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New Hampshire
**LAWYERS
ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM**

April 2019 Newsletter

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Volume II | Issue IV | New Hampshire Lawyers Assistance Program

WWW.NHLAP.COM

NH LCL Monthly Meeting

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers is a monthly meeting on the
SECOND TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH
of NH lawyers, judges and law students who come together for
free, confidential peer support for any issue that interferes with
professional competence. Absolutely confidential.

April 9 at 6:00 p.m.

May 14 at 6:00 p.m.

Airport Diner, 2280 Brown Ave, Manchester

Inside This Issue

Pg. 2 Toxic Work Environments

Pg. 4

Quick Tip: Stop Gossiping

Pg. 5

Monthly Resource Spotlight

What is a Toxic Work Environment?

The term “toxic work environment” is so over used that it virtually has lost all meaning. What exactly is a work environment that is so unhealthy that it can be identified as toxic? It can’t simply be a stressful place where work is done. If that is the definition, then practicing law in and of itself would be toxic regardless of circumstance or environment. No, stress is not the main feature of a toxic work environment. Dysfunction and drama are the hallmarks of a workplace so out of balance that one should not hesitate to leave to preserve one’s mental health.

Toxic Employees

The toxic employee is a well understood archetype. This is the coworker or subordinate who blames everyone else for their mistakes, struggles to hold themselves accountable on the most basic level and generally has a negative, judgmental attitude. This type of employees can exist in any work environment. Simply because there is a toxic employee or two does not mean that the entire workplace is toxic. Competent managers and/or employers who are tuned into the workplace can easily identify these employees and make moves to get them out. It is the bosses and managers who know these employees are part of the workplace and allow them to thrive that create a toxic workplace.

Identifying toxic employees is essential to keeping a productive and healthy place of work. Nipping such issues in the bud is essential. Once this issue arises, it must be immediately and effectively addressed. If not, the first issue will become two issues. Before long, two employees become four and then the toxicity will spread like wild fire. There is no better solution to the problem of the toxic workplace than preventing the proliferation of toxic employees which will eventually take down the whole system.

Do you feel like a cog in a machine rather than a valued professional?

Signs of a Toxic Workplace:

Narcissistic Boss/Manager The rules apply to everyone but them. They are never wrong, nor are they ever the problem. They rule over people and micromanage instead of leading and inspiring.

There is plenty of blame when something goes wrong but there is little praise when something goes well.

There is little employee autonomy or flex time, but the boss is often late or missing.

Vindictive Co-Workers Coworkers do not function as a team but rather are in it for self-advancement. The communal shared purpose and shared values are missing.

Office gossip is the norm. There is little or no sense that coworkers support one another or “have each other’s back.”

Pervasive feeling that coworkers are focused on assigning blame, finding fault and reporting minor issues to managers.

Commiserating Colleagues Little or no ability of management to take workplace issues seriously so coworkers stew in resentment and discontent.

Issues are discussed behind closed doors. Cliques or groups form, and alliances are forged throughout the office.

Lack of Transparency It is not clear how performance will be measured, regardless of written policies and procedures. Every time the finish line is in sight, the line is moved out of reach.

The rules are inconsistent. Rules to not apply to everyone equally.

Workload imbalance without any rational explanation.



Constant Illness Chronic stress and chronic work overload takes a toll on physical health. Perpetual illness is a clear sign that the issue is with the work environment and not the individual(s).

The rules are inconsistent. Rules to not apply to everyone equally.

Toxic work environment

1. Major **Communication Problems**
2. **Inconsistency** in following policies
3. **Narcissistic** leaders
4. Seething **disgruntlement**
5. Physical and emotional **health effects**

Source: ENR/SHIRAZI

Workplace Bullying Repeated mistreatment by coworkers or management; Abusive conduct that is threatening, humiliating, intimidating or sabotaging to work product.

Being told “you are lucky to have a job” when attempting to address workplace issues.

61% of bullies are bosses
33% of bullies are peers
6% are subordinates

Poor Communication Indirect communication as to expectations and processes; the withholding of essential information to complete the required task; team members withdraw and communicate at a minimum.

Any unaddressed issues by management leads to high turnover, burnout and resentment among staff.

42% of people looking for work on Monster.com left their place of employment because of an overly stressful work environment.

What Can Be Done?

In an ideal situation, direct confrontation with management by a group or team of employees can be the key to changing the work environment for the good of everyone. This type of remedy requires planning. A group of concerned employees can get together to identify pressing issues and then work to obtain hard evidence: emails, memos, policies, or concrete examples. Asking to have a consultant come to help move the process of detoxifying the workplace is also a good way to have a neutral party assess the situation in real time.

Most situations are not ideal. Once a workplace is identified as toxic, planning a quick exit is essential to maintaining good mental health. If no one in management is willing to address the reasons why the environment is unsustainable for workplace productivity and wellbeing, there is no good reason to stay. Although the necessity for a paycheck is a reality, that paycheck will be small consolation for chronic headaches, ailments and illnesses, depression, burnout, isolation and hopelessness. There is enough stress inherent in the practice of law. Working in a toxic environment should never be the price of making a living.

life is short.
work somewhere
awesome.

WHAT IS NHLAP?

We are a confidential, independent 501(c)(3) non-profit to assist NH lawyers, judges and law students with any issue that may impact or impair the ability to practice law. Many lawyers think we only help with substance misuse. Although that is a very important part of NHLAP, it is not the sole focus of our work. We help with anything that has become problematic. Just some examples are depression, anxiety and other mental health issues; grief; cognitive limitations resulting from aging; eating disorders; professional dissatisfaction and burn-out; work-life imbalance and time management strategies.

We are here to help before consequences of these issues become problematic, public or both. We are not part of the NH court system nor the NH Bar. Because we are solely funded by a per attorney mandatory assessment, we are akin to an additional lawyer insurance policy- we can help individuals or legal employers understand the risks in ignoring these very real issues and point to concrete solutions.

We are your resource. We are here to help make your legal practice something you enjoy, not something you endure.

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QUICK TIP

Stop Office Gossip

Whether you are a victim of gossip or a contributor to it, there is no place for gossip in a healthy work environment.



Gossip. (noun) Casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about others, typically involving details that are not confirmed as true.



Gossip in the workplace is the death of teamwork. It kills morale, breeds distrust and disrupts productivity.

THE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

TERRI M. HARRINGTON, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NHLAP

For Laughs

It's gotten to the point where I am working here to pay for the prescriptions I now require to cope with working here.



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When you haven't even gone to sleep yet and you already can't wait to come home from work tomorrow



MONTHLY RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT



How to Deal with a Toxic Work

Environment by David Smiedt. gq.com March 6, 2019

[Read Article](#)

Ten Things You'll Hear in a Toxic

Workplace by Liz Ryan. *Forbes*. May 12, 2017

[Read Article](#)

Rising Above a Toxic Workplace: Taking Care of Yourself in an Unhealthy

Environment by Chapman, White & Myra. Moody Publishers (2014)



Pod Cast: *Worklife with Adam Grant: When Work Takes Over Your Life* a TED Original podcast



Available free through Apple iTunes