



City of Weslaco

Information Technology Department

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Department Directors Meeting

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Book Report: The No Asshole Rule
Building a Civilized Workplace and
Surviving One That Isn't

By Robert I. Sutton, PhD



“The No Asshole Rule, Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn’t”

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Introduction:

About the Author: Robert I. Sutton, PhD, is a professor of management science and engineering at Stanford University and author of *Good Boss, Bad Boss*, the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Business Week* bestseller *The No Asshole Rule*, and *Weird Ideas That Work*, which was selected by the *Harvard Business Review* as one of the top ten books of the year.

Sutton did not plan to write “*The No Asshole Rule*” but in 2003 he half seriously submitted an article to the *Harvard Business Review* when their senior editor Julia Kirby asked for suggestions for *HBR*. Despite the fact that the *HBR* is well known as a conservative publication, Sutton managed to talk them into printing the article with the word “asshole” in it. Sutton noted that while the word is offensive to many, “no other word captures the essence of this type of person”.

This book teaches you how to deal with the following types of people in the workplace:

- 1) Bullies
- 2) Creeps
- 3) Jerks
- 4) Weasels
- 5) Tormentors
- 6) Tyrants
- 7) Serial Slammers
- 8) Despots
- 9) Unconstrained Egomaniacs
- 10) And finally the Asshole!

The above listed types of characters can damage their fellow human beings and undermine organizational performance.

Symptoms:

- 1) If the targeted person feels “oppressed, humiliated, de-energized or belittled” .
- 2) If the “alleged asshole” targets people of “lesser power”.



Actions: The Dirty Dozen:

- 1) Personal insults
- 2) Invading one's "personal territory"
- 3) Uninvited physical contact
- 4) Threats and intimidation, both verbal and nonverbal
- 5) "Sarcastic jokes" and "teasing used and insult delivery systems"
- 6) Withering e-mail flames
- 7) Status slaps intended to humiliate their victims
- 8) Public shaming or "status degradation" rituals
- 9) Rude interruptions
- 10) Two-faced attacks
- 11) Dirty looks
- 12) Treating people as if they are invisible

Every Workplace Needs The Rule:

- 1) Damage to victims – Bosses that use "ridicule, put-downs, silent treatment and insults" to belittle their subordinates. This can result in employees dissatisfied with their work, leading to poor performance, both mental and physical issues like anxiety, insomnia, feeling worthless, tired, angered and depressed.
- 2) Battered Bystanders – Coworkers, family and friends may suffer too as a result of their relationship to the targeted employee.
- 3) Assholes Suffer, Too – The asshole will also suffer as a result of bullying others. Examples are career setbacks, humiliation and even the loss of their job.
- 4) Impaired Organizational Performance – As a result of the asshole's behavior, the organization suffers from "increased turnover, absenteeism, decreased commitment to work and the distraction and impaired performance".
- 5) The Upshot: What Is Your Organization's "Total Cost of Assholes"? – Organizations can spend valuable time that costs money. Below is an example:
 - a) Time spent with direct managers
 - b) Time spent with HR
 - c) Time spent with executives
 - d) Time spent with outside employment counsel
 - e) Cost of recruiting and training
 - f) Cost of overtime
 - g) Cost of anger management training



How to Implement the Rule, Enforce It, and Keep It Alive:

Most organizations will “enforce the no asshole rule”. Some may even tolerate it up to a point before action is taken.

- 1) Make it Public – by What You Say and Especially What You Do: Have written policies and postings, orientations, etc.
- 2) Weave the Rule into Hiring and Firing Policies:
 - a) Value trusted reference
 - b) Select for professional competence
 - c) Create mutual feelings (walk, eat and hang out with people at work)
 - d) Have employees from ALL levels interview the candidate, not just upper management.
- 3) Apply the Rule to Customers and Clients: This rule should apply not only to employees, but also to customers, clients, students and everyone we deal with. No one deserves to be abused.
- 4) Status and Power Differences: Roots of Many Evils: Many people once given power become greedy and think only of themselves and are blinded by the fact that they have become jerks.
- 5) Focus on Conversations and Interactions: Get the employees involved in decision making and in making good changes to the organization.
- 6) Teach People How to Fight: No to wimps, instead, speak out and encourage positive discussions.
- 7) Should It Be “the One Asshole Rule”? One is better than many. If one person breaks the rule it becomes more visible. If more are breaking the rules, it becomes less visible.
- 8) Warning: Be Slow to Brand People: Give people a chance, just because they are outspoken or insist on applying high-standards to their work does not make them an asshole.
- 9) The Upshot: Enforce the Rule by Linking Big Policies to Small Decencies: You can have all of the philosophies and policies in place but they become “meaningless unless you treat the person right in front of you, right now, in the right way”.

The Top Ten Steps:

- 1) Say the rule, write it down, and act on it. *(Follow the rules you make.)*
- 2) Assholes will hire other assholes. *(Keep resident jerks from hiring other assholes.)*
- 3) Get rid of assholes fast. *(Don't prolong till it becomes an issue.)*
- 4) Treat certified assholes as incompetent employees. *(Even if they do extraordinary work but mistreat others, treat them as incompetent.)*
- 5) Power breeds nastiness. *(Beware that even little power can turn to abuse.)*
- 6) Embrace the power-performance paradox. *(Reduce unnecessary status differences.)*
- 7) Manage moments-not just practices, policies, and systems. *(Change the little things and the big things will follow.)*
- 8) Model and teach constructive confrontation. *(Develop a culture that people know when to argue and when to stop.)*



- 9) Adopt the one asshole rule. *(Remind everyone of wrong behaviors.)*
- 10) The bottom line: link big policies to small decencies. *(There must be a virtuous, self-reinforcing cycle between big and little things that happen. Talk and work together.)*

How to Stop Your “Inner Jerk” from Getting Out:

- 1) How to Avoid “Asshole Poisoning”:
 - a) Don’t Join The Jerks – A quote by Leonardo Da Vinci – Do your homework first before you take on a new job. Do not join a group of assholes.
 - b) Walk out- Or Stay Away As Much As You Can – Beware of recruiters that charm you during the interview process. Or jobs that are stressful with long hours, pressures, obnoxious group/employees and cruel clients are not worth it.
 - c) Warning: Seeing Coworkers As Rivals And Enemies Is A Dangerous Game – Condoning competition and cutthroat behavior is dangerous to an organization.
 - d) See Yourself As Other Do – Step back and look at yourself and your behaviors and how other may see you.
 - e) Face Your Past – Ask yourself if you were once a bully as a child and compare how you are today.
- 2) The Upshot: Asshole, Know Thyself – The first step is to admit to yourself if you are an asshole.

When Assholes Reign: Tips for Surviving Nasty People and Workplace:

- 1) Reframing: Change How You See Things – If you can’t escape, change your mind-set. *(Avoid self-blame, hope for best but expect worse, develop indifference and emotional detachment.)*
- 2) Hope for the Best; Expect the Worst – *(Lower expectations and accept the fact that your boss is a jerk.)*
- 3) Develop Indifference and Emotional Detachment – *(Don’t put all your energy and emotions into a job that is not worth it. Stay focused and quit caring about the jerks and assholes and get through each day until it changes or something better comes around.)*
- 4) Look for Small Wins – *(Seek support groups and other ways to feel self-worth.)*
- 5) Limit Your Exposure – *(Limit your face to face contact if possible with the assholes.)*
- 6) Build Pockets of Safety, Support, and Sanity – *(Surround yourself with good people.)*
- 7) Fight and Win the Right Small Battles – *(Take small steps to chip away at the bad behavior, small changes.)*
- 8) The Upshot: You Might Be Able to Take It, but Are You Really Trapped? – *(Look for small wins or modest victories.)*



The Virtues of Assholes:

- 1) The Virtues of Nastiness
 - a) Gaining Personal Power And Stature
 - b) Intimidating And Vanquishing Rivals
 - c) Motivating Fear-Driven Performance And Perfection - (Fear at work = less productivity)
 - d) Bringing Unfair, Clueless, And Lazy People To Their Senses - (*Be a temporary asshole and stand up to these people. Polite, delightful people become doormats to assholes.*)
- 2) The Upshot: Some Virtues Are Real But Many Are Dangerous Delusions – (*It can eventually bite you in the end.*)

The No Asshole Rule as a Way of Life:

- 1) A few demeaning creeps can overwhelm the warm feelings generated by hordes of civilized people.
- 2) Talking about the rule is nice, but following up on it is what really matters.
- 3) The rule lives – or dies – in the little moments. (*Keep it the rule alive.*)
- 4) Should you keep a few assholes around? (*Just don't let them take control or make themselves at home.*)
- 5) Enforcing the no asshole rule isn't just management's job.
- 6) Embarrassment and pride are powerful motivators. (*Those that do not follow the rule are often confronted and embarrassed publicly.*)
- 7) Assholes are us. (*We have all been guilty of being assholes. To build an asshole-free workplace start by looking in the mirror.*)