

## Business Tip: Cleaning up the toxic workplace

Consider it spring-cleaning in a HAZMAT suit. Maybe your office is a Superfund site, leaching and oozing foul attitudes and behavior, contaminating everything in its wake.



Instead of rusting 55-gallon drums full of heavy metals, you are faced with employees, coworkers or supervisors who backstab, spread rumors, demoralize others, slack off and generally make life unpleasant for everybody nearby.

Could you have unwittingly set the stage for this toxic dump in cubicles? And if so, what can you do to turn things around and put everybody back on track?

The University of Minnesota's human resources Web page, [www1.umn.edu/ohr/careerdev/resources/articles/toxic/index.html](http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/careerdev/resources/articles/toxic/index.html), offers some ideas for handling poisonous people, and you don't even need a respirator – though you may need a strong resolve. Though the tips are meant for university employees, their wisdom is universal.

1. The offender – or offenders, as the case may be – need to be made aware of the impact of their behavior, and understand how it affects others in the organization. Supervisors need to be clear about their expectations and the work environment.

“Everyone is entitled to a respectful workplace,” notes the Web page, “and if anyone consistently works outside of those expectations, it becomes a performance issue and must be corrected by the individual who is displaying disrespectful behaviors.”

2. If the problem is a coworker, it's your responsibility to establish good boundaries and be assertive, rather than defensive, in letting them know their behavior is unacceptable. It may be necessary to bring the problem to the attention of a supervisor for a resolution.

3. If your supervisor is the problem, you will need to contact human resources or a counselor with your employee assistance program to work through a solution.

4. If, after all is said and done, you think you might be the toxin, ask a trusted friend or family member for an honest assessment of your personality traits, and start planning for change. If you have a good relationship with your supervisor, ask for help in making the necessary changes.

As has been done with the Superfund sites in so many communities across the land, can your office landfill be turned into a golf course, someplace clean, well mannered and genteel?



**Myth: Bullies exist only in school.**

When you were a kid, these were the people who pushed you off the swings, cut in front of you to play foursquare, dumped your backpack out on the school bus and, perhaps, separated you from your lunch money.

Ah, the joys of those old school days.

Whatever happened to that schoolyard bully? Surely he or she is now a mature, successful adult, long removed from those times of unmerited cruelty to others.

Or maybe not. According to the Website [www.kickbully.com](http://www.kickbully.com), self-defined as, "your guide to fighting workplace bullies," roughly one-fourth of employed Americans have reported bullying at work – estimated at more than 30 million people.

So there's a good chance that you will walk into the office one day and find a bully in the break-room, or behind the CEO's desk, waiting to torment you. Not surprisingly, the stakes are little higher now than when you were a kid, but the sense of dread has not changed.

You may remember how to identify the bullies at your old school. A few traits in the workplace bully, offered up by [www.kickbully.com](http://www.kickbully.com):

1. The bully is someone who controls you through micromanagement, so you can't do your job independently. This person may dominate conversations and prevent you from communicating with important people.
2. The bully may be judgmental of others, including you. This behavior includes being personally disappointed in how you do your job – whether you deserve that or not – being critical of the work you do, and always finding fault with you.
3. The bully does what he or she can to bring you down, attacking you when you're not around to defend yourself, misleading others to destroy your reputation, and setting you up for failure.

The good news is, like with any bully, you can fight back. The Website offers an assortment of methods and responses on how to handle the situation, from maintaining an invincible attitude to, ultimately, getting ready to look for another job.

## **Do you need help creating a harmonious workplace?**

The Success Trek team is ready to talk! Sit down with us and we will listen to your issues and challenges. For more information, contact Theresa Valade at [t.valade@success-trek.com](mailto:t.valade@success-trek.com) or 219-680-7720.

## **Information on Free HR Webinars**

Success Trek partner, Preventive HR, offers a free Webinar. The title for February is "A to Z Employment Laws: An Overview."

To receive notification of the date and registration, go to [www.hr Sentry.com](http://www.hr Sentry.com) and provide your email address. You will also be notified of future free webinars. These webinars are provided by HR Sentry which Preventive HR offers through an alliance.

Preventive HR is dedicated to providing its clients with tools and resources to help them efficiently and effectively manage their organizations. Preventive HR has teamed with HR Made Simple to create a free webinar series that will address various Human Resource topics.