



Promoting Healthy, Productive, and Socially Responsible Workplaces

Imagining the Good Workplace: It Starts With Individual Dignity

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The **New Workplace Institute** is an independent, multidisciplinary, non-profit research and education center devoted to healthy, productive, socially responsible workplaces. David Yamada, president of the Institute, is a tenured professor of law at Suffolk University Law School, whose support of the New Workplace Forum series is gratefully acknowledged. For more information about the Institute, please send an e-mail with a mailing address to david_yamada@yahoo.com.

WORKPLACE STRESS

Prevalence

- “One-fourth of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives.”
- 40% of respondents report job as being “very or extremely stressful.”

(Northwestern Mutual Life, 1990s surveys; source: NIOSH)

Major Work Stressors

- Job insecurity
- Work hours
- Control at work
- Managerial style

(Sparks, Faragher and Cooper, 2001)

Consequences

- “Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than are any other life stressor – more so than even financial problems or family problems.” (St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Co. study, 1992; source: NIOSH, 1999)
- Workplace stress has been linked to cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, psychological disorders, workplace injuries, and other problems. (NIOSH, 1999)

WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying: “repeated, malicious, health-endangering mistreatment of one employee...by one or more employees.” (Namie & Namie, 2003)

Common bullying behaviors

- false accusations of mistakes and errors;
- hostile glares and other intimidating non-verbal behaviors;
- yelling, shouting, and screaming;
- exclusion and the “silent treatment”;
- withholding resources and information necessary to the job;
- behind-the-back sabotage and defamation.

(Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Namie & Namie, 2003)

Severe Harm to Workers

- clinical depression
- hypertension
- cardiovascular disease
- impaired immune systems
- symptoms consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- life-altering decisions about whether to stay in or leave a job.

(Namie & Namie, 2003)

- Experience is one of a “nightmare,” “battle,” “torture,” making bullied workers “feel like slaves and animals, prisoners, children, and heartbroken lovers.” (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts, 2006)

Prevalence

Roughly 60-90% of workers experience bullying during their working lives. (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Hornstein, 1996)

Impact on Performance and Productivity

Bassman (1992): Abusive work environments result in “fear and mistrust, resentment, hostility, feelings of humiliation, withdrawal, play-it-safe strategies, and hiding mistakes.”

Pearson (1998) (study of 775 targets of workplace incivility & aggression):

- “28 percent lost work time avoiding the instigator”
- “22 percent decreased their effort at work”
- “12 percent actually changed jobs to avoid the instigator”

Kinney, National Safe Workplace Institute (1995): Abusive supervisors bait employees who then commit violent acts.

INCOME GAP

- Approximately ¼ of the American workforce ages 18-64 earns less than \$9.04/hour, which as a FTE translates into less than the federal poverty line for family of four. (Business Week, 2004)
- In 2005, top 1% of Americans (>\$348,000 income) received “their largest share of national income since 1928.” (NY Times, 2007)
- In 1980, CEOs of large corporations “earned 42 times as much as the average American worker.” By 2000, they “were earning 531 times the average worker’s salary.” (Robert Frank, 2005)

PROMOTE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURES THAT VALUE INDIVIDUAL DIGNITY

- Google hits for “dignity at work” = 141,000 (April 17).
- Other countries understand workplace dignity and decent work.
- Fighting “rankism”: Robert Fuller’s “dignitarian” agenda.
- APA’s Psychologically Health Workplace standards: Employee involvement, work-life balance, employee growth & development, health & safety, and employee recognition.

EDUCATE, HIRE, AND EMPOWER SOCIALLY INTELLIGENT LEADERS

- Social intelligence: “being intelligent not just *about* our relationships but also *in* them,” in ways that allow us to “look beyond the individual to understand what actually transpires as people interact—and to look beyond the narrow self-interest to the best interest of others, too.” (Goleman, 2006)
- Socially responsible management education.
- A challenge for the private, public, and non-profit sectors. (Nelson, 2007)

SUPPORT “DIGNITARIAN” LAWS AND POLICIES FOR THE WORKPLACE

- Enact Healthy Workplace Bill to combat workplace bullying.

- Strong enforcement of labor protections and ethical standards, such as collective bargaining statutes, discrimination laws, and professional codes of ethics.
- Safety net: minimum wage, workplace safety, health insurance coverage, workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, and disability benefits.

BUILD STRONG WORKER ASSOCIATIONS

- The importance of employee voice.
- Unions have a positive impact on wages and working conditions for all workers, not just union members. (Mishel, 2003)
- Labor union representation has declined from 25% of the American workforce in the mid-1950s to under 13% today.

EDUCATE, COUNSEL, AND ASSIST WORKERS

- Lots of schooling, but little education about dealing with work.
- Dignity *and* responsibility.
- Transitional assistance, career and personal counseling.

***IN SUM:
THIS IS WORK IN PROGRESS***

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