

THE SET FREE LIFE

Surviving a Tormenting Workplace: Why is This Happening to Me?

Have you ever had a deeply stressful work experience? I'm not talking about the average, garden-variety stresses of the workday; those come and go and are soon forgotten. I'm referring to a situation that is mired in hostility, loneliness, fear, and intimidation. Not everyone goes through something like this and you never, ever forget it once you do.

I have twice worked in truly treacherous circumstances. I felt set apart, watched, and unjustly criticized. It seemed that no matter how much I tried to do right, I was knocked down as though I had deliberately plotted to do wrong. I found myself questioning my abilities. I lost sleep, perspective, and the belief that I was a productive employee with something to offer. Nothing made sense as I fought everyday just to keep my head above water. I wondered: *What did I do to deserve this?*

I made it through, but not before gaining some life-changing insights, and here is the most important one: these experiences have nothing to do with what we deserve or don't deserve. They occur in order that we might build character.

We humans just do not grow without pressure. Going through these crushing ordeals reveals what we are made of. We really do not know what we've got in us until we are in situations that try every last resource we've got. What we often find is there is more inside than we knew, and the trial sharpens us for the next inevitable battle.

We don't get to escape the reality that life occasionally presents seemingly insurmountable challenges because there is something in us that must be tested. You may possess talents and aptitudes that will affect the lives of others. These talents do not just sprout up in a moment, fully grown, without any struggle. They must go through a process and part of that process is painful. That's life.

Here's the thing: life does not ask your permission. It doesn't care if you would prefer to be left alone. It is the test of walking through the fire that reveals what's inside of you, and you must undergo different obstacle courses to uncover and strengthen your purpose. You may be on a job filled with torment, wondering if you'll be able to maintain any sort of equilibrium. It's possible you may have the opportunity to move on without hurting your career, or be blessed with an independent source of income so that you can leave without worrying about the mortgage payment. But in this economic climate, holding onto a job may be the most important thing you can do right now, so seek the principles that will assist you as you run the extremely difficult obstacle course of a job that feels like it's trying to kill you.

In a way it is, because growth does not occur without death. A seed has to die to grow. It has to be buried to become all that it was meant to be. We have to be buried by the harsh circumstances of life to find our potential. But consider this: you have an opportunity to prove that you have what it takes to tackle a job that few would be able to handle. It is not easy or fun. It is frequently unfair and unrighteous. But you are there and you have a choice: to take command of it or allow it to take command of you.

Change your perspective, gather some timeless principles, and allow the experience to do a work within you. I'll be sharing some of those principles in the coming months. You can survive! ♣



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 listeners at companies and business organizations throughout 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.

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Teddy Bear Says...

Dogs love a ride in the car! We truly enjoy an adventure, and the opportunity to stick our heads out the window, feel that forceful wind upon our faces and in our ears,

and be with you wherever you're going is just one of the joys of being a four-legged companion.

As an observer of human manners, I can't help but see some things that show poor etiquette behind the wheel. Here's some of what I've noticed:

Teddy Bear understands "stop" to mean a car's wheels stop moving, even if just for an instant. Others do not, as barely touching the brakes seems to be enough to indicate "stop."

When a sign is posted noting "No turn on red," there are apparently circumstances under which it's okay anyway.

I wonder if the people who activate their turn signals a quarter of a mile before their turn have considered there might be five turns prior to the one they're intending? How is anyone to know the actual turn for which they're signaling?

Humans are in a such a hurry that when a car signals a lane change, some drivers speed up so the person can't make the change. Hmm.

Why are people surprised at oncoming cars when they never turned their heads to see them coming to begin with?

There are mysterious rules about making left turns, including making them when a traffic light has just turned red or immediately upon the light turning green. I cannot figure them out.

Some people habitually tap on the brakes even when there's nothing slowing them down. Gas-brake, gas-brake, gas-brake . . . phew! It makes me feel queasy just thinking about it.

Finally, even a dog knows that activities like talking on a cell phone or texting while at the wheel just wreak (pronounced *reek*) havoc. It's a scary thing to see humans drive like they're drunk when they're actually attempting to punch in a telephone number.

Now that I've given you my thoughts for the road, I think I'll take a nap. My bed is the safest place to be!



Quotable

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

Helen Keller

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LITTLE THINGS CAN COUNT

You've just put on that sweater you like or the pair of pants that fit you so well. Suddenly you notice a snag, or a button missing, or a hem coming out. Stop! Take a moment to repair your clothing!

It is a small commitment to attend to the little things that can make a big difference in one's wardrobe. Anyone can hem a pant leg or sew on a button! Don't go out of the house with a hole in a seam you're convinced no one will see, or settle for a safety pin that remains permanently in place when you can quickly thread a needle and be done in a moment. You will always feel better in your clothes when you know they are clean and properly cared for.

No, these things are not thermonuclear war, but they are components of a total package. How often do we easily dismiss such things, thinking no one will notice? Some people really do notice these things, which can transmit a subtle message that we are sloppy, scattered, or don't pay attention to details. As shallow as it may seem, you and someone else just as qualified for a job may be compared on something as "inconsequential" as how well put-together you both appeared. Give yourself the edge, not the other person!

Here's a tip: have a snag in a favorite item of clothing? *Don't cut it.* You can start a run in your clothing that is irreparable. Pick up a wonderful tool called a "knit picker." It's made by the company Dritz, which produces sewing products. With a tiny hinge on a hook at the end of a long, needle-like extension, you can carefully push the sharp hook through the back side of the fabric, close the hinge on the snag, and then pull the thread back through the garment, smoothing out the fabric to distribute the thread. This little godsend has saved many a sweater, knit piece, and much more—I have used it on all kinds of fabric, including denim and silk. It takes some careful maneuvering sometimes but it beats the disappointment of discarding a favorite item of clothing! I carry one in my travel case and keep one at home. They can be tough to locate—I've had to purchase them online ([here](#)) or search for them at JoAnn Fabrics.

For larger problems requiring sewing you're not equipped to handle, take advantage of the tailoring your drycleaner offers. Repairs are not expensive to take care of and can keep you looking like a million bucks! ☺