

THE SET FREE LIFE

Surviving a Tormenting Workplace: Protective Defenses

In the final installment of this series on surviving the worst work experiences of your life, keep this in mind: you are making your way across a desert and you must have some special provisions. You must have water. You'll need the right kind of food, the kind that will give you the nutrients you need to be able to travel well. And you'll need protection, particularly as a solitary traveler. It's treacherous out there.

Let me offer you what I think are three essential areas that must be *protected* in the hostile environment. Similar to some points I've already shared, these are things you must *always* do to get through *anything* that places a demand upon you.

Guard Your Heart

Do not surround yourself with negativity. It will kill your perspective, your self-esteem, your ability to bounce back. It's hard enough in a hostile environment to stay focused when everything is pulling you down. Surround yourself with people who will lift you up and put something in. You need encouragers, those who will see the good in you and tell you about it, who will remind you of who you are and what your talents are and the good you bring to life. You cannot survive on a daily diet of unkindness, bitterness, hatred, cruelty, and coldness. Those traits seem to be the stuff of the corporate world, and you must guard against them by being reminded that everyone in the world is *not like that*. This requires having good friends and family members who help by preventing you from being sucked in by the stuff being done to you. If you have only one person who can help you, inform that good and faithful friend that you may be drawing upon the friendship in a powerful way during your hard place. A true friend will be willing to hang in there and dress your wounds, comfort you, and remind you that you will make it.

If you don't have anyone who does this, encourage yourself. This is

much harder and requires considerable discipline, but it can be done. The point is to guard your innermost core, the thing that makes you *you*. Protect what you can and trust that what's unproductive will be discarded and wasn't worth holding onto anyway.

Guard Your Mind

Read encouraging things. Listen to things that build you up instead of tearing you down. Some motivational speakers put out a bunch of hokey, but in order to keep yourself from sinking into despair and self-destructive practices, you must deposit positive messages that sit someplace in your brain and rise up when needed, so find one or two that speak to you. Build yourself up in the morning before leaving for work. If you must get up half an hour early so that you can put your day in mental order, do what helps you retain your equilibrium. Start out your day with a page or two, or a recording, of something uplifting. I recommend things such as [Andy Andrews'](#) DVD, "The Seven Decisions." He has marvelous books (*The Traveler's Gift*, *The Lost Choice*) that are terrifically inspiring.

Watch things that make you laugh. "A sense of humor," says Moshe Waldoks, a rabbi and humorist, "can help you overlook the unattractive, tolerate the unpleasant, cope with the unexpected, and smile through the unbearable." To be able to laugh in the middle of a rotten place shows the turkeys have not gotten you down! Laugh to defy all of the forces coming against



Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her seminars on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused steners at companies and business organizations hroughout the country to rate her presentations as "the best seminar of the conference!" She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.

Quick Links

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you. Make time for another viewing of "Young Frankenstein" or "My Big Fat Greek Wedding."

Listen to good music. Detox on the way home with inspirational books on tape or quiet classical music. Discipline yourself to insert positive message into your mind while you are away from work. Constantly remind yourself of the good so that you are not consumed by the bad. There is a battle for your mind, and you have to have some weapons of your own.

Guard Your Health

This is a no-brainer. Stress is enormously detrimental to the body. If you overeat or smoke or drink to excess to relieve stress, you are, quite literally, killing yourself. In a pressurized situation when all forces are arrayed against you, you must develop your muscles—muscles of discipline, determination, and exercise. If you do no other exercise, walk. Walk with an iPod or other MP3 player and listen to some of that detoxing music or spoken word. Give yourself a physical outlet other than the natural bad habits so many of us have made a part of our lives. One of the most therapeutic moments of my day when I was in the midst of my awful experience was going home at lunch to walk my dogs, as well as walking them when I got home from work. Dogs are always happy to see you. They love you and just want to be with you and be happy. They are tremendous stress relievers, and our walks were sometimes the only bright spots in my day. Find a way to get some kind of exercise. It's a life-saver.

Keep in mind those closing words from the old "Mary Tyler Moore Show" theme song: "You're gonna make it after all!" 🐾

Teddy Bear Says...



Have you ever noticed how often we pups interrupt each other? We bark loudly, we snap back, we sneak up, we nudge, insert, growl, and yawn. We do it with you, too, propelling ourselves into your conversations or quiet moments without any regard for your comfort. You love us anyway, and sometimes it's one of the reasons why. Our nature is childlike, and you often excuse us for behaviors you'd find offensive in other humans.

Quotable

It requires greater courage to preserve inner freedom, to move on in one's inward journey into new realms, than to stand defiantly for outer freedom. It is often easier to play the martyr, as it is to be rash in battle.

Rollo May

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Which makes my point: it is offensive to constantly interrupt. It's also a hard habit to break, and it requires you to *attend to the sound of yourself*. This is a skill you would do well to cultivate, because it will improve your communication skills in purposeful ways.

Most people who regularly interrupt are utterly, completely unaware of what they are doing. You who are deeply offended by serial interrupters sometimes believe it is done on purpose, but that's rarely the case. Interrupters are just wrapped up in *their* ideas or *their* thoughts or *their* stories, and they honestly believe you won't mind if they just cut you off here and insert a point or two. They aren't bothered when others do it to them, so they can't fathom it will bother you. It really doesn't seem like an offensive thing; they see it as just the way conversations go.

But you see, Interrupters, it can be quite annoying and some folks cannot abide it. Your interruptions send messages such as, "You're taking too long to get to your point so I can start talking again," or "My story is way better than yours, so let me just insert it," or "You're really boring me so I'll take over now." It may not be at all what you are thinking, but it may be what your conversation partner perceives.

So perk up those floppy ears! START LISTENING TO YOURSELF. You may hear more than just your interruptive nature; you may hear how often you use "uh" or how V - E - R - Y L - O - N - G it takes you to finish a sentence. You may hear the nasally quality of your voice, or how often you squeal when you laugh. Others may be bowled over by your constant mispronunciations:

"estatic" for "ecstatic"

"of-ten" for "often" (how many of you know the "t" is silent? Really, it is.)

"jewlery" for "jewelry"

"reelator" for "realtor"

"drowned/drownding" for "drown/drowning"

"ekcetera" for "et cetera"

"wreck" for "wreak" (reek)

"excape" for "escape," or "expecially" for "especially"

not to mention the ubiquitous "aks" for "ask," or dropping the "ing" sound and replacing it with "een."

You don't hear such things, but they are mind-piercing to some listeners. They also broadcast the unfortunate message that you are uneducated or backwards, and is that what you really want people to remember? Perhaps you have just never noticed that it's when you launch into another story about your experience that coworkers start gathering papers and preparing to leave the meeting. Start noticing! Start listening to yourself!

And forgive me for that insane barking I do when the UPS truck arrives at the house. I just can't hear myself sometimes. 🐾