

## READING GUIDE/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

# Happy at Work: A Practical Guide to Overcoming Workplace Psychological Harassment



### *Introduction – The path to transformation*

1. What is the concept of the hero's journey? How can this narrative approach to meeting, overcoming and being transformed by challenge apply to workplace psychological harassment?
2. How is the workplace changing? How is the meaning of work changing? Researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihaly believed that the positive feelings derived from 'flow' at work provide deep satisfaction and happiness. Do you agree?
3. What is the connection between personal lives and are working lives? What is your perspective on the overlap of mental health in these different spheres?

### *Part One - The departure, encountering the challenge*

4. What is psychological harassment? How does it happen? What are its impacts?
5. The book describes research about characteristics of perpetrators of psychological harassment and abuse. What do you think are the most common reasons for perpetration of abuse? Do you think that it is conscious and intentional on their part? Or is it sometimes simply a matter of poor management skills? What other factors can you think of that come into play?

6. What do the 'dark triad' and 'dark tetrad' have to do with psychological abuse?
7. Why do you think the concept of narcissism is a recurring theme in the discourse around psychological well-being? Do we live in a society that cultivates and rewards narcissism? Are there benefits of narcissism?
8. Are organisations themselves narcissistic?
9. The research into the characteristics of targets of workplace abuse is inconclusive. Do you think that there are certain attributes or characteristics that make some people more susceptible to abuse? What are the attributes the book suggests? What do you think are the main reasons a person might be targeted? Do you think some perpetrators simply cycle through and pick off the most vulnerable at any given time?
10. The book speaks of organisational factors that create conditions conducive to workplace psychological abuse. These factors can be quite varied. What are they? Do they comport with your experience?

### *Part Two – Initiation, overcoming the challenge*

11. The book suggests three main reasons why managers turn a blind eye to workplace psychological abuse. What are these reasons? Is your view and/or experience similar or different?
12. How do organisations select managers? How do they select leaders? Do they distinguish between the attributes required for these different roles? Can you think of ways managers and leaders might better fulfil their roles in organisations in the interests of psycho-social safety?
13. What are the secret rules and toxic tactics used by organisations, management, HR/P&C, and so on to avoid recognising and responding to workplace psychological abuse?
14. What is concept of the dyadic dodge? How does it work? Have you seen it in your workplace or elsewhere?
15. What is outrage management? How does it work? Have you seen it in your workplace or elsewhere?
16. What is DARVO? How is it used by perpetrators? How is it used by organisations? Have you seen this in your experience?

17. Are targets whistleblowers?
18. Increasingly, legislation frames the employer's provision of psycho-socially safe work conditions as a matter of human rights. Is there a human right to safe work? Should there be such a right in your view?
19. What are the main avenues available to targets who wish to take legal action in response to workplace psychological abuse?
20. How does anti-discrimination legislation apply to workplace psychological harassment?
21. From a legal perspective what are the differences between workplace psychological harassment and sexual harassment?
22. Are workplace health and safety laws effective in combatting workplace psychological abuse? What about criminal charges?
23. Do employers owe a duty of care to employees to ensure a safe workplace?
24. Why is it challenging to legislate psychosocial safety? What does it mean when we say it is about impact? How do we assess the nature of the actions that cause the impact? How can we most effectively manage and act on these highly subjective and nuanced judgements?
25. What is happening on the global stage in terms of legislative reform in this area? Do you think proposed new legislation will be effective?

***Part Three - The return, achieving the courage, wisdom and strength to master ourselves in service to others***

26. What is one of the things Peter Drucker observed as commonly overlooked in a modern enterprise?
27. How does faith play a role in helping targets deal with abuse?
28. Does being a target mean you have to be a victim?
29. The book discusses various ways of staying strong, and of healing and resilience. Which of these are most powerful in your view?
30. What are some ways the book suggests that a target can maintain perspective on the path to emerging victorious?

31. DARVO, outrage management and the dyadic dodge are all stories. How do we counter them?
32. When we think about how information is portrayed and perceived by others but also by ourselves, what are ways that we can proactively shape the narrative?
33. Intentional connection relates to proximity, distance, boundaries. Who do we keep close? Who do we keep it a distance and why?
34. What does work mean to you? Are the employing organisation's values consistent with your own?
35. Why does being a target of workplace psychological abuse often lead to isolation?
36. How do we make the decision to leave? When you look for a new job, what is due diligence?
37. The last chapter in the book shifts the focus away from self-help to shared responsibility for what is a collective problem. What can we do together, instead of expecting targets to shoulder the burden? What are the three steps borrowed from a crisis management approach?
38. How can organisations increase recognition and awareness of the problem?
39. Once they recognise the problem, how can organisations respond with genuinely effective policies and procedures?
40. What are some important questions to ask in the process of ensuring that appropriate and effective response mechanisms are implemented?
41. What does the book suggest are some of the key elements of remediation?
42. What do you think is the significance of bystander courage? How can bystanders play a greater role in resolving workplace psychological abuse?
43. What is institutional courage? What does it look like in your workplace?
44. Do the leaders in your workplace model leadership courage? Are managers leaders? Are managers and leaders incentivised to be courageous and collaborative?
45. Whose responsibility is a safe and healthy workplace? What is the role of
  - a. the perpetrator?
  - b. the target?
  - c. managers?
  - d. bystanders?
  - e. HR/P&C?
  - f. workplace health and safety?

- g. entities external to the organisation, such as Safe Work Australia, Fair Work, the Anti-discrimination Commission...?

Can you remember a time when you were a perpetrator, a target, or a manager or a bystander? Looking back, what would you have done differently?

46. What preconceived notions about workplace psychological harassment did you have before reading the book? What experiences informed your views? Is it difficult for you to be open to others' experiences and views on this topic? What did you find surprising about the information introduced in this book? Has the book influenced your thinking? In what ways might it change your approach in future?

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