

MONEY WISE

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The toxic workplace

Author counsels on handling office harassment

By Kevin Smith Staff Writer

The toxic co-worker.

Nearly every office has at least one, and they come in all varieties. We've heard about the sexual harassers, the yellers and the screamers. But a workplace can also be disrupted by the socially clueless, the saboteurs and the obsessives.

The labels may vary but they all have one thing in common: they can pose a threat to you and the productivity of the company you work for.

Linnda Durré, a psychotherapist, author, business consultant and corporate trainer, addresses these issues in her book, "Surviving the Toxic Workplace: Protect Yourself Against the Co-Workers, Bosses and Work Environments That Poison Your Day."

"Sexual harassers are the worst and the hardest to deal with because it's often a case of 'he said/she said,'" Durré said. "So many times, there is no proof and the harasser will deny what they said."

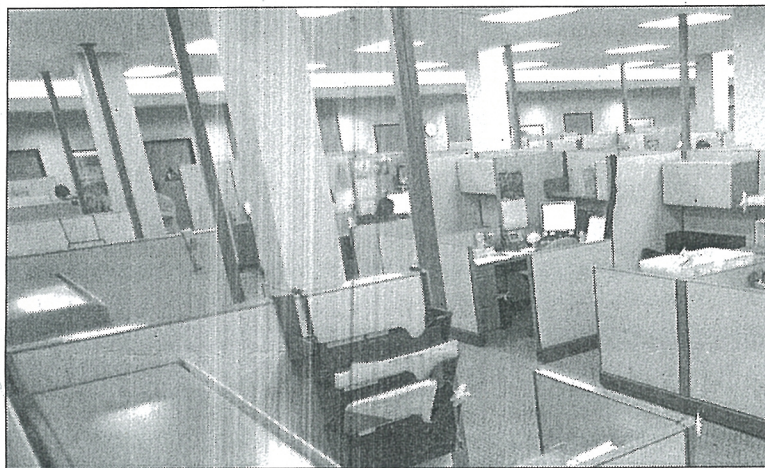
Women, especially single mothers, are frequently the target of sexual harassment by their bosses, according to Durré.

"Women aren't getting promoted as much and men take advantage of that," she said. "They see employees as their property and they want to have power and control over them."

A common scenario involves the supervisor who offers to promote a female employee on the condition that she perform sexual favors in return.

"The situation is worse if they are a single mother because then they really need the money," Durré said.

In cases like these, Durré advises



Leo Jarzomb Staff Photographer

Author Linnda Durré has written a book that addresses toxic behaviors in the workplace. The book offers advice on how to approach such situations and what to do if the behavior doesn't stop.



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the victim to try to find someone who may have witnessed the abuse. Victims are likewise advised to report the situation to the human resources department.

Durré adds a caveat to that, however.

"You have to make sure you are getting someone who is on your side," she said. "Many times, HR people aren't on your side because they are company people."

Others try to undermine co-workers via sabotage by purposely misplacing an important report you might need for a meeting or failing to tell you about a phone call.

"Back-stabbers and passive-aggressives are very scary because they are sneaky," she said. "They will do passive things and then lie about it. They'll say, 'Oh, I forgot about that.' They are mind-game players. Their motive is power and revenge."

No matter what the abuse is,

Durré advises victims to thoroughly document what is happening to them. And those concerns must be given in a timely manner to the HR department.

If all else fails, victims of abuse can get an attorney. When an attorney writes a letter advising the abuser to stop the harassing behavior or face a lawsuit, it usually ends, according to Durré.

Victims can also turn to the union or trade organization where they work and file a class-action lawsuit because there is strength in numbers, according to Durré.

Durré graduated from Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena with a degree in human development. She received her master's and Ph.D. from the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego, now known as Alliant University.

She has appeared on numerous television and radio talk shows.

For more information, visit www.survivingthetoxicworkplace.com.

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