



**Promoting Healthy, Productive, and Socially Responsible Workplaces**

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# **Imagining the Good Workplace: It Starts With Individual Dignity**

**Presentation by  
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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. This is a slightly edited outline of a talk delivered on April 24, 2007. For more information about the Institute, please send an e-mail with a mailing address to [newworkplaceinstitute-info@yahoo.com](mailto:newworkplaceinstitute-info@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  $\frac{1}{4}$  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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