

I came to my new job as a single mother with 3 children under the age of 5, newly divorced. I needed a job. I was the only woman hired into a tenure track position in the area I worked. I came from a University where people thrived on excellence and I expected to be able to build that in my new position. I was excited and optimistic.

It didn't take me long to observe that the texture of the workplace was slimey. It was a toxic workplace. I watched while 2 other people were hunted out of their jobs. I watched how badly they were treated. There was a lot of not so subtle sexist behaviour, including staring down the front of your shirt, lots of looking you up and down and checking you out, lots of invitations to come into my office and close the door, unwanted remarks.... It culminated in one member at a workplace function propositioning me repeatedly to leave with him. When I refused for the third time, he finally got up to leave. I was sitting at a picnic table facing away from him. He tapped me on the shoulder and as I turned to look, he chose that moment to rub his crotch across my face. I was really angry. These were the same people upstairs making decisions about my tenure and promotion. I discovered that unless I could get witnesses to testify to the crotch incidence, or that I was grooped, or pushed down the stairs there was nothing I could do. Serial meanness and slimey inappropriate sexist behaviour were not problems to be dealt with in our workplace. They fell through the cracks.

I was also accused of forgery on a Copy Right document. It was insane because the circumstances were such that I was not even in the building when the final signatures were put on the document before it went out by courier. Yet 3 of my superiors without any investigation at all met to decide that "I was guilty and had committed forgery." After vehemently disagreeing I found a forensic hand writing specialist who would evaluate the signatures, and I insisted that the number one send the document out for analysis. It all then disappeared, except the damage it did to my reputation. It was clear that in our workplace there was no skill, or training at all in investigating complaints.

It seemed that rules that applied to me didn't seem to apply to others. And conversely when you thought that you had very carefully inquired about the rules and how things worked. They were like shifting sand. I was the type to point out the inconsistencies, the number of times the reasons and the stories changed. I would repeat why that behaviour, or their actions were unfair. It is a real problem to state the "emperor has no clothes." I think I have the most letters on my file of any person in the workplace threatening discipline. As a matter of fact I was averaging 3 – 5 letters a year threatening discipline. On no occasion did any of them ever have any consequence, none of them ever stuck. On no occasion did I ever receive a letter of apology. The intent was to make my life miserable. I had to hear over and over how what I did was not a priority, not important. Everything I did was a problem.

In spite of this after a while we built a core group that was quite successful. I would say that it was crazy because on one hand I would go off to a conference and get great complements about our work and the ideas and then I would come back to the "cold room, chilly climate." You know where you walk into the Xerox room and say cheerfully "good morning" only to get no answer and the shrivelling look. Over and over day after day the same crap. It was pretty clear it

was their problem. So childish, you don't have to like people, but you do have to act respectfully in the workplace, only not in our workplace. Then the resources began to be cut out from under me.

Things began to get worse and I became more of a target. There was a lot of collateral damage of those who worked with me, or supported me because they became targeted as well. They were threatened, and students were held to higher standards than others. I, 2 of my students and a support person all went over to complain at the Harassment Office. Here we met with the director who spent a great deal of time convincing us not to file a formal complaint, what were we thinking, things would only get worse! And by the way all that behaviour you find objectionable in the workplace is NORMAL. After all wasn't our behaviour contributing to the problem, you must be asking for it! Forget about the power imbalance, or the fact they should know better, if it bugs you tell them to stop. I guess the 4 of us just must be too sensitive! It took me a long time to realize how many of the safeguards that are supposed to be in place were broken....and how damaging that was for everyone.

Then the management changed again and people felt under attack. It was a real culture of fear. I saw employees that were terminated and escorted out of the building as if they were common criminals. That sent a big message. I had the opportunity to watch how the legal process (arbitration) was frustrated. How every opportunity to argue scope, witnesses, disclosure was taken to the extreme and then appeal after appeal was launched. Appeal to judicial review over and over, appeal to court of Queen's bench. No penalty for delay so as a consequence there was delay after delay. Expedient reasons. Next week we will argue something else. Argument for the sake of argument. Grinding people down to quit.

Take the women's hockey issue for example. We are not the University of Hawaii. We are not asking for a coach for water skiing. We are the University of Saskatchewan asking for a hockey coach for women. Seven years in the making for a settlement, only for the University to take the same deal on the steps of the court house that it was offered 7 years ago. No thought for the women, their families, and their lives. I want to know what the cost of that argument is in dollars and similar arguments. How much are they spending on breaking on system? What was the purpose of that? Your tax dollars at work.

People in the workplace do not realize that for a bully to function it takes support. Usually a higher up knows about it and is putting up with it. It takes willful blindness. It takes people being silent. Everyone in the workplace is affected. Everyone is held hostage. There is stress and tension. The workplace I was in was like watching a serial murderer. I meet women all the time whose lives have been shattered.

It takes a long time to undo the kind of problems we have in the workplace. But it isn't any different than the bully picking on the kid with freckles. You have to tell them to stop. It all begins with you.