

# SUMMARY

## OVERCOMING MOBBING

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# **Summary of “Overcoming Mobbing” by Maureen Duffy and Len Sperry**

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A Recovery Guide for Workplace Aggression and Bullying

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# Introduction

You may be wondering exactly what *mobbing* is. Well, mobbing refers to a type of workplace abuse that is entirely too common. It's a form of workplace bullying in which individual groups and larger organizations mutually influence the behavior of one another. Bullying, however, is often misunderstood. You always hear about the big kids in school who shake people down for their lunch money. But that's not exactly what bullying is today in the workplace, it's not just the stereotype of a powerful boss screaming at a cowering worker. To understand workplace mobbing, you'll need to understand the complexity and roles of individuals, groups, management, and the organization itself. All of these roles play a part in the development of workplace mobbing. If you could simply point out the "bad apple" or "rotten egg," then most bullies would be out of the job by now. Clearly, that isn't the case. Therefore, you must not only look at how individuals can behave abusively but also how groups can gang up at work, and how organizational leadership and authority can become involved. You must also remember that this isn't about blaming others. It's about healing and understanding, understanding what workplace mobbing is and how it happens and what to do to recover if you or a loved one has been impacted by it.

# Dwayne's Dream Career Turns into a Career Nightmare

Let's look at the story of Dwayne, the football coach who had extensive experience and high qualifications. After coaching an overseas semipro team, Dwayne returned to the high school that he graduated from and was hired to coach the varsity football team. Returning to your old roots would seem like an advantage to most people, but for Dwayne, it only highlighted the differences between him and the people around him. For instance, Dwayne was both attractive and in great shape. His assistant coaches, however, were overweight. Additionally, Dwayne came from a wealthy family while most people in the town did not. Finally, Dwayne didn't practice the same branch of Christianity as the majority of people in town. In other words, Dwayne was "foreign," and his overseas experience only made the people of the town fear him more.

Before Dwayne's first day on the job, he was in trouble. You see, many of his assistant coaches believed they should have been offered the head-coaching job. As a result, they resented him right away and became determined to undermine his authority before even giving Dwayne a chance. Furthermore, they complained about Dwayne's coaching style, his play selections, and they expressed these complaints to other colleagues. The mistreatment and negative thoughts trickled throughout the athletic department of the school, and eventually spread throughout the town. Some colleagues even went so far as to investigate Dwayne's past and find anything they could use against him. Their sole intent was to spread hate and fear of Dwayne.

Soon, the entire town was against Dwayne. The high school administrator, the man who hired Dwayne, failed to intervene and allowed the hate to continue. The school became divided as some people rallied behind the coach and an even larger group opposed him. Finally, during Dwayne's second season of coaching, the high school fired him. The administrator justified his decision stating the team's losing record was to blame. High

school personnel, including coaches and teachers, even went into Dwayne's office and packed his belongings for him without his knowledge or permission. Upon receiving his belongings, Dwayne discovered a meaningful piece of sports memorabilia was missing, likely stolen.

After 18 months of vicious hatred, Dwayne's mental health began to suffer. He finally exploded in anger and those who packed up his belongings informed the administration that Dwayne was violent and dangerous. They even suggested he not be allowed back on school property to retrieve the rest of his possessions. Soon, Dwayne and his family moved away from his old home town. Dwayne wasn't just a victim of workplace bullying, he was a victim of mobbing. You see, while bullying involves the abuse of one individual by another, mobbing is more sinister and is often perpetrated by a group that the organization itself supports.

# Many Factors Can Lead to Workplace Mobbing

Victims of mobbing eventually find everyone, including the head of the department, is against them. They feel like they have no choice but to leave. Unlike bullying, mobbing is an organizational attack which also typically includes the support of management. Even worse, mobbing is far more painful for victims, often involving “unethical communication,” like gossip, belittlement, untrue information, rumors, lies, and more. As a result, victims begin to lose the trust of others around them and in many cases, they develop physical and mental health problems. Even worse, some become suicidal or homicidal.

Mobbing is not an attack that simply happens one day. No, it is a long-term, planned attack designed to get victims fired or ejected from an organization. Oftentimes, mobbing is not perpetrated by management or administration. Instead, mobbing is typically a bottom-up tactic, in which employees at the bottom of the ladder band together to take down someone of higher authority. We saw this with Dwayne, who was hired as the head coach and was resented by the other assistant coaches.

There isn't a set profile for victims of mobbing, but victims are typically those who speak out or seem to be different, like Dwayne. For example, people who try and whistleblow or speak out against unethical business practices are more likely to suffer from mobbing. Similarly, those who are culturally different, like immigrants or people with non-normative sexual identities, are more likely to be singled out. Furthermore, mobbing is more common than you might think. In the United States, anywhere from 35% to 50% of workers have experienced some type of mistreatment in the workplace each week.

There are three common factors to incidents of mobbing. We can look at these three factors through the story of Thomas McInvale. In 1991, McInvale was fired from his job as a postal worker. One day, he walked into



the Royal Oak Post Office and shot and killed four of his former managers before killing himself. Unfortunately, this act of aggression became motivated after becoming a victim mobbing. Let's first take a look at the group dynamics in the workplace. You see, mobbing occurs when team cohesion is broken down and some team members view the outsider as holding everyone else back.

At McInvale's job, the relationships between management and employees were unhealthy and toxic. Management allegedly treated the staff horribly and McInvale was unfairly singled out by them. He was eventually fired for an offense that management typically turned a blind eye to. Next, the organizational structure of Royal Oak Postal Service used a strict top-down hierarchy, in which employees were harshly disciplined for minor offenses. This harsh environment wasn't the only stress-inducing aspect of McInvale's job either. Technology in the industry was becoming rapidly produced while competition from FedEx and UPS made it so the US Postal Services had to cut costs and increase efficiencies. As a result, job security was low and job-related stress was at an all-time high.

Lastly, we must take a look at individual dynamics. People with certain personality traits, like high anxiety or a quick temper might struggle more when faced with workplace abuse. For example, McInvale was a former marine who didn't know how to cope with stressful situations. Ultimately, the combination of his personality and a stressful job caused him to snap.

# **The Effect Mobbing Has on a Victim's Health, Career, and Relationships**

For victims of mobbing, the experience is horrible and can have a devastating impact. Unlike bullying, which can lead to feelings of isolation and depression, the effects of mobbing can expand far beyond your emotions. Mobbing is all about separating an employee from a job, typically, a person's job is crucial to his or her well-being, family security, and nourishment. Additionally, many people's lives are centered around their careers, so an attack on their job is an attack on their identity. As a result, victims of mobbing can experience serious injuries.

Physical injuries can occur when victims experience high levels of stress, resulting in heart problems, high blood pressure, fatigue, and insomnia. Victims can also experience psychological illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When victims feel trapped in a toxic, abusive environment, they become trapped in a cycle of desperately wanting to leave but also needing to pay bills and build a résumé and network. Furthermore, victims become ostracized by their coworkers, some who may have once been friends. They then begin to feel alienated and worthless as they question their abilities and lose faith in themselves. This often leads to extreme sadness and depression.

Not only does workplace mobbing affect a person's emotional and mental health, but it can also impact their careers. Many victims feel as if they can't return to work after experiencing being mobbed. They continue to question their abilities, and even if they do go back to work, they lose confidence in their performance, causing them to perform below their capabilities. They hold themselves back and fail to move up the ladder. Therefore, many victims turn to self-employment after leaving an organizational workplace altogether.

Victims of mobbing experience destruction in all of their relationships, not just with their coworkers. One of the worst effects of mobbing takes place

between victims and their children. Children are at an impressionable age in which they need their parent's guidance and support. Unfortunately, mobbing victims become so distracted by their work, that they fail to devote their time and energy to their loved ones. Furthermore, bystanders who witness mobbing also suffer. Simply witnessing a victim of mobbing can lead to physical and mental damage similar to what the victim suffered. In fact, according to one study, witnesses of workplace mobbing reported higher levels of stress than first-responders.

Lastly, workplace mobbing affects the company as well. Not only does the company lose a good employee and all the skills that particular employee brought to the table, but it also experiences higher turnover rates as other employees recognize the toxicity of the work environment. Replacing employees costs money, especially if mobbing occurs continually and new workers are being hired regularly. Additionally, as the staff becomes more unhappy and stressed, they begin to take more sick days resulting in a loss of production, further costing the company. The total monetary cost for companies in the U.S. due to workplace abuse is estimated to be somewhere between \$180 million and \$250 billion a year!

# **Victims Can Overcome the Effects of Workplace Mobbing**

So what can you do if you are a victim of workplace mobbing? How can you begin to get your life back on track? While recovery can be a slow process, it is possible to overcome the effects of mobbing. The first step that many victims take is attending therapy. Therapists should encourage their patients to grieve the losses incurred from the experience. Mobbing can take away a person's career, relationships, and even their identity. By taking the time to grieve what you have lost, you can begin the slow process of healing.

Second, you'll need to begin networking. This may be difficult since you have likely experienced isolation and abandonment, you probably have little trust in others. But it's important to quickly replace your workplace relationships and develop new social relationships. Begin by networking with others, a strong social community will provide the support you need after a traumatic experience. Mobbing victims also need the support of their friends, family members, and spouses. You should nurture the relationships you do have and seek new ones as well. An unemployment support group, volunteering or taking a cooking class are all great ways to find new friends and support networks.

It's also important that you create a plan for how you're going to get back on your feet. The first step is to build a support network of people you trust. Then, you should select the five areas in your life that suffered the most as a result of mobbing, things like trust, your career, and your relationships are all great examples. Once you've identified these five areas, then make it a priority to fix these areas. Next, you'll want to talk to your support team about your experience. Listen to their perspective and their advice, this will help you view the situation from an outsider's perspective and give you insight into what happened.

Finally, as you move through the healing process, you should keep track of your progress. Ask yourself, “What steps have I taken to try out new possibilities for myself and my career?” “If I continue taking these steps in new directions, where will they lead me?” “Am I moving forward in the right way?” If you find that you aren’t, then ask yourself what you need to change. Be sure to remain flexible as no two people heal the same way.

# Become a Speak No Evil Company

In today's world, working in a healthy environment is more important than ever. In the past, people typically chose jobs that would bring them the most profit and companies only cared about two things: money and productivity. Today, however, the reputation of a company is largely determined by how the company cares for its employees. Therefore, it's crucial that the company you work for understands and acknowledges workplace mobbing and takes a proactive role in addressing it and preventing it from happening.

A healthy workplace is based on many factors; in fact, profitability certainly plays a role. That's because organizations that maintain a healthy environment are often more profitable than those with unhealthy ones. Just take a look at some of the most successful companies in the world, like Starbucks and Google. Both are incredibly profitable and are dedicated to the health and well-being of their employees. To create a healthy work environment, a company will need to become a *speaking no evil* company. A speaking no evil company values its people, including customers and employees, and prioritizes their well-being. Catholic Health Service, for example, is a speaking no evil company. Each year they rank highly in both patient and employee satisfaction. This can also be seen in their value statement which states that they put patient care first, employee care second, and community comes third. Do you see profit anywhere on their priority list?

In addition to speaking no evil companies, there are also *see no evil* companies. In these companies, mobbing thrives as management and administration typically ignore the mobbing and bullying that is happening and focus only on profits. There are also *hear no evil* companies who focus solely on abuse and bullying against individuals but fail to address workplace mobbing. Ultimately, companies that focus on their people experience less abuse within the organization and retain staff for as long as 30 years or more.

Lastly, it's important to recognize that mobbing victims can be anyone. Many associate mobbing with antisocial employees; however, only 1% of females and 3% of males in the general population are antisocial. Additionally, anyone can join the mob. Joining the mob has little to do with an individual's personal characteristics and has more to do with peer pressure and group dynamics. Workplace mobbing does not discriminate but there is something that can be done and victims can go on to find peace and healing.

## Final Summary

Victims of workplace mobbing don't just experience anxiety and sadness, they also have their careers ripped from them, their relationships destroyed, and their trust in others and themselves completely torn down. This doesn't affect the victim himself but the lives of everyone close to the victim as well. As a result, a person's mental and physical health can become damaged and lives can be ruined. However, victims don't have to succumb to the effects of mobbing, they can build themselves back up and get back on their feet. With the right techniques, like grieving their loss and finding a support network, victims can overcome the damage that mobbing brings. Additionally, companies can address mobbing issues as well and take a proactive approach in preventing it from occurring. Speak no evil companies, for example, focus on the health of their people over the profits of their company. As a result, healthy employees lead to healthy work environments, which can lead to more profits!





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