

Stepping on folks to get what I want

"That man can destroy life is just as miraculous a feat as that he can create it, for life is the miracle, the inexplicable. In the act of destruction, man sets himself above life; he transcends himself as a creature. Thus, the ultimate choice for a man, inasmuch as he is driven to transcend himself, is to create or to destroy, to love or to hate." - Erich Fromm

The ultimate example of "stepping on folks to get what I want" occurred on Friday, November 28th at a Wal-Mart store on Long Island, NY.

A 34-year-old Wal-Mart temporary employee was trampled to death in a rush of thousands of early morning shoppers as he and other employees attempted to unlock the doors of a Long Island store. The employee was reportedly "stepped on by hundreds of people". Video showed as many as a dozen people knocked to the floor in the stampede of people trying to get into the Wal-Mart. Police arrived and as they were giving first aid, those police officers were also jostled and pushed. The employees' family filed a wrongful-death suit on December 3rd, accusing Wal-Mart of creating an atmosphere of competition and anxiety. Competition and anxiety. Don't many of our workplaces today reflect a fair amount of internecine, subtle and not-so-subtle "competition and anxiety"? I, for one, would suggest a resounding "yes!"

So, what's at play with much of our workplace "competition and anxiety"? Nothing less than an all-out assault on "anybody who gets in my way" by folks driven by competition and anxiety whose only reason for living is to take care of themselves and work for his or her own good - blinded by their own ego-driven need to succeed at any cost.

While such instances of "manslaughter" and violence are not commonplace in our daily workplaces, the mantra of "stepping on folks to get what I want" is — a mantra chanted by a cadre of leaders, managers and employees who are driven by their own flavor of "competition and anxiety." While we don't witness heinous crimes of "manslaughter" on a daily basis at work, we do witness more subtle, but equally-painful"- crimes of "morale-slaughter", "spirit-slaughter", "satisfaction-slaughter", "passion-slaughter" and "reputation-slaughter" by folks who mis-treat, ill-use and abuse their colleagues and fellow employees in order to achieve their own ego needs for control, recognition and security — driven by "competition and anxiety" — their competitive nature to be seen and accepted as "somebody" and anxiety over not being a "nobody."

Those who step on others to get what they want, to be somebody, usually fall into the categories of bullies, narcissists, and psychopaths — folks whose view of their world at work (and, often at home and at play) is based on a lack of trust in others, and on deeper emotional and psychological issues which bring them to define relationships as win-lose, domination, subservience, winning at all costs, and triumph, or on shame or humiliation - two feelings they detest and fight to the tooth to avoid.

Corrupting, manipulating, bullying, gossiping, one-upping, disrespecting and devaluing others in order to gain praise, power, promotion, status and influence are these folks' heinous workplace crimes that destroy individuals - another flavor of "manslaughter." Mistreating others through humiliation, intimidation, backstabbing, and sabotage is the way they kill others' will to live and engagement in their life at work. These "criminal" behaviors cause others mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological distress - killing their passion and their spirit.

In order to survive, to feel seen and be somebody, these bullies, psychopaths and narcissists need to humiliate, criticize, persecute, ignore, compete, sabotage, attack, scapegoat, gang up on, subjugate, denigrate, talk down to, "supervise" and contradict others, and to constantly seek special treatment for themselves.

From an emotional or psychological perspective, what brings one to walk all over people? What causes

leaders, managers and employees to behave in ways that cause manslaughter" at work? What's underneath their ruthlessness? Here are three sources:

- Upbringing - having been raised in a harsh, abusive environment where one was consistently referred to as lazy, good for nothing, or stupid, i.e., a "nobody". This individual interacts in their workplace as though its their family. Their "I'll show you I'm somebody!" mantra drives them to walk over others in order to feel, and to show others, they have value and worth.
- Compliance - having grown up in an environment that can be likened to a boot camp, these individuals need to intimidate and threaten in order to feel successful. They need others to be totally compliant and obedient and walking over them is their "motivational approach" of choice to exact compliance.
- Ignorance - they just don't know any other way. Having grown up in an environment where force was king, they integrated this notion into their psyche and so, "force it is". It's their default programming. It's all they know.

The question that day at Wal-Mart, and everyday in our offices and workplaces, is: Where is civility?

"The evil of our time is the loss of consciousness of evil". - Krishnamurti

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Are there distressed groups in your workplace? Are there systems in place to support these folks? If not, why not?
- Do you have increased attrition and transfers in your workplace due to bullies, psychopaths and narcissists? Is abuse a reason people leave?
- What happens to folks who are abrasive? Are they simply accepted as "business as usual" or "that's how it is around here"?
- When matters of abuse are raised, how are they handled?
- Do performance and productivity suffer as a result of emotional distress? Are folks passive-aggressive?
- Do you personally suffer from presenteeism (you show up for work but you're not there 100%) due to workplace bullies, psychopaths or narcissists?
- How does senior management respond to abrasiveness and workplace abuse? Do they respond at all? Do they hold such folks accountable? If not, why not?
- Do most folks feel paralyzed and helpless when it comes to dealing with arrogant, abrasive leaders, managers and colleagues?
- Have you ever been accused of being arrogant, abrasive, bullying, or disrespectful? How did that make you feel? Have you ever accused someone else of the same? What happened as a result?
- Did people in your childhood environment reflect elements of bullying, narcissism or psychopathology? Did you?
- Have you ever stepped on someone else to get what you want? Are you now?
- Have you ever been victimized by someone who stepped on you to get ahead? What was that like?

"The greatest evil is not done in those sordid dens of evil that Dickens loved to paint...but it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried) in clear, carpeted, warmed, well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices." - C.S. Lewis, Introduction of the Screwtape Letters

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