks being seen as both nasty and hypocritical. Recall the fate of Holland & Knight, the law firm that bragged it had "made it a priority to weed out selfish, arrogant and disrespectful attorneys" and that it would enforce a "no-jerk rule." It faced bad press when insiders expressed disgust with the firm's hypocrisy because an attorney with an alleged history of sexual harassment was promoted to a senior management position.

The rule lives -- or dies -- in the little moments.

Having all the right business philosophies and management practices to support the no-asshole rule is useless unless you treat the person right in front of you, right now, in the right way.

That customer who claimed to be writing a book on assholes took less than 30 seconds to deliver his beautiful insult. In that moment, he reinforced the unwritten rule that Little Joe's was a place where employees and customers came to have fun, to laugh, and to joke, not to abuse and demean. The same lesson emerged from the most extensive "asshole management intervention" that I know of in American history, which involved more than 7,000 people at 11 different Veterans Administration facilities. Of course, the people at the VA used much more polite language -- words like stress, aggression and bullying. But I call it an asshole management intervention because the VA teams taught people how to reflect on and to change the little nasty things that they did, like glaring at people and treating them as if they were invisible. In other words, they helped assholes recognize how and when they did their dirty work -- and they showed them how to change such destructive behavior.

Should you keep a few assholes around?

The incident at Little Joe's shows that very bad people can be a very good thing -- if they are handled right. That flaming asshole was perfect for Chapter 13 because his antics showed every customer and employee in that crowded place how not to behave at that place. But I want to warn you that allowing a few creeps to make themselves at home in your company is dangerous. The truth is that assholes breed like rabbits. Their poison quickly infects others; even worse, if you let them make hiring decisions, they will start cloning themselves. Once people believe that they can get away with treating others with contempt or, worse yet, believe they will be praised and rewarded for it, a reign of psychological terror can spread throughout your organization that is damn hard to stop.

Enforcing the no-asshole rule isn't just management's job.

Keep in mind that the aspiring author at Little Joe's wasn't a manager. He wasn't even an employee. He was just a customer waiting in line. The lesson is that the no-asshole rule works best when everyone involved in the organization steps in to enforce it when necessary. Just think of the simple math. If, say, you work in a store that has one manager, 22 employees and several hundred customers, it is impossible to expect that one manager to be everywhere at once, enforcing the no-asshole rule or, for that matter, any other norm about how people are expected to act in the organization. But if every employee and customer, as well as the manager, understands, accepts and has the power to support the rule, then it is a lot harder for any given customer to get away with being a flaming asshole. Treating people right means conveying respect, warmth and kindness to them -- and assuming the best about their intentions. But the game changes when people demonstrate that they are unmitigated jerks. And it is a lot easier to enforce the rule when everyone feels obligated to let bullies know that their nastiness is ruining the joy for everyone else and -- as that clever customer did by embarrassing that flaming asshole -- when everyone takes responsibility for pressing the "delete button" to expel assholes from the system.

Embarrassment and pride are powerful motivators.

That abusive customer at Little Joe's was stopped in his tracks because he was embarrassed. I can still remember how his face turned bright red, how he turned silent and stared ahead as he finished his meal, and how he avoided eye contact with people standing in line as he headed out. As renowned sociologists like Erving Goffman have shown, human beings will go to extreme lengths to save face, to feel respected and to avoid embarrassment and feelings of shame. In organizations where the no-asshole rule reigns, people who follow it and don't let others break that rule are rewarded with respect and appreciation. When people violate the rule, they are confronted with painful, and often public, embarrassment and the feelings of shame that go with it. True, it rarely happens as swiftly and

thoroughly as it did that day at Little Joe's. At most places that enforce the rule, the delete button is powered with a more subtle blend of respect and humiliation. But it still happens.

Assholes are us.

I suspect that when you heard the Little Joe's story, you identified with the customers and employees who were offended by that jerk. And maybe -- like me -- you secretly dreamed that someday, just once, you could summon the spontaneous wit and courage to bring down an asshole just like that clever customer did. But let's look at it another way. Think about the times when you were the guy at the counter, when you were the asshole in the story. I wish I could say I've never been that guy, but that would be a bold-faced lie. If you want to build an asshole-free environment, you've got to start by looking in the mirror. When have you been an asshole? When have you caught and spread this contagious disease? What can you do, or what have you done, to keep your inner asshole from firing away at others? The most powerful single step you can take is to just stay away from nasty people and places. This means you must defy the temptation to work with a swarm of assholes, regardless of a job's other perks and charms. It also means that if you make this mistake, get out as fast as you can. And remember, admitting you're an asshole is the first step. We are all given only so many hours here on earth. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could travel through our lives without encountering people who bring us down with their demeaning remarks and actions? If you are truly tired of living in Jerk City -- if you don't want every day to feel like a walk down Asshole Avenue -- well, it's your job to help build and shape a civilized workplace. Sure, you already know that. But isn't it time to do something about it?

From the book "The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't," by Robert I. Sutton, Ph.D. Copyright © 2007 by Robert Sutton. Reprinted by permission of Warner Books, New York, NY. All rights reserved.

5./ Returning to work - some ideas on gaps, explaining and references

Returning to work

'Never explain--your friends do not need it and your enemies will not believe you anyway.'
Elbert Hubbard, US author (1856 - 1915)

Gaps? Answering the 'why did you leave your last job' question. References?

It's impossible!

No, it's not.

Here are some simple tips to keep you moving forward.

You need to show three things:

you are not avoiding a question or denying the past

you are not trying to explain things away

you are organized and are looking and moving forward

Dealing with gaps.

Well these days everyone has gaps. Almost no one starts work at 16 or 18 and then works for the same company through to retirement at 60 or 65.

If you have had a break from work to recover from being bullied you may be nervous about explaining what you were doing for the last 6 months. year, 2 years.

Saying you were a bit of a wreck, and couldn't function doesn't seem an adequate response or at least not one to get you a job offer, so what to do?

Here's what I suggest to my clients (working as an employment counsellor in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, BC).

'I was taking care of some family business and now I'm looking forward to getting back to work which is why I am interested in this position with (name of company)'.

This may be partly true - you are part of your family and taking care of yourself and others affected by your experience of being bullied is part of the gap.

However accurate, this approach does three things in one sentence. First acknowledge the gap, second dismiss it and thirdly move on.

No one will ask 'What family business?'.

If they do, you get up and leave! You don't want to work for inappropriate and intrusive people.

Any true human will understand 'family business' - haven't we all had to take some time to take care of it?

It is crucial to keep the three step answer intact. Don't stop at the first part.

So - dealing with gaps:

Acknowledge

Dismiss

Move on

Answering the 'why did you leave your last job' question.

'Because my co-worker/ supervisor/ subordinate was a bullying a**hole..' may be true but won't do.

Just as suggested above the principle is to acknowledge, dismiss and move on.

'I felt I had learnt and given as much as I was going to so I thought it was time to move on, which is why I put in an application for this position.....'

'The team/ department I was working with/ in had changed a lot and the 'fit' wasn't as good as it had been; this happens sometimes doesn't and it's then you know time to move on...' smile.....

'I didn't see a way of continuing to grow with (name of previous employer). I'd enjoyed my work there and now I'd like a chance to expand on what I'd learnt in a position such as the one you are offering...'

Even if you had been bullied out of your last job, all the above examples are true.

So - dealing with why you left:

Acknowledge

Dismiss

Move on

References

When you had a bad time at your last place of work, you are understandably anxious that your previous employer, especially if they were the bully or one of the bullies or one of the bystanders, will sink you with a bad reference.

Let's look at what a reference is designed to do.

It's purpose is to confirm the interviewer's good taste and assessment skills.

'I want to hire Jane; I can see that Jane is the one. I will call Jane's references to have them agree with my decision.'

The though process is not 'I want to catch John out. I will call his references and hope they tell me how awful John is.'

If you feel your interviewer is trying to catch you out, then you don't want to work there. Done.

Selecting references

If your direct supervisor at your last place of work will not give you a good reference don't use them.

It's OK to say 'The people I worked most closely with..' or 'The people who know my work best...' I am not in touch with anymore/ are no longer there/ have moved on themselves.

You may wish to go back to the job prior to the 'bad' one, and select a reference from that workplace. It's fine to offer just one professional and one personal reference.

Whoever you select as references ensure they are, or least are prepared to be, not completely glowing.

What?

Well 'Jane is the most wonderful person in the history of the world without a flaw in any aspect of her work or personality....' doesn't ring true, sorry Jane.

So you are looking for a 95% glowing reference, but with an acknowledgment that you are human and therefore flawed.

Your reference must be prepared to answer the 'If I was to ask about a weakness that John has...' question.

'Well John does sometimes take on too much; he knows this about himself, and is always now aware of how much he can deal with professionally at once...'

It is the reference's version of the classic interview 'What about a weakness that you have...' question.

So - references

Remind yourself of the purpose of references.

Dismiss queries over 'why not direct supervisor?' if this is the case.

Select your references and remind them of their role and purpose.

Finally, job interviews are just that an 'interview' 'between see' not an interrogation.

If the style of the interview is aggressive or the questioning inappropriate you don't want the job anyway.

Do find a friend or relative to rehearse your answers until they flow, without revealing pauses.

Take care,

Stephen and Karen

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No Bully For Me

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Karen and Stephen

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