

# Handling toxic work environments

By [Candace Bosch](#)

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Disliking your job is one thing but it is another to feel physically ill, drained, depressed and miserable at work due to toxic personalities dictating and commanding you what to do. A toxic work environment is any job where the work, atmosphere and people make you so dismayed it causes serious disruptions in the rest of your life.



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Mitchell Kusy and Elizabeth Holloway, authors of the book 'Toxic Workplace: Managing Toxic Personalities and Their Systems of Power', define a toxic personality as anyone who demonstrates a pattern of counterproductive work behaviours that debilitate individuals, teams and even organisations over the long term.

Employees put up with hostile and negative working environments because they have bills to pay, children to support, or feel that they are not qualified or skilled enough to get something else. Linnda Durre, a psychotherapist, business consultant and author of 'Surviving The Toxic Workplace: Protect Yourself', states that the "fear of losing one's job is the number one reason problems at work persist year after year until every day is like an episode of The Office – without the laughs."

## Dysfunctional warning signs

Larry Buhl, host of 'Labour pains' podcast and a journalist, agrees with Durre, stating that hostile working environments usually have one or more of the following types of dysfunction:

- **Unfairness** - This could be an individual doing the work of two or three people yet receiving little or no appreciation for it. Another example could be co-workers stealing one's ideas and taking the credit.
- **Immoral and illegal activities** - An example would be if you are asked to falsify data, reports or documents, or if co-workers ask you to lie and cover for them.
- **Abusive bosses and poisonous co-workers** - Co-workers miss deadlines and affect your productivity and, in turn, they blame you for it. In addition to this, bosses and peers may rely on inflicting fear and intimidation in order to manipulate you into thinking a missed deadline was your fault.
- **Physical danger** - You or others have ever been threatened or assaulted.

Mitchell Kusy and Elizabeth Holloway, authors of the book *Toxic Workplace: Managing Toxic Personalities and Their Systems of Power* state that such situations as the ones listed above have the capacity to pervade individual's thoughts leading to the potential of undermining their sense of well-being. By infiltrating individual's professional and personal space and demoralising them, toxic individuals in the workplace could even make those individuals doubt their own competence and productivity.

## Protective steps

Here's what to do about toxic work environments

- **Know when to get out** - Firstly it is important to realise the effect that the workplace is having on you. Personally, I have seen people quit toxic jobs without anything lined up because certain individuals in the workplace made it unbearable to stay.

If you can, get a new job first or prepare your safety net — but do leave. If your job is causing you serious emotional or physical stress, you should get out as soon as possible.

- **Document everything** - It is important to consider taking note of everything that you do, although this is not foolproof protection from toxic individuals who are determined to call you out for their mistakes, it may offer some insight and defence when needed. This includes saving e-mails, taking minutes in meetings and on phone calls made, and never trusting some to recall or agree when you remind them of something they did or said in the past. Remember that a good working environment is built on trust, and if you do not feel that you have that then it may be time to get out.
- **Remember that it is not you (or your fault)** - I have seen too many people become caught up in the swirl of negativity that surrounds their whole work situation. Even after speaking with the HR manager about what is going on at work, more often than not things in the workplace still do not improve and may even lead to the situation becoming worse. People often fall into the trap of thinking and assuming that they are lucky to have their job in the first place, that they should put up with colleagues seniority and with being shouted at just to keep their jobs. Remember, every job is a two way street: The team should need you as much as you need them, and if you get the feeling you are being disrespected, unappreciated and emotionally abused, it's time to realise and respect yourself enough to move on. Ty Howard, a dynamic international keynote and motivational speaker, stated "Life is short... Work where you're continuously accepted, respected, appreciated, encouraged, inspired, empowered and valued."
- **Lastly, take time to heal and build yourself up again** - If you are one of the many unfortunate individuals who have suffered physically or emotionally because of working in a toxic environment, one of the most important things is that you need to take time to heal from your wounds.

See it as a learning experience (and as an indicator of how strong you are). Do not blame yourself or succumb to shame for the way you were mistreated. Seek positive experiences and people that can help re-build your self-confidence. Remember good working environments are everywhere. If you have had this one bad experience, don't let it spoil your believe and hope in humanity.

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