



Abuse in the Workplace: Management Remedies and Bottom Line Impact

Emily S Bassman

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This book identifies a major threat to the productivity, profitability, and competitiveness of American business. This threat is the deteriorating relationship between managers and employees in the face of repeated downsizing, cost-cutting, and demands to accomplish more with fewer resources. Stress brings out dysfunctional, abusive behavior in managers, and a form of generic harassment results. Emily S. Bassman creates a vision of the antithesis of an abusive environment: one that is empowering, where fair treatment is lived out in daily practices, where employees choose to exert discretionary effort, creating a peak performance culture. In creating this vision, the author applies principles from Total Quality Management to human relationships in the workplace, especially to those between managers and subordinates. The unique contribution is putting W.E. Deming's quality principles into behavioral terms based on psychology and learning theory. The author effectively documents that a transformation of how employees are treated is necessary, and not primarily to increase employee satisfaction. Rather, the primary reason to use these principles is to create the conditions whereby every employee can reach their full potential, thereby maximizing their contribution to the business and achieving transformational, rather than incremental improvements in productivity.

Bassman begins by mapping out the problem-defining and describing the various forms of abuse that surface in organizations, and clarifying how employee victims of abuse behave very similarly to victims of other forms of abuse. The unique elements of employee abuse are explained in terms of the nature of power in organizations. Why we persist in self-defeating, punishing interactions is explained with reference to principles of learning, and strategies are outlined for breaking the cycle of punishment and methods of negative behavior control. The author then moves from a consideration of individual abusive relationships to institutional abuse. How employees are treated is positioned as an ethical issue, and related to aspects of corporate culture, policies, and management practices. This leads into a discussion of the impact of employee abuse on organizations. Bassman documents the costs incurred by organizations that tolerate abuse, and describes some of the corporate programs that can be used to assess the extent to which employee abuse exists in the organization. The last section of the book deals with solutions, offering guidance for senior management teams that choose to involve themselves in an assessment and cultural change effort. This book is designed to educate management and senior leadership about the issues, and provide a roadmap for change, both for leaders and managers, and for those change agents (consultants, human resource managers) who may work with them.

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