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Press Release

“No One Can Make You Feel Inferior without Your Consent” You don’t have to give bullies your lunch money anymore - How positive thinking can get you out of getting a knuckle sandwich.

SAN DIEGO, April 22, 2008: Day in and day out, the bully Kate worked with attempted to micromanage her, and turn the boss against her. He picked fights with her, harassed her, and showed up in her office once in awhile to yell at her.

Over the course of Kate’s employment in that position her mental health declined under stress and anxiety increased almost daily. After five years of abuse, Kate placed a tattered piece of paper above her alarm clock with the words “Get up! Get up! Get up!” written in blue highlighter. It was her only source of inspiration, and an ever failing attempt at motivating herself to actually get out of bed when the alarm went off. Depression increasing, so was the number of times she hit the sleep button each morning.

Life’s too short to live in fear of a co-worker, manager or peer, yet researchers estimate **over half of the American workforce has felt bullied at some point during their careers**, and that we often feel anxiety, depression, burn out, humiliation, and a multitude of other bad feelings as a result.

Bullies bully everyone. Yet some people are able to “fight” them off while others, like Kate, find it more difficult. Essentially we consent to bullying by not defending ourselves – but that takes courage, faith, belief in ourselves and knowledge in communicating with the enemy (and your level in the organization does not matter: Kate’s bully bullied the organization’s president).

On the drive home the day Kate finally quit, she swore she would never be that unhappy again. So the decision was made. She learned later the desire to follow through with it was immensely powerful. One day in her next position, where work days were normally happy and even fun, her boss sent her a scathing email in response to a mistake she’d made, which he cc’ed to half the company and all of the management team. He also heckled Kate a few times as he walked by her desk toward the water cooler. In an office with no cubicle walls or privacy, everyone could hear. Now, at the receipt of the email, Kate had a few choices.

She could ignore it, or write a timid apology claiming she would never let it happen again. But that would have led her down the path of becoming yet another victim of yet another office jerk. The other option was to stand up for herself, and compose a polite and firm response.

She clicked “reply to all,” acknowledged (not apologized for) her mistake, provided several options for solution, and advised she was free to discuss them further in privacy. Within seconds of hitting “send,” her boss’ office door flew open; he marched straight over to her, and said, “Fantastic email Kate! Way to put the hammer down!”

The moral: He respected Kate’s ability to stand up for herself. He knew he’d bullied her, and he also knew now that she would not allow it. In that instance, she demonstrated courage and leadership. It earned her his respect.

So how do you overcome a bully? Steven R. Covey, author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, says we should “Begin with the end in mind,” and we can do that by following Former Congressman Ed Forman’s advice, and saying out loud and in the mirror every morning before work, "I am happy, I am healthy, I am terrific!" Heck, even while you’re at work, close your office door or step outside a few times during the workday and say it out loud then too. With a little faith those words can turn your life around.

Faith develops and increases through repetitive affirmation. If you attend Church each Sunday, for example, your faith is nurtured each time you go. As you receive information directly in line with your beliefs from church leaders, your certainty in what they say is confirmed. If you stop going to Church loss in faith may result, and the same happens when we stop believing in ourselves.

So as you head to the “Church of You” each morning and stand in front of the mirror to shout your personal affirmations (“I am terrific! I am great at my job! I will overcome the bully! I am not a helpless victim!”), your thoughts turn to faith in yourself. The more you say it, the more you feel it, the more you believe it, the more you believe it, the greater your courage becomes, the greater your courage becomes, the closer you are to reaching your goal of overcoming a bully.

It’s not easy to overcome challenges and obstacles, but then again we wouldn’t call them challenges and obstacles. There would be nothing to celebrate on their completion, and the result of overcoming them would not be a stronger you. Challenges take courage and you can find courage through persistence in your positive thinking. Tough circumstances are a part of the strengthening process, and with perseverance we can reach our goals. You do absolutely have the determination and doggedness to “fight” the bully. You can find it within yourself through consistently reaffirming it in your head.

Now “fight” does not mean a punch in the nose, as that is what we are trying to avoid here. But as you become more confident in yourself, the ability to effectively communicate with others (including bullies) naturally follows as will your ability to “fend” bullies off. Your inner strength will actually become apparent to others as you walk through a room, or have conversations with peers, because your body language will demonstrate it. As you ask a question during staff meetings, for example, your speech rate will speed up and your posture will improve (standing straight, not slouching) – two signals you are a confident person.

Effective communicators are articulate, communicate vision, share opinions, adjust communication style to the audience, openly address conflict, take accountability, and champion the success of others. Simply put, confident speakers are well liked because they are no-holds-barred kind of people. They take risks and they do it with grace, passion and fervor which show up in their communication style. The power exuded then becomes a shield against people who may initially attempt to target them (and you) with childish behaviors.

Granville Toogood, author of *The Articulate Executive in Action*, encourages the use of words such as “cut” instead of “reduce,” and “strike” instead of “delete,” for example, because they are short, sharp, and unambiguous. In another example, think about the boldness you project when standing with your arms on your hips or down at the side, rather than folded across your chest (a signal of fear or shyness). These slick moves come with courage and belief in yourself!

As for Kate, on “game days” as she calls them (those days she knows extra bravery is required), she pulls her hair straight back, pins down the thick bangs that often cover her eyes slightly, puts on one of her brightly colored shirts and slides into her favorite pair of power pumps. With no where to hide, she has no choice but to be confident, bold and daring all day, and sometimes for weeks at a time, depending.

You are not a helpless victim, and you are not an inactive passerby in your own life. Make an investment in yourself and follow your dreams, hopes, desires and goals, including overcoming the bully at work. You have the ability to change your negative situation. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent".

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Catherine Mattice’s interest in workplace bullying sparked through her own experiences dealing with a workplace bully and overcoming him through positive thinking and personal development. She is frequently invited to guest lecture at SDSU, is currently authoring a book about workplace bullying and communication competence, coaching public speaking at the US Marine Corps Recruit Depot, and expanding her consulting business.