



# How to deal with a toxic workplace?

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In a previous newsletter, last week in fact, I spoke about what a toxic workplace looks like. In this newsletter I want to talk about how you deal with being in a toxic workplace.

Now you might say to me, “Why would anyone want to stay in a toxic workplace?”, and generally I would agree with you. I would not want to. Sometimes, though, the organisation or department you are in offers benefits you may not easily get elsewhere. It may be that the organisation you are working in is one of the few that offers the opportunity for you to develop and practice certain in-demand skills. And having those skills will benefit you and your CV a great deal. It may be that having some work experience in that organisation will open a lot of doors to you later on in your career. It may even be that in order to pursue your career dream, you need to spend some time working in that company. Whatever the reason, sometimes there may be good reasons to stay in a toxic workplace for some time. Also, I almost never recommend people just resign from a job without having something else lined up. You are making your life very difficult if you do this, unless you have many months of savings you can live off for a while. So, it is quite possible you may need to stay for some time in a toxic workplace, in which case you want to learn how best to deal with it.

1. Recognise that you are in a toxic workplace. You may feel that you are going mad and you may wonder if you are totally incompetent and stupid, however, you need to understand if it is you or if it is a toxic workplace you are in. For this reason you always want to share information about what is going on at work with others to get the perspective of someone else. When there is abuse of any form happening (and in a toxic workplace there will be abuse), the abuser usually tries to isolate you and get you to believe you are wrong and imagining things. This happens in order to stop you from discussing your situation with others. You definitely want to discuss what is happening at work with other people to get their perspective and check that you are not going mad. Once you do this, and you can see that you are not the core problem, you are in a toxic workplace, it can help you see things as they really are and deal more effectively with what is happening.
2. If you are in a company that has policies around abuse, harassment, or bullying, and you are experiencing any of these, then go to HR and discuss the problem. It may be possible that these issues can be addressed. If you are in a workplace where you know nothing gets done, and the leadership don't care about addressing such problems, then you need to take other measures to take care of yourself. If you take steps to raise your issues, then try and get some people around you to support you. You don't want to do this alone if possible.

3. Toxic workplaces serve to destroy your self-esteem and confidence. You are likely to be made to feel incompetent and inadequate. You need to engage in actions to counteract this. Get help or practice some self-help to keep your self-esteem and confidence intact. Work on reminding yourself of your strengths and successes. Remind yourself of previous roles where you received praise and recognition. Also, remind yourself that this is one organisation. The view of one organisation does not define who you are and what you are capable of. People are often biased and self-serving. No matter what you do or how well you do it, some people will never have anything nice to say about you.
4. Spend your time outside of the workplace with people who are kind and caring and build you up. Make sure that your social activities are with people who support you. Make sure time with friends and family are with people who believe in you.
5. Practice self-care. When we are very busy this is something we neglect. And we are all mostly extremely busy. Between work and family responsibilities and household chores, we are on the proverbial treadmill. And we forget to have some me-time and some time for relaxing and pampering of ourselves. It is important for our well-being not to neglect this, but if you are in a toxic workplace, then it is even more important that you take care of yourself. When we engage in self-care, we are sending a message to our brains that we are worthy of care and worthy of doing activities that relax and replenish ourselves.
6. How we feel is very much determined by what we focus our attention on. Focus your attention on your goals and career dreams. Make sure you are getting something from the situation in terms of skills and experience that will help your career in the future. If you have decided to exit as soon as possible then focus on finding another job.
7. Try and stay away from the drama and toxicity as much as you can. You cannot ignore people because the work has to get done. Just try and not spend any more time than necessary in a toxic space, and if you have to, don't let yourself get hooked into the drama and nastiness. Have a lunch break outside of the company if you can. After work have a fun ritual that you engage in to let go of the toxic workplace for the day.
8. Don't add to the toxicity. Don't gossip and bad mouth people or the company even if you think they deserve it. Be professional and respectful. When you are treated badly it can be easy to resort to treating others badly. Don't do this. Just keep on with your work and stick to your values. At the end of the day what goes around comes around. Ultimately you will have a stellar reputation and in the long-term it will pay off for you.
9. Set boundaries. Be very clear what is okay and what is not. Learn to be assertive. Assertiveness means I stand up for myself while respecting others. It means I recognise that I deserve to be treated with respect and decency and so do others. If I don't like what they have done, I can still address it in a way that doesn't damage them.

You don't want to spend years and years in a toxic workplace. That will just break you down. So ultimately you do want to get out of a toxic workplace at some point. While you are looking around for other jobs make sure you keep working on your self-esteem and confidence. When you are applying for jobs and attending interviews you need to have confidence in yourself and your abilities. You need to believe you are competent and capable. Because a toxic workplace can damage this, make sure you are ready to put your best foot forward when you start looking for a new job. When you are interviewing for another job you also want to try and ensure as much as you can that you don't go back into another toxic environment. Pay attention to how people handle your application. Ask about the culture and talk to as many people as possible who work for that company. Ask questions in interviews and look for signs that the culture may not be a nice one before you accept an offer.